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## PREFACE

**T**HE history of thought encounters in interpretation dangers peculiar to it among historical disciplines; one need not be a philosopher to recognize that the retelling of a man's philosophy must express still another philosophy, and must run the danger thus, despite what philosophic truths it may contain, of historical falsifications. There is no avoiding the danger, unless it is preferable, as some scholastics were convinced, that the study of the history of philosophy be directed to the discovery, not of what a man said, but of the Truth; perhaps great philosophers and seekers after truth have been led by their divergent systems and terminologies to express in varying forms insights into a truth which is, for all that, at bottom one. In any case, questions of interpretation present the alternative: they may be answered in terms either of history or philosophy.

Where interpretations are many and extremely diverse, as they are in the case of the philosophy of Spinoza, it is a needless presumption to insist on the exclusive authenticity of any one reading. The meaning and the illumination of a doctrine frequently can be conveyed by translations of it into terms which, though mutually exclusive or even contradictory, are intelligent developments of its thought. To insist on the total error of an interpretation is more usually a development from a theory of meaning than a conclusion consequent to research; historical criticism of doctrines is a hazardous enterprise, feasible when it is limited to specific points, and then care must be taken that it be well-documented; but if it chooses to be general, its justification should be philosophic. In the latter sense the minute study of one philosopher, of Aristotle, Spinoza, Aquinas, or any one of a half dozen others, is the best introduction, not only to the history of philosophy, but to philosophy itself. The presence of such convictions as these in the exposition which

follows marks the indebtedness which, even more than the formal inscription of it to him, dedicates this book to Dean Woodbridge: the writing of the book was undertaken as a result of discussions and conversations with him, and the sense and spirit of the project are his, though he would differ still with many of the ideas and emphases. But consistent with the philosophic purposes which were clear in discussion, even when there were differences in doctrine, this presentation of the philosophy of Spinoza is directed chiefly to express the issues involved in the spinozistic system: where a decision is necessary for one interpretation rather than another, the question is of course historical, and historical evidence is presented as fully as possible: but the major motivation is in following the implications of the philosophy of Spinoza, which for its philosophic aptness — and because so little of it is present in contemporary discussions — deserves to be explored again.

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