THE PHILOSOPHY
OF SPINOZA

INTRODUCTION

The two and a half centuries which have passed since the death of Spinoza have been prolific in criticism of his work. Much that has been written about him, to be sure, seems to have sprung from no more profound motivation than a wish to praise or defame, but even of serious commentary few philosophers beside Aristotle can boast a larger critical library. Other details, moreover, of Spinoza's philosophic fortune suggest the comparison of Aristotle: even if one were permitted to forget that he has been rediscovered after a comparative oblivion, one would be led by the fervor with which he is acclaimed to expect a scholasticism in modern philosophy of which he is the Philosopher. Usually when he is not passed by or execrated in philosophic writings, he is looked to for a model of logical precision and acumen, and his pervasive awareness of the implications of concepts has apotheosized him among metaphysicians. Under such circumstances there is the danger that any further work seem a trifling or a presumptuous addition—either the swelling of the scholasticism with another glossary and commentary, or the undertaking of the magical enterprise of detailing precisely what has been in these works for several centuries. Fortunately the alternative is not exhaustive, and fortunately, so far as it holds, one may guide oneself by erring a little on the side of presumption. But the situation is determined somewhat by circumstances other than only these: the passing of centuries has altered the materials of the problem; it has added questions, and at very least it has changed the approach and so has changed the problem too. An age which boasts, as the present age does, of its scientific, pragmatic, and positivistic attitudes may well have lost, in forming itself, the sense of a philosophy which saw the
methodological and metaphysical problems. If, therefore, there is after so much criticism it can not be a question merely of use to philosophy and to the history of philosophy to inquire into the meaning of this persistent striving.

Excellent reasons could be found, consequently, for adding one more to the large collection of books on Spinoza. After so much criticism it can not be a question merely of approaching a work critically; the work must be seen through the confusions and clarifications of two hundred and fifty years. If it seem profitable to study the unity of Spinoza’s thought, it is not merely because there are signs of unity in his work, but further because his critics have found such an amazing diversity there. It is difficult to separate the two, since the history of thought is history and, although it be a question of the philosophy of Spinoza, the reflections of Freudenthal, of Gebhardt, and of Brunschvicg have entered the question as definitely as any of Spinoza’s own ideas. This is a difficulty which leads in some cases to unhappy consequences. There are few doctrines that have not been drawn by some critic from the body of Spinoza’s philosophy; and for a large part, the criticism of his works has played a game of horror and admiration with each of the assorted themes it has found. Accusations go the whole length from atheism to pantheism and god-intoxicated mysticism. Naturalism and idealism in turn, materialism and spiritualism, nominalism and realism have been drawn with astonishing legerdemain from the demonstrations of the Ethics.

1 It would scarcely be desirable to range the whole body of Spinoza according to the epithets employed in them. Apart from the fact that this has been done, though not literally nor exhaustively (Ernest Altkirch, Maledictus und Benedictus, Felix Meiner, Leipzig, 1924), its philosophic importance would be dubious. But lest the statement of the range of disagreement concerning Spinoza seem exaggerated and rhetorical, some examples of each can be adduced with no difficulty. Atheism and pantheism are perhaps the most wide-spread and most frequently repeated of the titles. It will suffice therefore to refer, for atheism, to P. Lami’s Athéisme Rénévé (Paris, 1696), or to P. Bayle’s Dictionnaire Historique et Critique (article Spinoza: “Il a été un athée de système et d’une méthode toute nouvelle…”); and his Pensées diverses sur les Comités de l’année 1688 (“C’est le plus grand Athée, qui ait jamais été…”) (see Freudenthal, Lebensgeschichte Spinoza’s (Leipzig, 1889), pp. 28 and 34, for the Bayle quotations); for pantheism to R. Avenarius, Ueber die beiden ersten Phasen des spinozischen Pantheismus (Leipzig, 1868). This list of either might be increased indefinitely.

