Spinoza's *Ethics*

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Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité,
Vaste comme la nuit et comme la clarté
—Charles Baudelaire, “Correspondances” (1857)

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George Eliot's Spinoza
An Introduction

SPINOZA AND SPINOZAS

Our philosophical landscape is populated by growing numbers of Spinozists, and by quite a few Spinozas. Some uncontested facts provide common ground: he was born Baruch Spinoza in 1632, the son of Jewish Portuguese immigrants, and he was raised in Amsterdam's Jewish community, from which he was expelled in 1656, never to return; from then on he took the name Benedict (the Latin version of "Baruch," meaning "blessed"), associated with Christians of various kinds, but refused to join any Church. From here, characterizations of Spinoza diversify. There is the brave critic of superstitious religion, a clear-eyed prophet of the secular age: this Spinoza heralded a "radical Enlightenment" more than a century before Kant. There is the daring anti-theological thinker of "pure immanence," popularized in recent years by Gilles Deleuze's influential interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy. There is a Spinoza whose invocation of "God or Nature" represents a more familiar naturalism: his readers equate "God" to a modern, materialist conception of nature and tend to dismiss as rhetorical—or as mere "nonsense"—those passages in his works that suggest a more religious view. There are also left-wing and liberal Spinozas, early champions of equality, individual freedom, and democracy. Hovering among these modern Spinozas is the ghost of Spinoza the atheist, which haunted generations of readers and critics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While this old Spinoza was castigated for his "monstrous" atheism, his descendants are now celebrated for it.[1]

The present text is, as far as we know, the first English translation of the *Ethics*. It was completed in 1856 by Marian Evans, then a

Marian Evans in Berlin, 1854; photograph provided by The George Eliot Fellowship.

Benedict de Spinoza; lithograph by Karl Bauer, originally published in *Spinoza im Porträt* by Ernst Altkirch (Jena: Eugen Diederich, 1913).

successful woman of letters, who in the following year began to publish stories under the pseudonym George Eliot. She encountered a different Spinoza, more angel than monster: he wore a bright new halo, conferred by the admiration of successive German geniuses, including the poets Goethe and Novalis, the theologian Schleiermacher, and the philosophers Schelling and Hegel. Like Spinoza himself, these thinkers were neither atheists nor conventionally religious. Though they did not grasp Spinoza's philosophy perfectly, they appreciated its spiritual depth at a time when Protestant orthodoxy was being challenged in unprecedented ways, in Germany as in England. Through the first decades of the nineteenth century, this Spinozism emanated from the German university towns, its strange glow illuminating the avant garde of English intellectual life.

The *Ethics* is indeed a radiant book, though a tough one. It is Spinoza's greatest work, sitting easily among the true masterpieces of Western philosophy, and perhaps rivaled only by Plato's *Republic* in its completeness and power as a work of both ethics and metaphysics. It was written in Latin, like most of Spinoza's works, and published shortly after his death in 1677. It crowned a brilliant philosophical career, which included a critical exposition of Descartes's philosophy (1663), the controversial *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670), various unpublished writings, including a book on Hebrew grammar, and a large correspondence in which Spinoza elaborated his philosophical system as well as his views on religious and scientific questions.

Part I of the *Ethics* sets out Spinoza's theology—his account of God, and of God's relationship to everything else—and at the core of this theology is the claim that "Whatever is, is in God" (E1, P15). This expresses in propositional form St. Paul's insistence that God "is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being"—an insight Paul offered in Athens, "a city full of idols," as a corrective to the pagan idea that "the deity is an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals."[2] In the seventeenth century, Spinoza was responding to a similar error: he saw that the mainstream Christian churches were propagating an idolatrous image of God formed after the pattern of human power, as if God were a great king or an omnipotent father, eager to reward or punish people for their obedience

or disobedience. Spinoza's claim that all things are *in* God, a doctrine now known as panentheism, undercut this anthropomorphic theology and challenged the crudely moralistic view of the human good that was based upon it.

Panentheism is a tendency found within all religious traditions, including Christianity. Augustine followed Paul in teaching that "all things are in God," though in a special sense, since God is "not a place," and Thomas Aquinas agreed with him; the early Franciscans pursued a radical way of living according to a panentheist spirituality.[3] But in the context of post-Reformation Christian theology, which promoted an image of God separate from the world, Spinoza's insistence that God is "the immanent cause of all things," so that nothing "exists in itself outside God" (E1, P18), appeared to be heretical, even atheistic. And Spinoza's writing was certainly polemical: he condemned the destabilizing dogmatism and repressive, debilitating moralism imposed by the established churches, offering in their place a joyful, empowering, and deeply virtuous way of life that he called "true religion." Though the *Ethics* is evidently concerned with theology in the literal sense of the logic of God, or the study of God, Spinoza helped cement a cornerstone of Enlightenment thought by distancing himself from the seventeenth-century conception of theology as based on scriptural and traditional authority, and tied closely to obedience and faith.[4]

Descartes is now widely regarded, not without justification, as the father of modern philosophy who tore up the roots of long-entrenched habits of thinking. Yet Spinoza's ontological reformation was far more radical—perhaps less in its account of God than in its account of everything that exists *in* God, including human beings. While Descartes saw human beings as finite substances, created by God, who is an infinite substance, Spinoza taught that God alone qualifies as substance: this term designates something that exists independently, self-sufficiently, which for Spinoza meant being self-causing. Human beings, like everything else that exists, are not self-sufficient. We are not substances but modes of substance: ways in which substance is modified or affected. Modes are, by definition, dependent entities, which exist in something else (see E1, Def. 5), and so Spinoza's claim

that "Whatever is, is in God" categorizes everything—except God—as a mode of God. The etymological connection between "mode" and "mood" may illuminate this metaphysical point: a human life is to God what one of my moods is to me—ephemeral, substanceless, and impossible to conceive as separate from or independent of my existence. More metaphorically still, we are to God as waves are to the ocean.

By elucidating the concepts of substance, attribute, and mode in *Ethics* I, Spinoza reframed both the difference between God and the world and the difference between particular things. By designating God as the only substance, he made it clear that God *is* in a way fundamentally different from the way in which anything else exists. This new account of ontological difference has a clear religious significance: it indicates that we are at once closer to God, and more different from God, than we may have imagined. Since we are in God, we are inseparable from this divine source of our being; yet since God is substance while we are modes, the nature of our existence is different in kind from God's existence.

