BIAS, INCONSISTENCY AND HERMENEUTICS

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I

MUCH of the trouble in the world is caused by bias and inconsistency. Bias is a compelling psychological force which, regardless of facts and logic, imposes on the mind certain beliefs beforehand, and afterwards prompts the understanding to justify them, often blinding it to actual facts and cogent arguments, and deceiving it into taking fallacious reasoning for sound reasoning. It may be a present state of mind, or the result of a previous state of mind long forgotten, or even the effect of past impressions made on the organism without producing consciousness at the time. Perhaps, too, some forms of bias are due to heredity, especially those relating to beliefs and opinions that began to develop in the early periods of human evolution. Moral and religious feelings belong to this last class.

Inconsistency is the lack of congruity or harmony between a man's avowed beliefs and his acts, or among the beliefs themselves. When insincere, it is hypocrisy. When sincere, it is usually the unavoidable effect of some overmastering bias.

Generally, the mind acquires knowledge in an incomplete and disconnected way, and forms judgments which, arising independently of one another, may be mutually contradictory, or inconsistent. The inconsistency, however, is found only later, when comparison and attempts at unification begin; but then some of the judgments already formed may have become beliefs too deeply rooted to be immediately displaced by their opposites. If we conceive such mental states to have as their physical basis certain brain arrangements, it will be readily understood that, the more stably these arrangements have become organized, the harder will be the work of altering them, and the longer it will take to effect the change. It is as

if each belief occupied in the brain what Maudsley calls an independent mental area, which it stubbornly refused to surrender. The conflicting beliefs will long continue to coexist side by side, while the mind, unaware of the cause of its duplicity, and loath to acknowledge its lack of unity, will resort to the most flagrant fallacies to convince itself that there is no conflict.

Another source of bias and inconsistency is premature generalization arising from incomplete knowledge. Suppose, for instance, that throughout his life a man already advanced in years has neither known nor heard of a hornless cow. He will no doubt acquire the firm belief that horns are an inseparable part of a cow's anatomy, and, with that natural tendency of man to claim absolute certainty in all matters, will declare a hornless cow to be an impossibility. If later he hears of cows without horns, he will deny their existence. If he sees them, he will try to prove that their horns were cut off, or have not yet grown, or perhaps that the animals in question are not cows at all. He may even go to the end of his life arguing the case, and perhaps his successors, taught from childhood that all cows have horns, will continue the process of refutation and "interpretation." It may be several generations before the plain fact is acknowledged that some cows have no horns. To some this may sound like a fanciful case, but to those acquainted with political, theological and ethical controversies, and with the psychology of mental habits, it will sound familiar. Many a discovery of astronomy, geology and biology has proved a hornless cow, and many a preserver of the old order is still looking for the horns. To this subject I shall rever in subsequent paragraphs.

There is a pernicious and uncharitable tendency to identify inconsistency with hypocrisy, especially in judging leading men engaged in the solution of transcendent problems affecting the destiny of human kind. A philosopher would judge more generously as well as more justly and truly, and ascribe that inconsistency to unconscious bias and to the existence of rival mental areas in the same individual, involuntarily and independently formed, and not susceptible of sudden elimination. As saintliness has not yet become uiversal, it is not unlikely that some of the great leaders of the world are knaves; but it is as unlikely that they all are that name. Yet, it seems obvious that the majority of them are victims of inconsistency. I say *victims*, not *guilty*, of inconsistency, as I refer only to those that do not see this weakness in their conduct and doctrines, or seeing it, think it only a superficial semblance,

which they waste much time in barren exertions to remove. When Augustus and Tiberius praised and feigned to submit to the authority of the Roman senate and people, and hid their usurpation under the forms that had meant freedom before freedom died with Brutus at Phillipi, they were guilty of inconsistency—they were hypocrites. When Galileo held that the earth revolves about the sun, and yet adhered to the literal interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, he was a victim of inconsistency—an honest man with two mutually conflicting mental areas.

There is hardly an opinion which does not arise from bias, conscious or unconscious, and which does not contradict other opinions which the same person claims to hold, and honestly thinks he holds. As a rule, beliefs are rather emotional or accidental than intellectual; rather the result of education and environment, of casual impressions and associations, than the product of impartial, deliberating reason, freely weighing evidence and baring the truth. In many cases, they are but survivals, reduced perhaps to remnants by the attacks of rival beliefs, of the childish notions and superstitions of prehistoric man. It is often argued that the antiquity of a belief proves that that belief is well founded, either in facts or in the nature of man. This mode of reasoning seems to be bad logic, bad history and bad psychology; for nearly all the conceptions of the ancients with regard to the world, man included, were misconceptions. Rather should we say that the older a belief is, the more we should suspect it and put it to the test of present standards.