Novalis is not only responsible for the phrase “God-intoxicated” but will serve too as example of both idealistic and realistic tendencies in interpretation. (Fragmente vermisichten Inhalts ed. J. Minor; Jena, 1907.) “Die wahre Philosophie ist durchaus realistischer Idealismus — oder Spinozismus (p. 182)…. 355. Spinoza ist ein Gott trunkenen Munde. 356. Der Spinozismus ist eine Uebersättigung mit Gottheit. (p. 292) For naturalism see Nourrison, Spinoza et le Naturalisme Contemporain (Paris, 1886), p. 3; for Spinoza’s examination of the passions; bits from the study of the understanding can be used illustratively, disconnected from their metaphysical setting; the ethics may be looked upon as a rare piece of reasoned ordering of intimate experience; the physics can be passed over unexamined, since it is antiquated and, so, unessential. Only rarely have they been stated as the inseparable parts of one system. Spinoza stated them so, but it is perhaps natural that after him there should be more interest in parts of his philosophy or in its development than in the dialectical interdependence of his doctrines. Yet it seems unfortunate that so systematized a philosophy should be read in so fragmentary a fashion and that the system of this thought should

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have sunk so far from view that when it is raised at all, it is only by way of arguments which make it seem painfully forced and which state it finally in a language of mixed philosophic dialects.²

Yet the signs of an attempted consistency are too frequent in the writings of Spinoza to be ignored wholly. Even the externals of his work would indicate a unified conception. Surely it would be an unprecedented piece of carelessness in a philosopher to put off metaphysical, logical, and moral speculations, as Spinoza did when he interrupted work on the Ethics and possibly on the Correction of the Understanding, to expound political and theological doctrines at variance with his philosophy. There are commentators who would have him do that. And Spinoza was

² Needless to say, these confusions of critics have by this time all been made confusions of Spinoza. It is remarkable to observe how the processes of his thought can be accounted for, how antecedents for his doctrines can be found in history, and how the supposed weaknesses exposed in his philosophy can be traced to simple-minded precautions which he did not have the wit to take! Spinoza has found few critics to follow the ideal which he laid in criticism: he could forget his philosophic beliefs and obliterate himself behind Descartes when he expounded him. There are few restatements of Spinoza's philosophy which advance it, as he advanced Descartes's, on its firmest grounds. See, for example, John Caird, Spinoza (Blackwood, Edinburgh, 1888), p. 5: "His philosophy is not a completely homogeneous product. It may be said to be the composite result of conflicting tendencies, neither of which is followed out to its utmost logical results."

This is then illustrated by the fact that in the part of his philosophy which is concerned with substance there is no place for finite things, and the part concerned with individual things has no place for the infinite! Or see Otto Willmann, Geschichte des Idealismus (Braunschweig, 1897), 3 Band, p. 284: "Spinoza's Lehre ist plumper Synkretismus, ohne jeden organisiren Charakter, jeder Mystik baer und der Religion enttretend und unorganisch. Bei ihr ist alles Mache, erzwingend, auf den Schein angelegt, unwillig, allzuviel aufgeräumt, alles durch den Schürbel der geometrischen Methode einige Fasen gegeben; unverdiente Remissionsen aus durchblüterten Büchern dienen als Auflust, lediglich die Persönlichkeit ist der zusammenhängende Faden; es ist recht eigentlich ein "Privatsystem", was hier vorliegt." Or see C. N. Starcke, Baruch de Spinoza (Copenhagen, 1923), p. 12: "Sein Gott ist ein Jehovah in verbessert und modernisierter Gestalt, welche Elemente er auch aus anderen Quellen in sich aufnehm, er blieb doch stets seiner Rasse treu. Seine Medi sind aristotelisch, seine Attribute cartesianisch, aber das Substanzen ist jüdisch.