In fact, Spinoza's claim that everything is a mode of God gave a new philosophical expression to the religious view that all things are entirely dependent on God, a principle at the core of traditional doctrines of creation. In this way his "panentheism" opposed not just atheism, but also deism, which became widespread in the eighteenth century, propounding the idea that God is merely the architect of the universe, like a watchmaker who designs his creation, sets it in motion, then leaves it to function on its own. Spinoza acknowledged that his own view of God's omnipresent causal power echoed an older theology: "God is not only the cause that things begin to exist; but also, that they persevere in existing, or (to use a scholastic term) that God is the cause of the *being* of things" (E1, P24, Cor.).

As its title suggests, most of the *Ethics* is concerned with human life: with specifically human ways of knowing, feeling, and acting. Spinoza's analysis of human experience and behavior is underpinned by a philosophical anthropology: an account of what a human being *is*. He regarded the human body and the human mind as two aspects of a single, unified individual, understood metaphysically as a finite mode

of God. It is not quite right to say that modes are parts of substance, or that we are part of God, for Spinoza's substance—as theologians have traditionally taught of God—does not have parts: it is both simple (i.e., not composed of parts) and indivisible (i.e., cannot be divided into parts). Yet God's power manifests itself in infinite totalities, including the intellect of God and face of the whole universe, and finite modes are parts of these infinite modes, or infinite manifestations. In other words, each finite human consciousness is part of God's infinite consciousness, and each finite human body is part of the physical universe, interconnected with countless other beings.

This anthropology passes seamlessly from theology to epistemology, psychology, and ethics—before returning to theology at the end of the *Ethics*. In the second, third, and fourth parts of the book, Spinoza works toward his account of the highest human good by explaining the difference between "inadequate cognition" and true knowledge, and by setting out a masterly, genuinely therapeutic analysis of human emotions. Arguing that "the laws of nature according to which all things come into existence and pass from one form to another, are every where and always the same," Spinoza shows that human actions and passions "follow from the same necessity and power of nature as other phenomena" (E3, Preface). He argues that we are mistaken to believe ourselves or others to act from free will: "men believe themselves free solely because they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined" (E3, P2, schol.). Spinoza seeks to enlighten his readers precisely by overcoming this ignorance, and teaching greater self-understanding. A wise person, he explains, understands how she is affected by external things, and she also understands her dependence on God. In Part V of the *Ethics*, he concludes that knowing and loving God will bring us "blessedness," "freedom," "true peace of mind," and even some kind of eternal life.

With this end in view, readers may wish to dive straight into Spinoza's difficult masterpiece. For those curious to learn more about how this remarkable seventeenth-century text came to be translated by an equally remarkable nineteenth-century author—and about how Spinoza's philosophy may have shaped George Eliot's thinking and writing—there follows an exploration of the intriguing relationship

between two of the widest and deepest souls, or "modes" of thinking, ever to arise within God's infinite intellect.

A SPINOZA OF HER OWN

Before she became George Eliot, Marian Evans spent many, many hours in the company of Spinoza. In December 1849, her thirtieth year, she wrote to her friend Charles Bray that "for those who read the very words Spinoza wrote there is the same sort of interest in his style as in the conversation of a person of great capacity who has led a solitary life, and who says from his own soul what all the world is saying by rote."[5] Here she expresses her feeling for Spinoza's truthfulness in speaking "from his own soul," while the word "conversation" hints at an intimacy, almost a friendship, with that philosophical soul, which she felt she gained through his writing.

Yet she wrote very little about Spinoza, or about the effect that this close encounter with his soul had upon her own. "What is wanted in English is not a translation of Spinoza's works, but a true estimate of his life and system," she told Bray, after abandoning her translation of Spinoza's second masterpiece, the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which she began in the spring of that year. "After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English," she continued, "one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, and that the only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them, and give an analysis."[6] Despite her much more extensive acquaintance with the *Ethics* during the 1850s, she never attempted this task of exposition and analysis. Yet some readers have found in her novels literary "translations" of Spinozism, accomplished through character and narrative.[7] While it is difficult to trace the direct influence of Spinoza on her critical and fictional writings, she certainly had an affinity with his thinking, and particularly with his insight into the vast, intricate, ever-shifting constellations of emotion, action, and interaction that shape each human life.

This affinity can be traced biographically, as well as textually. As we review the life of Mary Anne Evans—her given name, which she

changed to the less demure Marian when she moved to London in 1851—her encounter with Spinoza begins to seem as unavoidable in the 1850s as it looked unlikely in the 1830s. How did a lower-middle-class woman from a solidly Anglican Midlands family discover the Latin writings of this unconventional philosopher, so alien to any English curriculum? Indeed, Mary Anne's education took her in the opposite direction from Spinozism: while at school in the 1830s she became a fervent evangelical Christian. Of course, she could not go on to study at Oxford or Cambridge, nor at London's newly founded University College or King's College—it was not until much later in the nineteenth century that a university education became possible for even a small number of women in England. After leaving school at sixteen, she educated herself in the library of Arbury Hall, the Warwickshire estate managed by her father, Robert Evans.

After her mother died in 1836, she changed the spelling of her name to Mary Ann. In 1841, now in her early twenties, she moved with her father to Foleshill, a couple of miles north of Coventry, where she became friends with freethinkers Charles and Cara Bray, and Sara and Charles Hennell (Cara Bray's sister and brother). She flourished in this intellectual circle, reading Schiller, Lessing, and Goethe with Cara, and quickly devouring recent historical studies of the Bible—some by German scholars, as well as Charles Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838)—which persuaded her that Christianity was based on "mingled truth and fiction."[8] By 1842 she had caused a deep rift with her father and brother by refusing to go to church, though after a few months she relented and attended mass again. She would retain a critical sympathy with the religion of her childhood throughout her life, but her spiritual appetites could no longer be satisfied by evangelical piety.

It was not long after this loosening of faith that Mary Ann encountered Spinoza, almost certainly for the first time. At the beginning of 1843 the Brays received a copy of one of Spinoza's works from Robert Brabant, who was Coleridge's doctor in 1815–16 while the declining poet was living in Wiltshire and writing his *Biographia Literaria* (which contains several brief references to Spinoza, largely in relation to German Idealism). Mary Ann, who by this time had taught her-

self Latin from a textbook, translated part of this work by Spinoza.[9] It must have been the *Theologico-Political Treatise*; in a letter to Sara Hennell in October 1843, Mary Anne repeated one of this book's core arguments—"We must part with the crutches of superstition. Are we to go on cherishing superstitions out of a fear that seems inconsistent with any faith in a Supreme Being?"—and echoed Spinoza's conviction that "We cannot fight and struggle enough for freedom of enquiry." Sara also recorded the influence of Spinoza's *Treatise* on her friend at this time: "She said she considered the Bible a revelation in a certain sense, as she considered herself a revelation of the mind of the Deity."[10] Mary Ann was evidently struck by Spinoza's claim that "God's eternal word and covenant and true religion are divinely inscribed upon the hearts of men, that is, upon the human mind."[11] One consequence of Spinoza's panentheism was his critique of the Protestant view that the Bible is the privileged site of divine revelation: he suggested instead that "the Eternal Wisdom of God . . . has manifested itself in all things and especially in the human mind, and above all in Christ Jesus."[12]

