

CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

SPINOZANA

SIR,

I am loth to trespass once again on your valuable space, but certain statements connected with Spinoza in your July issue seem to me to call for comment:

(1) In his short popular exposition of the philosophy of Spinoza, and again in his notice of Sir Frederick Pollock's recent biography of the philosopher, Mr W. G. de Burgh makes emphatic reference to the commonly alleged contradiction between Spinoza's deterministic metaphysics and his doctrine of salvation. I confess that I do not understand how it is rationally possible to believe both that a man is capable of falling into so naïve a blunder, and also that he is the great philosopher that Mr de Burgh evidently admits him to be. It is like catching Euclid in the act of assuming a simple converse without geometrical proof, or Newton substituting a plus for a minus sign in a fundamental equation. Contradictions there may be, and probably are, in the philosophy of Spinoza, but they are not of the childish kind supposed by Mr de Burgh and the scores of psittacine commentators that were before him. And now in fullness of time Signor Guzzo has even discovered the very "*potest*" at which the contradiction was "unwittingly" introduced. This is criticism indeed! I hope that it will not be supposed that I am unduly impressed by mere authority, even that of Spinoza, when I say that the discovery of a blatant antinomy in the system of a thinker of his integrity and calibre should lead any acute critic to look for a profounder basis of exposition through which the seeming contradiction is resolved. Such a basis is discoverable by a more precise examination of Spinoza's determinism, which is not the mechanism that Mr de Burgh seems to suppose. This is not the place for a detailed analysis: perhaps the simplest way of indicating the source of the misunderstanding is by recalling that the determinism that conflicts with freedom is that which holds that every event is precisely determined in character and occurrence by temporally prior events, so that with sufficient knowledge of these its nature and epoch are calculable. If every event is wholly determined by events occurring before it, and so to infinity, if determination is essentially *a praeterito*, there is, of course, no sense in talking of human freedom. Mr de Burgh knows well enough that such a doctrine of causation collapses before the slightest inspection: if it remains stubbornly temporal it stands self-refuted in the philosophy of Hume; if it seeks mitigation it is caught in a process that eliminates time and identifies the cause with its own effect. What he does not appear even to suspect is that *Spinoza neither advanced nor accepted any such view of causation*: this was no more than the "common order of nature" that in philosophy is subordinated to the "order of the intellect" for which real causation is not transeunt but immanent, not sematic but genetic, not serial but creative, not temporal but eternal. This is, perhaps, what critics mean when they falsely assert that for Spinoza "cause" means "reason" or "logical ground". Doubtless, real causation finds its amplest and purest expression in the eternal creative process that unites *Natura naturans* with *Natura naturata*, but although man by reason of his essential finitude is necessarily to some extent involved in time and the common order of nature, yet even for him the essential form of causation remains unchanged, and in *his own* actions he is free as an eternal self-determinant.

Man's self-determination is thus not merely the inclusion of a set of serial causes within the contours of a relative individuality (for so a self-fuelling engine would be free), but the self-legislating individual operating in accordance with its own inherent principles as a draught of *Natura*. Every intelligent action is free, and every action is intelligible: but not every action that falls within the contours of the finite

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individual is intelligent, i.e. *to him* intelligible. Doubtless it is intelligent in relation to some higher individual within which the finite being is an element: in any case it is at furthest the free action of *Natura* or some part of its free action; it becomes *the man's* free action when he understands it, that is when its genetic causes lie within his finite eternal individuality. And there is nothing in Spinozistic determinism to make this variation of contour and integration impossible; the "emendation of the intellect" is no miracle thrust upon a resisting natural order: it *is* the natural order, though not the "common order of nature". Nor is there in fact anything in Spinozistic determinism to make even temporal choice impossible, for no action is completely determined *a praeterito*, though it is futile to argue endlessly whether the rejected alternative was really possible or not. It was a sure ethical instinct with Spinoza to identify morals not with acts of choice but with aspiration, and to refer freedom to intellectual love and its eternity rather than to fragmentary actions and their temporality. If this variation of ethical climate is really what Mr de Burgh deplores, it was a superfluous refinement to give his predilections an air of scholarly precision by tacitly ignoring the doctrine of *Ethics*, III. xxx, and omitting the ruling phrase of *Ethics*, III. xl: "Qui . . . imaginatur", thus implying that "Hatred is increased by reciprocated hatred" represents "the mechanism", while "Hatred can be destroyed by love" represents "the miracle". If the one is "mechanism", so also is the other; if the one is "miracle", so also is the other. But in fact, as there is no "mechanism" there is no need to make freedom a miracle. That human freedom is limited, not only by man's essential finiteness as an eternal part of *Natura*, but also by his consequent partial pulverization by time, I have elsewhere not spared pains to emphasize; and if the former limitation is the sphere of religion, the latter is the sphere of moral endeavour. The moral life is no more and no less than the aspiration of the temporal individual after his full eternal finite stature. That aspiration, where it exists, is essentially free, for it is the very *nisus* of reality. It is strange criticism that makes the admission of the limitation of freedom into an assertion of its impossibility.

(2) My second comment, happily, can be much briefer: it refers to Sir Herbert Samuel's notes on *Spinoza Memorials in Holland*, in which he implies that it was wholly "friends of philosophy in Holland" who rescued the house at The Hague from destruction or oblivion. I think, Sir, that no account of the Spinoza House, however brief, can be satisfactory that makes no reference to the inspiration, labour, enthusiasm, and unsparing energy and generosity of that true lover of Spinoza, and learned editor of his works, the late Dr Carl Gebhardt of Frankfurt. It would not, I suppose, be far from the truth to speak of Gebhardt as the "onlie begetter" of the *Domus Spinozana* and the *Societas Spinozana*, and it is an act of piety to recall to the minds of some at least of your readers the personality of that most urbane of Germans, that most human of scholars, unhappily cut off by painful disease in a time of national and personal anxiety, and without the assurance of the completion and permanence of the work he had most closely at heart.

I am, Sir, yours, etc.,

H. F. HALLETT.

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