It is a significant commentary on the vast body of Spinoza criticism that one would be forced to turn for an adequate treatment of Spinoza's physical doctrines; that the English translations of his letters, both Willis's and Elwes's, omit almost everything concerned with science, even the very important Letter VI on Boyle's treatise on Salt-Petre; see Willis Benedict de Spinoza, London, 1870, p. 255. "The sequel of this letter is on the constitution of Nitre, the nature of its spirit, etc., which could not interest the general reader, and would be passed over by the chemist"; there is no consideration of the fact that it contains also significant statements concerning the relation of reason and experiment)ation; finally that Coughoud (Bibliot Spinoza, Paris, 1924), should think it worth em-
The striving after unity has left signs more properly philosophic than these in Spinoza’s works, since his philosophy orders itself nicely toward a single goal. No considerable portion of it is wholly free from one preoccupation. There are numerous statements of that problem since almost every consideration of man or the universe yields at some time to it. The opening pages of the Treatise on the Correction of the Understanding are characteristically eloquent: whether there is some Good which is truly good and able to communicate its goodness and by which alone the mind could be affected after it had rejected all other things. That question is reiterated with increasing emphasis. Clear knowledge in any human discipline would contribute to solving it. It is significant, too, that the work which contains the most complete statement of Spinoza’s philosophy, the one which treats of God and of the relations of man to man, to Nature, and to God, should have been called an Ethics. The unity of his thought is indicated there; the Ethics is a work of morals and, in that obvious sense, practical. But to be practical it must state its problem fully. The discussion of physics, metaphysics, and psychology contributes always some bit of information which is essential to a knowledge of the nature of man and of the manner in which he should live and act. The Ethics is, though critical interpretations have almost neglected that central aspect to emphasize others, an examination of moral ideals and of human potentialities and circumstances; it is not the occasion only for metaphysical speculations and psychological and physical analyses. But if any knowledge is to be derived from the sciences which may bear on man’s powers and his opportunities, that knowledge will help organize ethical philosophy. “Ethics... should,” Spinoza says, “as everyone knows, be based on metaphysics and physics.”

The force binding Spinoza’s philosophy in a unified whole, then, is precisely the one which directs the sciences to a moral ideal. Obviously knowledge is indispensable for the examination of ethical problems. It is impossible to self-conscious mind, in which all finite thought and being find their reality and explanation.”

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engage in moral inquiry while the nature of good and evil is wholly unknown and unexamined. Even an elementary experience of things suffices to show that the same object may be good in one set of circumstances and evil in another, that in itself alone it can not be good or evil, perfect or imperfect, and that therefore there is no good or evil in the nature of things. But these are metaphysical considerations. Human abilities are unequal to a continued vision of things as they are in the eternal order and fixed laws of Nature. Life and experience lead man to conceive a human nature more perfect than his own and to seek the means that will lead him to such a perfection. This is the origin of notions of good and perfection; whatever advances man toward that more perfect nature is a true good; the supreme good is that which enables him, together with other men, to attain to that nature; all science and philosophy should be useful to that end. “What that nature may be,” Spinoza says, “I shall show in its proper place, namely, that it is the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of Nature. Therefore this is the end to which I tend, obviously, to acquire such a nature and to endeavor that many acquire it with me; that is, it is part of my happiness to take care that many others understand as I do, and that their understanding and desire agree thoroughly with my understanding and desire, and in order to achieve this it is necessary to understand as much concerning Nature as is needed to acquire such a nature, and moreover it is necessary to form such a society as would bring about that as many as possible attain that nature as easily and securely as possible. Again care must be taken concerning Moral Philosophy as well as concerning the Theory of the Education of Children; and since health is not an unimportant means to this end, the whole science of Medicine must be arranged appropriately, and finally inasmuch as many things which are difficult are rendered easy by art and since we can gain a great deal of time and benefit by it, Mechanics must by no means be despised. But before all else a method must be thought out of healing the understanding and of purifying it as much as is possible at the beginning that it may understand things fruitfully.
and without error and as well as possible. From all this anyone will now be able to see that I wish to direct all science to one end and goal, namely, that the highest human perfection, as we said, be attained, and so, all that does not advance us in the sciences to the end and goal, must be rejected as useless, that is, to say it in a word, all our operations and also our thoughts must be directed to this end."

This is reiterated in a foot note: "There is but one end in the sciences to which all must be directed."

Consequently, if ethics is to pursue an inquiry into the nature of goodness and into the means of attaining that which is good, it is unavoidable that it draw on metaphysics and the sciences. But it must be seen at the very outset of the inquiry—in fact, it should have appeared in what has been said—that there are two ideals involved in ethics, not only the right conduct of living, but also the selection of conduct that will fit to the higher ideal of living and that will lead to perfection. There is the good life which may be led though one have no unusual powers of understanding, and there is the perfection which is the status and the reward of the well-guided intellect. One must live in a well-ordered state and according to the rules that lead to good health and friendship to live well. Such things, however, are external and not in the control of man. To know its highest perfection, man's nature must be considered apart from his circumstances in relation to the intelligible nature of things; it would be tautology to say that knowledge and metaphysical speculation are needed to attain to this perfection.