Of course, human minds are not always clear manifestations of divinity; they can be very "troublesome," as Spinoza acknowledged in the *Ethics* (see E4, P63, schol. 1). Robert Brabant, the proximate source of Mary Ann's enthusiasm for Spinoza, became a difficult figure for her after she visited him at his home in Devizes in November 1843. During this stay she was drawn into an intense friendship with the married, much older, and rather predatory man and was sent home early by his wife. Three years after this embarrassing episode, in 1847, she returned Brabant's copy of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, imagining herself hurling it toward Devizes so that it would leave "its mark somewhere above Dr B.'s ear."[13] But she was keen to get Spinoza back again. She asked Sara Hennell, who lived in Hackney, to obtain the same edition for her from London: "Mind—I really want this," she wrote to Sara in February 1847.[14] Mary Ann did indeed acquire a Spinoza of her own, and he would be one of her most constant companions over the next decade, during which she made the biggest leaps of her life—to London, and the editorship of a major literary journal; to a partnership with George Henry Lewes; and to the novels of George Eliot.

SPINOZIST TRANSMISSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

One of Mary Ann's first pieces of published writing was a short review of James Anthony Froude's controversial novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1848). Her review appeared in March 1849 in the *Coventry Herald and Observer*, which at that time was owned by her freethinking friend Charles Bray. Froude was the son of an Anglican clergyman, and younger brother of Richard Hurrell Froude, who together with John Henry Newman initiated the High-Church, anti-liberal Oxford Movement. During the late 1830s, while Mary Ann was reading voraciously in the library of Arbury Hall, J. A. Froude was encountering Newman and Edward Pusey at Oriel College, Oxford, and in the 1840s—in parallel with Mary Ann's loss of faith—he broke with their movement. In 1847 he wrote an essay on the life of Spinoza for the *Oxford and Cambridge Review*.

The Nemesis of Faith was an autobiographical story of religious doubt, moral crisis, and eventual despair, precipitated by the intellectual currents that challenged Anglican orthodoxy in those middle years of the nineteenth century: Newman's *Tracts for the Times*, on the one hand, and the Spinozism of the new Romantic literature and Idealist philosophy from Germany, on the other. Mary Ann loved Froude's novel, which she read during a lonely period when she was nursing her dying father. Her review described the book's deep effect on her: "we seem to be in companionship with a spirit, who is transfusing himself into our souls, and is vitalizing them by its superior energy, so that life, both outward and inward, presents itself to us for higher relief, in colours both brightened and deepened—we seem to have been bathing in a pool of Siloam, and to have come forth reeling." She evoked the new spiritual configurations emerging in her time, suggesting that

> Much there is in the work of a questionable character . . . but its trenchant remarks on some of our English conventions, its striking sketches of the dubious aspect which many chartered respectabilities are beginning to wear under the light of this nineteenth century, its suggestive hints as to the necessity of recasting the currency of our religion

> and virtue, that it may carry fresh and bright the stamp of the age's highest and best idea—these have a practical bearing, which may well excite the grave, perhaps the alarmed attention of some important classes among us.[15]

Mary Ann was delighted to receive an appreciative letter from Froude soon after this review was published. A few weeks later, in April 1849, she described, in a letter to Sara Hennell, a kind of pantheist "blessedness" inspired by *The Nemesis of Faith*: "Egotism apart, another's greatness, beauty or bliss is our own—and let us sing a Magnificat when we are conscious that this power of expansion and sympathy is growing just in proportion as the individual satisfactions are lessening. Miserable dust of the earth we are, but it is worth while to be so for the sake of the living soul—the breath of God within us." Quoting from Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's *Homer*," Mary Ann told her friend that Froude's novel "has made me feel

> like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken."

This lofty praise was a little lighthearted—"You see I can do nothing but scribble my own prosy stuff—such chopped straw as my own soul is foddered on," she added, before signing herself "Yours in perennial silliness and love"—but Mary Ann's enthusiasm for Froude's novel was certainly sincere. And perhaps *The Nemesis of Faith* reawakened, or intensified, her interest in Spinoza. In this letter to Sara Hennell, her praise for the novel is followed immediately by the announcement that "I am translating the Tractatus Theologico-politicus of Spinoza"—and just a few days before her review had appeared in the *Coventry Herald and Observer* she had told Cara Bray of "her great desire to undertake Spinoza." On April 19 (the day after Mary Ann wrote to Sara about *The Nemesis of Faith* and her Spinoza translation), Cara informed Sara that "M.A. is happy now with this Spinoza to do; she says it is such a rest to her mind."[16]

At this time, by the end of the 1840s, Mary Ann had already confronted Spinoza's legacy through her translation of D. F. Strauss's *The*

Life of Jesus, Critically Examined. This work, published in German in 1835, was indebted to the daringly critical interpretation of the Bible offered by Spinoza in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, as well as to Schleiermacher's scientific, historical approach to theology, itself influenced by Spinozism.[17] Though Strauss's *Life of Jesus* was an enormously important book, marking a turning point in the study of Christianity, and indeed in European thought, translating it was not a labor of love for Mary Ann. For 1,500 pages Strauss plodded through the gospels, scrutinizing every episode in Jesus' story for evidence of historical veracity. Mary Ann began to translate the book in 1844, while ensconced in the Brays' freethinking circle in Coventry, and in 1846, when she had nearly finished, she told her friends she was "Strauss-sick." Translating gave her headaches, and "it makes her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the crucifixion, and only the sight of the Christ image and picture make her endure it," Cara Bray wrote to Sara Hennell that February.[18] On Mary Ann's desk in her father's house, along with Strauss's thick book and her ever-growing manuscript, was a small cast of Thorvaldsen's statue of Christ, standing with arms outstretched to receive his overburdened followers. The original statue was (and still is) in the Church of Our Lady in Copenhagen, and during the mid-1840s, while the miniature version watched over Mary Ann toiling at her *Life of Jesus*, the larger-than-life original was welcoming Søren Kierkegaard into church on Sundays.

Mary Ann's translation of Strauss was published anonymously in London in 1846 by John Chapman, a friend of the Brays. When she moved to London at the beginning of 1851, altering her name to Marian, she lodged at Chapman's house on the Strand. She began to attend Frances Newman's lectures on geometry at the newly opened Ladies College in Bedford Square, Bloomsbury—but it was probably Spinoza, not Newman, who suggested to her that living, changing human beings could be studied geometrically.[19] She would encounter this insight in the spring of 1855, while translating Part III of the *Ethics*: here Spinoza begins his study of the emotions by declaring his intention to consider human feelings, actions, and appetites "as if the subject were lines, surfaces, or solids."