Reason often struggles to assert herself, and cherishes the illusion that she is exercising her noble and lofty rights, when in reality she is led by hidden guides along devious channels where she sees only what they have prepared for her to see. The Mussulman or the Buddhist scholar is prepared to prove by an appeal to reason, as he thinks, that his faith is superior to the Christian faith, while the Christian scholar is equally certain that reason can establish the superiority of Christianity to all other religions. Why? Mainly, and probably only, because each sucked his religion with his mother's milk, and found it already established in his mind as a necessary truth when he began to think. If his mother had been nursed with the milk of India, he would have been ready to prove that Brahmanism is the only rational religion, and the eternal Vedas the only source of truth.

The same thing happens in politics, economics, ethics and many other departments of thought relating not only to great things, but

to small things as well, down to very trifles. Circumstances of one kind or another, in which the intellect has no part, open the road that reason must follow, and she obediently and slavishly moves in it, although, unaware of the forces that impel and drag her, she thinks herself free. It is true that now and then a man will shake off the yoke of custom, education and tradition, leave the atmosphere on which he has fed and in which he has lived, and, apparently guided by liberated and unfettered reason, explore the field of facts and thought, assume an independent attitude, and freely adopt what his unbiased understanding can unconditionally support. It is pious to believe, or at least to hope, that in many of these cases there is a real intellectual emancipation. Nevertheless, experience compels the admission that perhaps in the majority of cases the elimination of bias is but apparent, the actual process consisting in the triumph of one form of bias over another, so that it is rather a process of substitution than one of elimination. The most devoted Catholic may become a sincere deist or an atheist because some priest hurt his feelings, creating in him first a dislike for that priest, then for other priests, and gradually for the Catholic religion and for religion generally. The change may have taken place so slowly that he may not even remember its origin. He will proclaim, and honestly believe, that unhampered reason opened his eyes and let in the light of truth, when, as an actual fact, the whole revolution in his thought was the unconscious effect of some trivial offence. Had Plato and Aristotle, when they were born, been taken to Judea and brought up in the synagogue, they might have been two of the prophets, and the intellectual development of Europe might have been radically different from what it was. People might have thought differently, felt differently, reasoned differently, and yet with equal conviction and certainty. And why? Simply because two Greek babes had been taken to the land of Jewry.

Two morals follow from these obvious facts, the one discouraging and discomforting, the other soothing and purifying. The first is that most all our opinions and beliefs with regard to debatable philosophical matters and matters affecting the mutual relations of men are the effect of fortuitous causes, often unintellectual and exceedingly trivial. They are automatic adaptations or responses of the mental organism to its medium, and are defended by individual reason only because reason finds them there and is prevented from functioning otherwise than as a tool of the obstinate, enduring feelings arising from such causes and organized in the nervous centers

as masters that unconsciously dictate all the operations of the intellect. They make the intellect itself stubborn, or, acting like the blinkers on a draft animal, prescribe its path and the range of its vision.

What, then, are in these matters those cherished and boasted things we call conviction and certainty? Very suspicious things indeed, since they are likely to be aliens in the realm of reason exercising their rights under spurious papers of citizenship. Nor will this sad conclusion seem at all surprising to any serious-minded person who will ask himself whether he really feels certainty or true conviction about the views he holds on politics, ethics, economics or theology. How many Republicans or Democrats, Socialists or Capitalists, Christians or Jews can answer ten per cent of the arguments of their opponents? If they are fond of disputation and have often engaged in it, they know that many a time they have been silenced, or, confused and helpless, resorted to meaningless, irrelevant or even contradictory answers and explanations that neither answer nor explain and are evidence at once of defeat and of unwillingness to acknowledge it; and perhaps they have ended the debate with the common declaration of stubborn impotence, "That may be, but I don't think so." This declaration tells the sad story, although it is not properly phrased. As there is really very little *thinking* about the matter, but feeling, blind feeling or belief begotten without the co-operation of reason, the actual state of mind is more fittingly described by the statement, "That may be, but I don't *feel* so, don't *wish* to believe it, and *won't* believe it." Such stubborness occurs even among mathematicans, where one would least expect it. When non-Euclidean geometry was first formulated, many old geometers and philosophers sneered at it and undertook to refute it. Its reasoning was unanswerable, and their arguments were fallacious or mere anathemas; but their hardened faith made them *feel* that "there must be something wrong somewhere."