At no point, then, can ethics proceed certainly without the aid of science. A knowledge of the nature of the body, of the mind, of human society must complement at each step the progress of the science of ethics. No question, on the other hand, can come up which does not involve ethical problems. When John Bouwmeester writes to ask Spinoza "if some method is given or can be given by which we can arrive unhindered and without weariness at the understanding of the best of things, or are our minds, like our bodies, subject to the vicissitudes of chance and our thoughts ruled by fortune rather than by skill?", Spinoza replies by detailing the "method by which our clear and distinct perceptions may be directed and concatenated."

Then he concludes his answer, "it remains only to warn you that assiduous meditation and a resolute and most constant mind are needed for all these matters, and to insure them it is before all necessary to set up a fixed mode and plan of living and to prescribe some definite end."

The problem of ethics slips imperceptibly into the problem of logic and the materials relevant to it are drawn from the metaphysics of thought, since ideas which are formed from the necessity of our nature alone, depend on fixed laws and must be true. This is the metaphysical problem of the relation of fixed and eternal things to contingent and changing things; it is the logical problem of the sufficient grounds of certainty; it is the central problem of ethics since the contemplation of the best things is exactly that knowledge of the union of our minds with Nature, and such knowledge makes human perfection. But meanwhile, even in a problem of logic, one must be reminded (by admonitions to assiduous meditation, to a constant mind and fixed mode of living) that to arrive at truth is part of a way of life and involves moral considerations.

In the metaphysical reaches of thought the end of all activity will be single. There is no difficulty in the fact that the intellectual love of God is at once beatitude and the contemplation of truth. In fact, this identity in the changing world is the source of the solution of ethical problems. Not that action need be rational, nor need it even be subject to rational control, but logic on the one hand is a function of a living thing, and morality on the other is the deduction of rules or means for the practical use of the faculty of knowing. Virtue is neither the reward of wisdom nor its necessary prerequisite; it grows with each item of knowledge, whether of the nature of the universe in which man is placed or of his relation to its parts. It may be as unified as the source of being and as diversified as the sum of the sciences; for man is a part of a world and he is caught in its


† Epistola XXXVII to Bouwmeester; IV, 187-189.

See Epistola XXXVII cited above.
logical implications, but he is affected directly too by things in it other than himself, moved by his desires with respect to them, and helped and hindered variously by them in attaining the ends he has set up. Consequently if one start with a concern for man and his perfection, a complete philosophic inquiry has been initiated in all its logical and scientific ramifications. "For the bounds of nature are not the laws of human reason which are directed only to the interest and preservation of man, but other and infinite laws which regard the eternal order of all nature, of which man is a particle; all individuals are determined from the sole necessity of this order to exist and to operate in a fixed manner." 8

The laws of human nature are to be considered; but there are also laws which determine man's body and other bodies, and there are the laws which determine his relation to the things of his environment. Finally, the nature of good is such that goods will be developed proper to any field in which man engages: the improvement of his mind, the development of his body, the continuance of amicable relations with other men in ordinary association, in political society, or in religion. But the summum bonum must be sought in none of these but in the law of them all, in the being of God which sets the order of the universe. The Ethics falls easily into a division of subjects which takes all these into account, and it is not surprising to find that Spinoza's contemporaries seem to have spoken of it very much like these. In 1676 Leibniz had not yet seen the text of the Ethics, but he had spoken of it with several of Spinoza's friends, and from their conversation he knew that it would be "about God, the mind, beatitude or the idea of a perfect man, about the medicine of the mind, about the medicine of the body, etc." 9

8 Polit. II, par. viii; III, 279.
9"Mons. Tschirnhaus m'a conté beaucoup de choses du livre de Spinoza. Il y a un marchand à Amsterdam, nommé Gilles Gerrit puto, qui entretient Spinoza. Le livre de Spinoza sera de Deo, mente, beatitudine seu perfecti hominis idea, de Medicina mentis, de Medicina corporis, etc." Aus Leibniz' Papieren, Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza's, J. Freudenthal (Leipzig, 1899), p. 201. Somewhat before this (November 14, 1675) Schuller had requested that Leibniz be permitted to see the manuscript (Epistola LXX; IV, 303) and Spinoza had refused (Epistola LXXII; IV, 305).