Lines and planes are straightforward enough, but solid bodies are another matter—and the conjunction of human bodies in one place can evoke messy feelings, actions, and appetites. Chapman's house on the Strand was a case in point: he lived there with his wife and mistress, and soon after Marian's arrival she became romantically entangled with Chapman too. This domestic arrangement ended in tears—Marian's—and a distraught train journey back to Coventry. But she remained friends with Chapman, and when he bought the *Westminster Review* in the summer of 1851 she agreed to edit it with him. By the end of September she was back in London, now the unofficial and anonymous editor of the city's leading intellectual journal, and "at last in her element."[20] In October 1851 she met George Henry Lewes for the first time; he was married, though his relationship with his wife was unconventional, and their youngest children were fathered by Lewes's friend Thornton Leigh Hunt.[21] During 1852 Marian and Lewes became close friends, and by 1853 they were "more than friends."[22]

Early in 1854 Marian gave up editing the *Westminster Review* and began her second translation, of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), and here again she was channeling Spinoza via a German text. Like Auguste Comte—another intellectual influence on Marian—Feuerbach rejected Christian theology in favor of a "religion of humanity."[23] In his early work, Feuerbach had followed Spinoza, whom he described as a "God-inspired sage": he embraced Spinoza's panentheism as well as his historical critique of literal readings of the Bible, and one of his first published works was *The History of Modern Philosophy from Bacon to Spinoza* (1833). His debt to Spinoza can be traced directly to the *Ethics* and *Theologico-Political Treatise*, as well as indirectly through Hegel and Strauss.

Yet *The Essence of Christianity* went in a new direction: by the 1840s, Feuerbach had turned against Hegelian philosophy, and in some important respects this work inverted the theological tenets of Spinozism. While Spinoza saw God as a powerful reality, the ontological ground of all beings, Feuerbach argued that God is an imaginative projection of humanity, conceived in its most perfect form: "Man, by

means of the imagination, involuntarily contemplates his inner nature; he represents it as outside of himself. The nature of man, of the species . . . is God."[24] When we worship God, he explained, we are really worshipping the perfection of humanity. Feuerbach developed Spinoza's panentheist insistence that everything is *in* God—including, of course, human beings—into the quite contrary doctrine that the human being *is* God. This, for Feuerbach, was the essence of Christianity: God's incarnation in the person of Jesus was proof, he claimed, that "Man was already *in* God, was already *God himself*, before God became man."[25] For Spinoza, it was impossible to equate the human being to God, for they differ in their most fundamental being: humans are modes, and God is substance. According to this metaphysics, Spinoza insisted that human beings must be explained through God, whereas Feuerbach now argued that God is explained through human beings.

Though Feuerbach's controversial new interpretation of Christianity was metaphysically opposed to Spinozism, it expressed an ethical humanism which echoed Spinoza's insistence that practicing love and charity, rather than assenting to orthodox doctrines, is the sign of "true religion." This view was quite consistent with New Testament teaching; indeed, Spinoza several times cited the First Letter of John in support of his claim that fighting over doctrinal truth contravened the ethical values of love and peace, which should be the foundation of any Christian community.[26] Similarly, for Feuerbach, "The relations of child and parent, of husband and wife, of brother and friend—in general, of man to man—in short, all the moral relations are *per se* religious. Life as a whole is, in its essential, substantial relations, throughout of a divine nature. Its religious consecration is not first conferred by the blessing of the priest."[27]

Marian enjoyed translating Feuerbach, whose writing was "*for a German*—concise, lucid, and even epigrammatic now and then," and she liked his "religion of humanity." "With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree," she wrote to Sara Hennell in April 1854, and the novels of George Eliot testify to her enduring assent to Feuerbach's view that human loves are the "religious consecration" of life.[28] The

English translation of *The Essence of Christianity* appeared in 1854, with Marian Evans credited as translator on its title page.

Though Marian's sympathy with Feuerbach's deflationary analysis of Christianity may signal her own rejection of Spinoza's more robust theology, she was soon to embark on her most sustained study of Spinoza. Shortly after her translation of *The Essence of Christianity* was published, in July 1854, Marian traveled to Weimar with Lewes, the man whose love and support became indispensable to her artistic fulfillment, professional success, and personal happiness. This journey to Germany marked the beginning of their public relationship, a de facto marriage that lasted until Lewes's death in 1878; Marian sought recognition as his wife by asking people to call her "Mrs. Lewes." In Weimar, these "two loving, happy human beings" explored the city together, socialized with local intellectuals, heard three Wagner operas, and enjoyed the "delightful domesticity" they had been unable to share in London.[29] At this time Lewes was writing his biography of Goethe, and Marian worked closely with him on this project; they spent their mornings writing together, and evenings reading together. Meanwhile, back in England, news of their relationship was causing a scandal, even among their friends, for Lewes was still married, though separated from his wife. Victorian ideals of proper feminine virtue were such that Marian was judged much more harshly than Lewes for their decision to live together.

At the beginning of November, after a little more than three months in Weimar, the couple took a train to Berlin. They arrived in Berlin on November 3, 1854, and on November 8 Marian began to translate Spinoza's *Ethics*—a task she probably undertook to help Lewes, who had agreed with the publisher Henry Bohn to produce an English edition of the *Ethics* for Bohn's Philosophical Library. She used a fairly new Latin text for her translation: Karl Hermann Bruder's *Spinoza Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, published in three volumes from 1843 to 1846. She also consulted earlier Latin editions, by Paulus (1803) and Gfrorer (1830), as well as recent German and French translations, by Berthold Auerbach (1841) and Emile Saisset (1842), respectively.[30]

Marian's entry in her journal that day offers a glimpse of her new life in Germany: "Wednesday 8. Began translating Spinoza's Ethics. Wrote to Mrs. Robert Noel to thank her for trying to get me an introduction to Humboldt. Read Wilhelm Meister aloud in the evening."[31] From this point in her journal, the phrases "Translated Spinoza" and "Worked at Spinoza" recur frequently; Marian evidently spent most of her mornings in Berlin translating the *Ethics*, though on some days she suffered from headaches that slowed or stopped her work. Nevertheless, she made rapid progress. On December 18 she recorded in her journal that she had "Finished revising Part I of Spinoza's Ethics," and the following day she "Began Part II of Ethics."[32]

Journal entries like these give insight into Marian's approach to her translation. She translated each Part of the *Ethics* in turn, then revised it before moving on to the next Part. And after finishing Part V, she "revised the whole text from the beginning," which suggests that she considered her final draft more or less ready for publication. Her manuscript itself shows that her work of translation was not simply a linguistic and literary exercise of rendering Spinoza's Latin into clear, elegant English: she was also engaging philosophically with Spinoza's text, thinking through its complex threads of reasoning and sufficiently alert to its arguments to amend errors in Bruder's Latin edition. For example, Marian noted that in the second scholium to E1, P33 Bruder, Saisset, and Auerbach all cited Definition 6, whereas Spinoza's argument clearly referred to Definition 7—and she was right.

LEWES'S SPINOZA

It is fitting that Marian began her translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* in Germany, alongside Lewes as he was writing his *Life of Goethe*. As we have seen, Spinoza's reception in nineteenth-century England was shaped by his reception in Germany—first by Lessing and Mendelssohn, followed by the Romantic poets and Idealist philosophers; when Marian discovered Spinoza in Coventry in the early 1840s this was, in a sense, a German Spinoza, mediated by Coleridge, and she encoun-

Lewes insisted that Spinoza's "pantheism" was not a modern atheism but an ancient doctrine taught by Plato, Augustine, and the Jewish "Cabbalists." He quoted a passage from Augustine's *Eighty-Three Different Questions* (though he probably did not know its provenance) concerning "the place of God," which states that while God is everywhere, yet not a place, everything is "in God." Lewes had found this passage in Sara Austin's translated compendium *Characteristics of Goethe*, one of the earliest sources of Spinozism in English, where he also learned that "Spinoza would have found his best defender in St Augustine," and is "rescued from the charge of atheism, as well as from that of a coarse and material Pantheism."[40] He explained to the readers of the *Westminster Review* that Spinoza "expressly teaches that God is *not* corporeal, but that body is a Mode of Extension," and quoted Schelling, who recognized that Spinozism entails a qualitative, ontological difference between God and the world.[41]

Lewes concluded this 1843 article by recording his own disagreement with Spinoza. He defended Bacon's empiricism—much celebrated in scientific circles at this time—against the method of "Ontology," which "reached its consummation" in Spinoza's thought and persisted in the "metaphysical speculations" of Leibniz, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel (whose thinking "was more akin to Spinoza's than any of the others"), Strauss, and Feuerbach. Lewes advocated the "strong practical sense" of the English mind, in the face of "the curious subtleties and cobwebs so indefatigably produced by the arachnae philosophers of Germany." Yet he ended on a note of appreciation for their intellectual ancestor, Spinoza: "We look into his works with calm earnestness, and read there another curious page of human history: the majestic struggle with the mysteries of existence has failed, as it always must fail; but the struggle demands our warmest admiration, and the man our ardent sympathy."[42]

Lewes's article adds vivid background detail to our picture of George Eliot's Spinoza. It is intriguing to think of Lewes and Mary Ann in the early 1840s, when they were in their mid-twenties—unknown to one another, yet both encountering Spinoza's philosophy, and perhaps poring over his Latin texts simultaneously, he in London and she in Coventry. Lewes, a more unambiguously secular

thinker than Mary Ann, found Spinoza too metaphysical. By the time they met in the 1850s, his enthusiasm for Bacon's scientific method had developed into a commitment to Comte's positivist philosophy. At the same time, of course, he was writing about Goethe, the great poet of Spinozism.[43]

Marian and Lewes were in Berlin for a little over four months in the winter of 1854–55, and during this period she translated and revised Parts I and II of the *Ethics*, with Lewes by her side and the figure of Goethe towering over her. Her journal entry on Christmas Eve, 1854, evokes this intellectual ambiance:

> Sunday. Read Scherr—Scholasticism, Universities and Roman Law. Worked at Spinoza. Walked to the Neue Museum, but failed to get in. Came home and copied Goethe's Discourse on Shakespeare. Read, at dinner, his wonderful observations on Spinoza. Particularly struck by the beautiful modesty of the passage in which he says he cannot presume to say that he thoroughly understands Spinoza. After Coffee read aloud G.'s M.S. of the Leipsig and beginning of the Strasburg Period [of Lewes's *Life of Goethe*]. G. finished [King] Lear—sublimely powerful![44]

Three weeks later, in the middle of a very cold Berlin January, Marian and Lewes enjoyed "a delightful two hours' walk in the frosty air towards Charlottenburg," during which they "Talked about Spinoza."[45] We can only guess if Marian, who had spent that morning immersed in the *Ethics*, concurred with her companion's positivist critique of Spinozism.

Whether this formidable literary couple agreed or disagreed about the merits of Spinoza's philosophy, we know that Lewes was, unusually, the sort of man who encouraged his wife to form and express her own ideas. And although Marian had taken over the task of translating the *Ethics* from Lewes, she made this work her own. Back in 1843, in his *Westminster Review* article on Spinoza, Lewes had translated the first few pages of the *Ethics*—its definitions and axioms, and the first eight propositions, including the lengthy scholium to Proposition VIII—yet Marian did not pick up where Lewes had left off but made her own translation from the beginning.[46] This was just as well, for

Lewes had made some mistakes, most notably in translating *affectiones* as "accidents" in Definition 5 and Proposition I. As well as taking charge of the translation, Marian did her own research on Spinoza, reading Jacobi's *Letters on Spinoza* and talking to her new friend, the literary historian Adolf Stahr, "about German style, Lessing, Spinoza, History of Jesus, etc."[47]

Their extended honeymoon in Weimar and Berlin allowed Marian and Lewes to live publicly as a couple among open-minded friends, as well as enabling Lewes to make progress on his *Life of Goethe*. Eventually this free, happy period in Germany came to an end, and in March 1855 they sailed back to England, where, they knew, their relationship would not be accepted so easily. After they arrived in Dover, Lewes traveled on to London to visit his wife, Agnes, and make domestic arrangements for himself and Marian, while she stayed in lodgings in Dover. She remained there alone for five weeks, waiting for letters from Lewes and translating Part III of Spinoza's *Ethics*, "On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions." During these solitary weeks she often translated in the mornings and revised her work in the evenings. In letters to two female friends she described herself as "well and calmly happy—feeling much stronger and calmer in mind for the last eight months of new experience"; "My mind is deliciously calm and untroubled so far as my own lot is concerned, my only anxieties are sympathetic ones."[48] On April 9, however, she received a "painful letter which upset me for work." She "Walked out and then translated 2 pages of Spinoza. Read Henry V. In the evening translated again." The next day she "Read Schrader[']s *German Mythology*]. Translated Spinoza. Walked feeling much depression against which I struggled hard. Read Henry V and Henry VIII. Wrote to Mr. Chapman. Revised Spinoza." The next day, April 11, she "Finished Book III of Spinoza's Ethics."[49]

Marian was a sensitive, emotional person, in touch with her need for affection. Though she was certainly capable of joy—especially after settling down with Lewes—she felt despondent at least as often. As she struggled with her feelings in Dover that spring, she worked on Spinoza's meticulous analysis of human emotions in Part III of the *Ethics*. Here Spinoza described what she was feeling: the debilitating

effects of sadness and agitation. Her typically sparse journal entries give no indication of how this text resonated with her—whether Spinoza helped her to understand her own turbulent affects or simply, as in 1849, gave "rest to her mind."