So intimate is the interdependence of all these strands that Spinoza would have had to become a system-builder to express even a fragmentary part of his convictions. The Ethics was to have expounded that moral center of his philosophy, the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of Nature; the Correction of the Understanding was to supplement that with the medicine by which the mind may be brought to a condition in which it might enter into that union. But the two had to encroach on each other unavoidably, since each as it proceeds becomes more clearly incomplete without the other and each could be understood only if the other had already been expressed. In both the Ethics and the Correction of the Understanding, the inquiry is in the interests of the life and career of an individual being, but it is impossible to explain what a thing is or how it will act, if it be considered in terms only of itself. There are problems connected with it which are problems of natural history; to resolve them the consequences of the action of other things must be taken into account. Other problems are involved which belong rather to metaphysics, and in them are implicated the endless principles by which all things are. Whatever we do and whatever we know is relevant to a universe of things acting upon each other and bound by necessary and intelligible laws: ultimately each thing is not merely part of a cosmic order but an element in a logical unity.

The constant recurrence of God as an important principle of explanation in the philosophy of Spinoza has just this significance. It is a manifesto that there could be no insignificant event in the world which this philosophy is to describe; it is scarcely to be wondered at that there will be no inconsequential detail in the philosophy that is expounded. The fact is particularly important since this is the philosophy of a man who would direct all the sciences to an ethical end: the Ethics and the Short Treatise begin with an examination of the nature of God; the Treatise on the Correction of the Understanding leads back to God and examines the relation of the human mind to the metaphysical structures discovered in the Ethics; even the discussions of the Political Treatise and the Theologico-
Political Treatise are carried very frequently to metaphysical principles and to God. There is finally an apparatus to bind the whole together; the politics, the theology, the logic, and the ethics, are referred, all, by footnotes and scholia to the metaphysics. Moral and intellectual judgments are not to be comprehended fully without their metaphysical implications: so the Ethics opens with frankly metaphysical questions and the Treatise on the Correction of the Understanding can proceed only by referring back to "my Philosophy" for further explanation. A mathematical physics or a transcendental psychology may be developed, but without their relation to each other they are incomplete, and that relation can be explained only by the doctrine of God. Religion and politics will be misunderstood and therefore misdirected if they are not considered in their proper subordination to God and the laws determined by his attributes. In a word, although information and details may be amassed from experience and may even be constituted into a body to be called a science, that science will not be true knowledge unless there is a sense of inner and logical necessity that binds it to other certainties: that perception can come from no experience, but only from reflection. This conviction must be implicit in the statement of any part of Spinoza's philosophy. To bring it out he had to resort to constant reiteration: physics, psychology, and ethics operate upon identical mechanisms. Any statement is a partial statement, only partly intelligible in itself; yet each contributes to the illumination of other statements. It is not difficult, consequently, to account for some of the misinterpretations to which Spinoza has been subjected: quotations can be found in his works to support most of them.

Spinoza's philosophy would be a difficult and subtle one to state even if it were completely formulated; as he left it the articulation and dependence of its parts are not perfect. Distinctions are frequently reiterated to become sharp only gradually; sometimes it seems as if definitions are modified in repetition. Extension and Thought are defined only after repeated explanations have made clear how these attributes are to be distinguished from the traditional ones and what correlation and what contrast there is to be between them. Sometimes the difficulty seems to be one of expression, for though the language is tersely exact and beautifully accurate, it bears the marks of painful revision. Since there is so much misunderstanding it seems probable that the work of revision may not have been perfected or completed. But possibly the fault is not always Spinoza's, and if what he means by, say, idea seems to be labored to its final conception through the whole length of Book II of the Ethics, the confusions may not have come from any vagueness in his mind, but from the variety of senses in which we have been reading the word since his time.

In expression as well as ideas Spinoza stands between two ages. Within his lifetime even the language he used had come to have different meanings. He is a contemporary of the first of the philosophers we have come to call modern, but in a significant sense his intellectual fellowship is with the medievals. This place which he occupies in the history of thought is another source for much of the strange interpretation that has been found for his doctrine and his terminology. He was concerned largely with problems which occupied the attention of his predecessors; and except in rare instances, the statements he cited with approval from the works of his contemporaries pleased him for other reasons, and because of other implications, than those which their authors had tried most to bring out. The misfortune is that his generation and those that succeeded it have faced about and that he expressed his convictions partly in terms which they continued to use. But even these readjustments do not leave the writings of Spinoza formed in a perfect and coherent body in which there are no conflicting doctrines and no unfilled lacunæ. Sometimes the difficulty and the confusion are genuine philosophic problems which evolved in the course of his work and which yield no solution. He was faced, to take one example, with the problem of the relation of finite bodies to God. In his first work, it seemed a simple problem, and he disposed of it: "now to prove that there is a body in Nature, can be no difficult task for us." The proof

10 Tract. de Int. Emend. Notes to pages 20, 22, and 24; also page 36.

requires only a knowledge of God and of his attributes. Fifteen years later a correspondent, Tschirnhaus, raises that problem in almost the same terms: "In the first place I can conceive only with difficulty how the existence of bodies which have motion and figure can be demonstrated a priori; since nothing of the sort occurs in extension, considering the thing absolutely." Spinoza's reply takes up other problems raised in the letter, but in regard to this he says only that if Extension be conceived as Descartes conceived it, that is, as a quiescent mass, it is not only difficult but impossible to demonstrate the existence of things. Tschirnhaus recognizes and expands on the difficulties in the case of Descartes, but asks Spinoza to indicate "how the variety of things can be shown a priori from the concept of Extension according to your meditations." Spinoza answers that the variety of things can not be demonstrated from the concept of Extension alone, but that it must necessarily be explained through an attribute which expresses eternal and infinite essence. This position and statement were those which in the Short Treatise seemed to him the solution of the problem. "But," he adds now, "I shall treat of these things with you more clearly some day if life be sufficient. For up to the present I have been able to put nothing concerning these matters in order." Since that reply, written on the fifteenth of July 1676, is the next to last of the letters we have of him, life was not to suffice for removing this difficulty. But it had been long enough to indicate that the confident statement of the Short Treatise was the statement and not the solution of the problem: bodies are related to the attribute of Extension; but the mechanism to mediate between bodies and Extension was never set in order. There are other such definite outlines in the Ethics which were never to be filled in.

There are consequently enough elements of confusion gathered about the works of Spinoza. But it does not seem too much to hope that the coherent logical form, which Spinoza strove so definitely and consistently to confer upon his philosophy, can be recovered in at least the detail that he gave it. Restatement of that unity is needed particularly since it can be made with an emphasis determined by criticism to which, though he could not have anticipated it, Spinoza has given the implicit answer. From the method he employed and from the confidence he had in the efficacy of deductive or synthetic reasoning, one is led to expect that the answer will be a consistent and autonomous doctrine. It may be incomplete in some details, for the unity is a formal one, and concerned, therefore, not with the specific inclusion of everything that is known, but rather with the conceivable manner in which anything that may be known is to be included. To say this is only to insist on Spinoza's firm conviction that the search for truths and goods could be conducted with profit only after one had investigated what is implied in the fact that we can conceive a truth or can desire that which we conceive to be good. Then one may speak of the power of the intellect and the strength of the emotions. Such an insistence will bring out forcefully what is involved in his philosophy and will recognize, too, as a proper consequence of this philosophy that in the age which was to go into a madness of observation and experiment, he could appraise Bacon's "little stories" and insist that Boyle's experiments revealed and could reveal nothing which was not already known about the nature of things.

In view, moreover, of this conviction that things in their essences are articulated in a close system, there must inevitably be rapid transitions and reduplications from part to part of Spinoza's philosophy. His dominant ethical concern leads through a metaphysics, and the unity of purpose takes on a philosophic significance in that it is based on a unity found among the facts of physics and ethics and metaphysics. Ethics must be preceded by an analysis of experience in terms of essence and existence. For a thing or for an idea to be, it is necessary not only that a set of circumstances and antecedent conditions prepare for it, but also that it be and exemplify one of a system of essences which has come, in it, into existence. This is the metaphys-
sical unity which is one of the important properties of God's nature; Spinoza devotes the first part of Book I of the Ethics to it. That the existence of God and his simplicity are necessary is a statement that there is an order in nature; the order is all the implications and sequences of things, not in time but in essence, so that, in brief, the nature and the sum of things indicate a set of conditions; these properly analyzed follow directly from the nature and attributes of God.