MARIAN'S RELIGION

One week after she finished translating Part III of the *Ethics*, Marian traveled to London to join Lewes, who had found lodgings in East Sheen, Richmond. She spent two months away from her journal and her work on Spinoza, returning to them both on June 13, 1855—a full day, even by her standards:

> Wednesday 13. Began Part IV of Spinoza's Ethics. Began also to read Cumming for article for Westminster [Review]. We are reading in the evenings now, Sydney Smith's letters, Boswell, Whewell's History of Inductive Sciences, the Odyssey and occasionally Heine's Reisebilder. I began the second book of the Iliad in Greek this morning.[50]

The article on Cumming mentioned in this journal entry was written over several weeks that summer, alongside her translation of Part IV of the *Ethics*, and it turned out to be a substantial and important essay, which set out her religious views and convinced Lewes of her "genius" as a writer. This article also shows signs of the philosophical influences on Marian's thinking, and of her affinities with Spinoza.

John Cumming was a Calvinist preacher, minister of the Scottish National Church in Covent Garden, and the author of widely read sermons. Marian judged these works unlikely to produce "A closer walk with God, A calm and heavenly frame," as the poet Cowper put it, and "more likely to nourish egoistic complacency and pretension, a hard and condemnatory spirit towards one's fellow-men, and a busy occupation with the minutiae of events." Against Cumming, she argued that "the highest state of mind inculcated by the Gospel is . . . to dwell in Christ by spiritual communion with his nature, not to fix the date when He shall appear in the sky."[51] Her searing critique of Cumming's moralistic doctrines and adversarial style of argument

echoed Spinoza's critique of divisive, superstitious religion in both the *Ethics* and the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which was directed primarily against the Calvinist theology of the Dutch Reformed Church.[52] Yet Marian's perspective was quite different from that of Spinoza, the perennial outsider: she was criticizing a version of a doctrine she had once embraced, during her youthful evangelical phase.

"Dr. Cumming's religion may demand a tribute of love, but it gives a charter to hatred; it may enjoin charity, but it fosters all uncharitableness," she wrote, repeating Spinoza's argument in Chapter 14 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.[53] Like Spinoza, she rejected religious doctrines that inspired fear of punishment and death, "the phantasmagoria of hope unsustained by reason," and sectarian animosity toward those of different beliefs.[54] She supported a view of God that promoted goodness, kindness, and compassion—what she often called "sympathy":

> The idea of a God who not only sympathizes with all we feel and endure for our fellow-men, but who will pour new life into our too languid love, and give firmness to our vacillating purpose, is an extension and multiplication of the effects produced by human sympathy; and it has been intensified for the better spirits who have been under the influence of orthodox Christianity, by the contemplation of Jesus as "God manifest in the flesh." But Dr. Cumming's God is the very opposite of all this: he is a God who instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies, is directly in collision with them; who instead of strengthening the bond between man and man, by encouraging the sense that they are both alike the objects of His love and care, thrusts himself between them and forbids them to feel for each other except as they have relation to him.[55]

We see echoes of Feuerbach in Marian's emphasis on human relations, and this influence is still more apparent in her suggestion that "the idea of God is really moral in its influence—it really cherishes all that is best and loveliest in man—only when God is contemplated as sympathizing with the pure elements of human feeling, as possessing infinitely all those attributes which we recognize to be moral in humanity."[56] The phrase "possessing infinitely all those attributes"

mid-June, she reported it finished four months later, in mid-October.[61] Then she had another break from her translation, returning to it on January 6, 1856, when she both "Began to revise Book IV of Spinoza's Ethics" and "Finished Kahnis's History of German Protestantism."[62] In this new year, she seems to have resolved to focus on her translation, and finish it quickly: her journal for February 19 notes that "Since the 6 January I have been occupied with Spinoza and, except a review of Griswold's American Poets, have done nothing else but translate the Fifth Book of the Ethics and revise the whole of my translation from the beginning. This evening I have finished my revision."[63]

In October 1855, immediately after she finished translating Part IV of the *Ethics*, Marian wrote a short article for the *Leader* magazine titled "Translations and Translators." This piece discussed two new English translations of German texts: Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and an anthology of poetry. Here Marian took the opportunity to reflect more generally on the work of translation, suggesting that people often underestimated its difficulties, and the special skills of a good translator. "Though geniuses have often undertaken translation, translation does not often demand genius," she wrote:

> The power required in the translation varies with the power exhibited in the original work: very modest qualifications will suffice to enable a person to translate a work of ordinary travels, or a slight novel, while a work of reasoning or science can be adequately rendered only by means of what is at present an exceptional faculty and exceptional knowledge.[64]

It is difficult to imagine that she did not also have in mind her own work on Spinoza's *Ethics* as she wrote these words. "Though a good translator is infinitely below the man who produces *good* original works," she concluded, "he is infinitely above the man who produces *feeble* original works. We had meant to say something of the moral qualities especially demanded in the translator—the patience, the rigid fidelity, and the sense of responsibility in interpreting another man's mind. But we have gossiped on this subject long enough."[65]

AN ENGLISHMAN'S SPINOZA IN 1855

On July 1, 1855—when Marian was in the middle of translating Part IV of the *Ethics*—a long article by James Anthony Froude on Spinoza's life and philosophy was printed in the *Westminster Review*. Given their convergence of interests in Spinoza in 1849, it is an interesting coincidence that they once again converged on Spinoza six years later. Froude had contributed several articles to the *Westminster Review* during Marian's anonymous editorship, which ran from 1851 to 1853, and in 1852 she read Froude's biographical essay on Spinoza from the *Oxford and Cambridge Review* of 1847.[66] So by 1855 she knew him and his writing well, and since she was three-quarters of the way through her translation of the *Ethics* when his article on Spinoza appeared in the *Westminster Review* in July that year, she naturally read it with great interest.

This article signals the growing recognition of Spinoza's importance in English intellectual life. It also shows us, if only approximately, how Marian understood Spinoza, for she broadly agreed with its analysis of the *Ethics*. She and Froude were almost the same age—he was born in 1818, and she in 1819—and their generation was ready for Spinozism. In the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, Spinoza had risked death for his supposed heresy; in seventeenth-century England, the Cambridge Platonists—while echoing Spinoza's critique of Calvinism—railed against the atheism and materialism they perceived in Spinoza's philosophy.[67] Although there was plenty of religious dogma in George Eliot's England, God and the human relation to God had finally become an open question.