This metaphysical background is so very important because the ways of knowing and the nature of all things, including the passions, can be explained only in view of it: they are in final analysis only the symptoms of the distinction between things and the metaphysical basis of things. The nature of no thing save only God determines that it must exist; that a thing is, is separate from what it is, save only that to be, it must be just that. Spinoza found, for this reason, no direct means of deduction of the existence of things from God. It is the reverse of the modern problem of logic — for whereas Mill found that any generalization built on experience was only tentative and hypothetical, Spinoza working from general notions to experience, found that experience is unreliable and that generalizations reveal rather what a thing must be than what it is. The whole problem which appears in various forms in different departments of philosophy is here: Spinoza's medieval predecessors would have said that a principle of individuation was needed; in essence a thing which exists is no different from a thing which does not exist; it is body or some equivalent principle which is the cause of all particularity; its existence depends on physical antecedents, but to be, it must be something. For Spinoza the essence, which in the realm of ideas and eternal things constitutes the thing that which it is, becomes in the realm of existence a tendency and inclination to persist in existence. In man this is a conatus become self-conscious; it constitutes striving and desire. The contribution of metaphysics to the ethical problem is precisely in this restatement: how can the impulse which comes from experience and from things be made commensurate with the inclination which is the essence of the thing. To ask this is to inquire what the strength of the passions and the power of the intellect are. Or again, it is said that infinite modes proceed in infinite ways from the divine efficacy: the tendency of a body to move in a straight line, the tendency of ideas to follow in a sequence of associations, and the tendency of emotions to follow in the fulfillments and frustrations of desires, all these have explanations which are remarkably similar. But the similarity is to be anticipated in the metaphysical truth that extension and thought are attributes of God and that the order and sequence of ideas is identical with the order and sequence of things. An insistence on the unity of Spinoza's thought is an insistence only on the ground and intimacy of such interdependences.

Spinoza is, in the sense made clear by this persistent unity and implied in his constant cross-references, the best introduction to himself; he is, himself, his own best commentator. His early works often contain fuller statements of his thoughts and not infrequently there are given the detailed reflections in which he distinguishes what he says from what would have been held traditionally. It is possible to trace some conceptions through perceptible steps until they arrive finally at an adequate statement; the repeated restatements of a doctrine, by rounding out different approaches to it, may indicate it clearly, though it be a doctrine which defies accurate exposition; sometimes an early opinion is definitely abandoned. In the works expounded according to the geometric method, statements that seem questionable or even unintelligible may be illuminated by the necessary references to doctrines on which they depend. Or analogies may be carried from one realm to another in which the inner continuity is the same; so the Lemmas of the Second Book of the Ethics, not only state the physical principles of all bodies, but illustrate as well the fundamental principles of thought.

The plan which this study will follow is determined by these facts. An attempt will be made first to indicate the possible influences which entered into the intellectual formation of Spinoza. There are various materials which may be used to this end: first, what is known of his life and of his associates and his relations to them, and for this we have testimony in the writings of some of his contempo-
raries and in his own letters; second, what is known of the intellectual influences that helped mold his thought, and these can be judged somewhat from the list of books left in his library and from the citations of authors in his works and from the familiarity which he shows with some traditional problems and discussions. Such an investigation should reveal at least the questions that recurred in his reading and his reflection; both the possibility and the utility of determining definitely what philosophy inspired him to any particular ideal or what doctrine influenced him to any conviction, are rather dubious. But the broad lines of materials to be used and problems to be considered may be marked. Then, on this background, the purpose which manifests itself early in the works of Spinoza may be traced through the modifications of his statements. Finally in the second part of this study the thought of Spinoza may be examined in a unity and entirety made more definite by this approach. This last can perhaps be done best by tracing the relations of the ideas in his mature works, so far as that is justified by his explicit statement, and reinforced wherever possible by reference to the earlier works. A unity in his thought emerges out of the dominant purpose which animates his investigations, but the coherence in which the final doctrine is set is not the outgrowth only of this conscious directing; in it the philosophic problems uncovered along the way find a metaphysical solution.