Froude's 1855 essay on Spinoza was clear, accurate, and sophisticated, sympathetic yet judicious. It drew on the early biography of Spinoza by Colerus and engaged with Spinoza's correspondence as well as with the *Ethics*, which Froude discussed in some detail. The occasion of his article, however, was a recent edition, in Latin, of Spinoza's early work, the *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*, and as Froude suggested, the publication of this relatively obscure text was itself evidence of a growing interest in Spinoza, especially among "the German students." While he acknowledged that the "Pantheistic

philosophy" was controversial, and expressed his own agreement with it cautiously, he declared that its "influence over European thought is too great to be denied or set aside."[68] Though it is now almost forgotten, Froude's *Westminster Review* article remains an excellent introduction to Spinoza's thought—and it has the singular merit of elucidating George Eliot's Spinoza, for we know that Marian read it as soon as it appeared and thought it an "admirable account of Spinoza's doctrine."[69]

The article began with a biographical sketch, which, like many accounts of Spinoza's life, came close to hagiography: "It is not often that any man in this world lives a life so well worth writing as Spinoza lived; not for striking incidents or large events connected with it, but because he was one of the very best men whom these modern times have seen." Spinoza preferred to live simply and quietly, though he was friendly to his neighbors; he had little money, and several wealthy friends showed their devotion to him by offering financial support, which he politely refused. In his life as well as his writings, wrote Froude, Spinoza exemplified "purity of heart," a "genuine and thorough love for goodness."[70]

Moving on to Spinoza's intellectual reputation, Froude rightly resisted all the contrary categorizations that were then circulating: Spinoza was neither a Christian, nor an atheist, nor a deliriously religious Romantic. "Both in friend and enemy alike, there has been a reluctance to see Spinoza as he really was," Froude explained:

> The Herder and Schleiermacher school have claimed him as a Christian—a position which no little disguise was necessary to make tenable; the orthodox Protestants and Catholics have called him an Atheist—which is still more extravagant; and even a man like Novalis, who, it might be expected, would have had something reasonable to say, could find no better name for him than a *Gott trunkner Mann*—a God intoxicated man: an expression which has been quoted by everybody who has since written on the subject, and which is about as inapplicable as those laboriously pregnant sayings usually are. With due allowance for exaggeration, such a name would describe tolerably the Transcendental mystics . . . ; but with what justice can it be ap-

> plied to the cautious, methodical Spinoza, who carried his thoughts about with him for twenty years, deliberately shaping them, and who gave them at last to the world in a form more severe than had ever been attempted before with such subjects? With him, as with all great men, there was no effort after sublime emotions. He was a plain, practical person.[71]

In 1855 this may well have been the most even-handed assessment of Spinoza's religious position yet written. It shows us how English high culture in the middle of the nineteenth century was singularly receptive to Spinozism, for it produced minds opened wide by German literature and philosophy—an expansion accomplished especially by Coleridge and Carlyle a generation earlier—and deepened by earnest religious doubt and keen spiritual need, yet brought down to earth by a sober, level-headed aversion to Romantic intoxication and flights of fancy, and to the lofty speculations of continental idealism.[72] Like George Eliot herself, Froude here writes with a clear, sensible, yet daringly spacious literary voice that has a very English accent. These qualities do indeed suit Spinoza, whose free, deep, nearly limitless thinking was coupled with a "plain, practical," "cautious, methodical" manner of philosophizing.

Froude's article offered an impressive summary of Spinoza's theology, as set out in Part I of the *Ethics*. Although Froude described Spinoza's philosophy as "Pantheism" (everything *is* God), rather than the more precise "panentheism" (everything is *in* God), he grasped this distinction conceptually if not linguistically: "Pantheism is not Atheism . . . let us remember that we are far indeed from the truth if we think that God to Spinoza was *nothing else* but that world which we experience. [The world] is but one of infinite expressions of [God]—a conception which makes us giddy in the effort to realise it."[73] He explained that, for Spinoza, "God is the *causa immanens omnium*," the immanent cause of all things: "He is not a personal being existing apart from the universe; but Himself in His own reality, He is expressed in the universe, which is His living garment."[74] Referring to God as "He" and "Himself" suggests an anthropomorphism that Spinoza eschewed, but Froude's characterization of Spinoza's universe,

described in the *Ethics* as *natura naturata*, a vital, continuously active process of "natured nature" expressing God's infinite power, was insightful.[75] In discussing Spinoza's account of the relationship between God and the world, Froude gave particular attention to his response to the "problem of evil"—if God is perfect and all-powerful, why is there evil and suffering at all?—and he concluded that "of all theories about it, [Spinoza's is] the least irrational."[76]

As Froude noted, Spinoza knew that his account of God, of God's relation to the world, and of the nature of good and evil would "remain intolerable and unintelligible as long as the common notion of free will remains intact." Perhaps we are still struggling in the grip of this "common notion" as we puzzle over Spinoza's contribution to philosophy and theology: his complex account of human life cannot be understood quickly or easily. Froude grasped it in a depth and detail that is, as Marian recognized, "admirable." He was able to show his nineteenth-century readers that according to Spinoza the human mind is "not merely an act or acts of will or intellect, but all forms also of consciousness of sensation or emotion," and that it parallels the body in this respect. Putting this into his own words, while following closely the complex analysis of human psychology and embodiment presented in the *Ethics*, Froude explained that

> the human body being composed of many small bodies, the mind is similarly composed of many minds, and the unity of body and of mind depends on the relation which the component portions maintain towards each other. . . . There are pleasures of sense and pleasures of intellect; a thousand tastes, tendencies, and inclinations form our mental composition; and since one contradicts another, and each has a tendency to become dominant, it is only in the harmonious equipoise of their several activities in their due and just subordination, that any unity of action or consistency of feeling is possible. After a masterly analysis of all these tendencies (the most complete by far which has ever been made by any moral philosopher), Spinoza arrives at the principles under which unity and consistency can be obtained as the condition upon which a being so composed can look for any sort of happiness; and those principles, arrived at as they are by a route so dif-

article in the summer of 1855, she noted that while she admired his exposition of Spinozism, she disagreed with Froude's own views. It is not clear whether this referred to Froude's criticisms of Spinoza or to other views, not expressed in this article, which she knew he held. As George Eliot, she would see her work as a novelist as "unraveling" what Froude called the "mystery" of moral life. Like Froude, she was prepared to follow Spinoza quite a long way in recognizing how human lives are shaped, even determined, by influences beyond their control. At the same time, she shared Froude's commitment to the principle of moral responsibility, as well as his recognition that, in practice, moral questions "will always be of intricate and often impossible solution."

GEORGE ELIOT'S SPINOZA: THE MORAL UNIVERSE

Marian's translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* was the last substantial piece of work she completed before she began to write fiction. She spent the summer of 1856 on a long holiday with Lewes in the British seaside resorts of Ilfracombe and Tenby. On July 20 she returned to her journal after a break of two weeks to reflect that "The fortnight has slipped away without my being able to show much result from it. I have written a review of the 'Lover's Seat' for the *Leader*, and jotted down some recollections of Ilfracombe; besides these trifles and the introduction to an article already written, I have done no *visible* work. But I have absorbed many ideas and much bodily strength; indeed, I do not remember ever feeling so strong in mind and body as I feel at this moment." By this time, Marian was quite self-consciously gathering her energies in preparation for what she was already calling "my fiction writing," and she declared herself "anxious to begin."[83]

Of course, we cannot say whether her long hours with Spinoza throughout 1855, and even more intensively during the first weeks of 1856, had helped to give her the psychological strength she needed for this task, clearly so important to her. Nevertheless, there is something Spinozistic in her sense of becoming empowered to express her nature fully, and in her recognition that she needed to be "strong in

mind *and* body," as a whole person, to confront the intellectual, artistic, and affective challenge of undertaking a new kind of writing. On September 22 she summoned the courage to meet this challenge: "Began to write 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,' which I hope to make one of a series called 'Scenes of Clerical Life.'" Six weeks later, on November 5, she recorded in her journal that she had "Finished my first story."[84]

How did Marian's sustained engagement with Spinoza, and in particular her detailed knowledge of the *Ethics*, shape her thinking and writing after she became George Eliot? It is probably a mistake to look to Spinoza's works for a philosophical template for her novels, as if these stories were, in any straightforward sense, "translations" of Spinoza's thought into poetic and narrative form. Nor is it quite right to read into George Eliot's fiction a Spinozist theology. Sometimes her characters find spiritual meaning through communion with nature, and these experiences hint at an impersonal, immanent deity—but Spinoza did not himself draw this kind of religious feeling from his theoretical equation between God and Nature. Wordsworth is a more likely source for this influence than the *Ethics*. No doubt Wordsworth's poetry evoked George Eliot's nostalgia for her rural childhood: while growing up she had watched the soft charms of the English countryside being brought into sharper relief by creeping industrialization, and she came to believe that in England "Protestantism and commerce have modernized the face of the land and aspects of society in a far greater degree than in any continental country."[85] She dramatized this process brilliantly in her introduction to *Felix Holt: The Radical*, where she described a journey by stagecoach through England's "central plain," between the River Avon and the River Trent: her imagined traveler passes from meadows, hedgerows, and shepherds to regions where cottages and children are dirty, men and women "pale, haggard," and "the land . . . blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of handlooms . . . heard in hamlets and villages."[86]

George Eliot's writing occasionally invokes an ideal of self-dissolution in a larger, perhaps infinite whole, which has a romanticized Spinozist resonance, as in these lines from her poem *The Spanish Gypsy*:

> Oh! I seemed new-waked
> To life in unison with a multitude—
> Feeling my soul upbourne by all their souls,
> Floating with their gladness! Soon I lost
> All sense of separateness: Fedalma died
> As a star dies, and melts into the light.
> I was not, but joy was, and love and triumph.

Fedalma's feelings of "gladness," "joy," "love," and even "triumph" are close to Spinoza's description of human "beatitude" at the end of the *Ethics*—yet she experiences this spiritual affect when dancing among a crowd of people, not by the kind of intellectual activity that is, for Spinoza, the only route to blessedness.[87] In 1869 the novelist explained in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe that "I do not find my temple in Pantheism, which, whatever might be its value speculatively, could not yield a practical religion, since it is an attempt to look at the universe from the outside of our relations to it as human beings. . . . For years of my youth I dwelt in dreams of a pantheistic sort, falsely supposing that I was enlarging my sympathy. But I have travelled far away from that time."[88]

It is in less overtly "spiritual" and speculative matters that we find genuine Spinozism in George Eliot's writing: in the deep emotional intelligence evident throughout her novels, surely informed by Spinoza's analysis of the affects in Parts III and IV of the *Ethics*; and in what we might call the metaphysics of morals which, for both thinkers, came not so much to replace religious life as to constitute it. The Spinozist distinction between true religion and superstitious (or simply false) religion that simmered beneath the surface of Marian's 1855 article on Cumming became more explicit in her first work of fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, begun six months after she finished translating the *Ethics*. In June 1857 she wrote to her publisher, John Blackwood, that "Janet's Repentance," the third story in this literary triptych, dramatized the conflict "between irreligion and religion":

> The collision in the drama is not at all between "bigoted churchmanship" and evangelicalism, but between *ir*religion and religion. Religion in this case just happens to be represented by evangelicalism . . .

> I thought I made it apparent in my sketch of Milby feelings on the advent of Mr. Tryan that the conflict lay between immorality and morality—irreligion and religion.[89]

Some readers have even traced a correlation between the three clergymen depicted in *Scenes of Clerical Life* (Amos Barton, Maynard Gilfil, and Edgar Tryan) and the distinction between three kinds of cognition (imagination and opinion, reason, and intuitive knowledge) drawn in Part II of the *Ethics*.[90] Certainly, what George Eliot called "immorality and morality—irreligion and religion" has a deep affinity with Spinoza's account of human bondage and human freedom, which is closely connected to his account of virtue (and vice). In the *Ethics*, bondage and freedom are inseparable from Spinoza's ontology of the human being as both "in God" and part of an endlessly interconnecting network of finite beings.

These core elements of Spinoza's philosophy provide a framework for working out the ethical possibilities of human life within a deterministic universe. It is not possible, Spinoza insisted, to free ourselves from external influences or to gain the kind of autonomy that had, by George Eliot's century, come to be widely regarded as the foundation for moral responsibility and for individual liberty—and, indeed, for liberal individualism. For Spinoza, human freedom was not a metaphysical starting point for moral theory but an ethical accomplishment; and he argued that this freedom is gained not by an assertion of the will but by knowledge of the causes of things. This knowledge encompasses the intrinsic causal relation of all things to God, entailed by his panentheist ontology of substance and mode, as well as the myriad extrinsic causal relations holding between finite modes.

George Eliot's moral universe operates according to these Spinozist principles. In 1857 she told Charles Bray (who published a book titled *The Philosophy of Necessity* in 1841) that she agreed with his "fundamental doctrine" that "mind presents itself under the same condition of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena (the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex)," and this thought stretched over the two de-