The second moral to be derived from the psychological facts here described is of more positive value, philosophically as well as ethically, than the first. From a purely philosophical point of view, those facts teach that there is a danger against which reason should constantly be on guard. The danger is all the greater because it is often hidden in the depths of subconsciousness. Honest reason should always endeavor to discover it, if possible, and sail clear of it, also *if possible*. And herein lies the rub; for, given the constitution of the human mind, and the controlling influence of long-estab-

lished feelings, is it actually possible for the intellect to overrule them? Probaby not entirely, or not always. However, much will be gained by endeavoring to shake off their tyranny and attain at least in part that ideal desideratum we call impartiality, without which the continuous thread of logic cannot be followed. Reason will take a long step forward if, as in Kant's memorable analysis, she learns at least her limitations, and realizes that she is tied by many strings, some stretching back to the caves of primitive man. Conservatism should be practiced with caution and rather with distrust, and radicalism not hastily condemned. Although iconoclasm often breaks more than false idols, the presumption is that when it arises there are false idols that have lived too long.

The ethical teaching of the law of unconscious bias is humility and tolerance. The philosopher knows that truth is elusive and seldom emerges out of the mist of uncertainty; that the mental powers are exceedingly weak and limited, and that their findings are for the most part guesses of things that seem probable, not of things that are facts. He also knows that reason is seldom a free agent, but nearly always is fatally led by contingent circumstances along paths which, had not those circumstances ever existed, she never would have followed. He knows that perhaps, and very likely, the true and only cause of his thinking that Mr. Wilson's policies are defensible on rational or humanitarian grounds is neither rationality nor humanitarianism, but simply that he, the philosopher, was brought up in a Democratic family, and learned to *feel* like a Democrat before he learned to reason. He knows that perhaps, and very likely, the true and only cause of his opponents' holding that Mr. Wilson's policies can be condemned on rational or humanitarian grounds is that his opponents grew in a Republican atmosphere, and were Republicans first, and thinkers afterwards, if at all. He knows that perhaps, and very likely, the true and only cause of his holding certain views on religion, politics and ethics is that his progenitors of many ages ago believed in ghosts and fetishes, in social and political slavery, in the sacredness of custom, and in the special rights of privileged classes. He knows that he is but emerging from the night of the past, and beginning dimly to discern the true form of the objects which in the darkness assumed fanciful shapes, not yet vanished. In brief, he knows that he knows very little, and that little with very little certainty.

Knowing this, the philosopher, that is, the true and honest thinker, will regulate his attitude accordingly. He will be neither

dogmatic and arrogant about his own opinions, nor intolerant, unforbearing and contemptuous about the opinions of others. There is always the possibility, and even the probability, that his own reason may be but the instrument of pre-existing blind feelings, and his own "convictions" but another name for those feelings; and that, if those feelings had not shaped his reasoning apparatus, his "convictions" would have been different. As to this opponents, they, too, may owe their opinions to similar causes, and the fact that they are not convinced by his arguments is not always proof that they are either dishonest or intellectually inferior. He may hold and defend his faith, and hope that it is the true faith; but the obvious fact that intellects which in other matters are as good as his, or better, hold opposite views will make him pause and ask himself whether he is really justified in categorically proclaiming that he sees with absolute distinctness things which they, with eyes perhaps as keen, are unable to see.

II

One of the strangest effects of some forms of bias is an inconsistency which seems unthinkable and would be unbelievable, were it not so common. Usually bias is consistently intolerant. It leads the minds to hold certain views, prevents it from seeing anything subversive of them, and quickens it to see, or to believe it sees, many things that support them. But in the queer form I now purpose to deal with, the same person affirms a general proposition and denies particular propositions logically subsumed under it, apparently holding mutually contradictory beliefs. The inconsistency arises from a bias that does not allow him to see the subsumption and prompts him to gross fallacies by which himself would be disgusted or amused, were it not that he does not, and *will not*, see them as fallacies. After having acknowledged that A is black, he will, in special circumstances in which the blackness of A does not fit in with some previous feeling or conception, which is the biasing influence, endeavor to convince himself and others that what really is A is something else.

This natural yet regrettable aberration is most wasteful of energy and time, and a very heavy drag on progress. A man or a party, a government or a church, may sincerely adopt, defend and preach the general proposition, "Whenever A exists, the necessary conse-

quence is B." The proposition may even belong to the class of those universally recognized as axiomatic, fundamental and absolute. And yet, if in any particular instance in which A exists, the consequence B happens to imply as a further consequence the surrender of an oil well or a gold mine, the enactment of an unwelcome law, the disavowal of the sacredness of a revered book, or the abandonment of a time-honored article of faith, logic vanishes from the mind at once. Reason succumbs under the attacks of interest or feeling, which deceives the intellect, dragging it into a maze of fallacies that it honestly mistakes for cogent arguments, all tending to prove that in that particular instance A does not exist.

Ethics, theology and politics afford numberless illustrations of this mental failing, from which even the exact sciences suffer not infrequently. Many examples may be found in the recent dealings growing out of the World War; dealings in which principle after principle, held to be based on reason and justice, is violated in the name of reason and justice, while the violators honestly believe that they are right both in upholding and inviolating it, simply because their strong bias makes them see distortions seeming to prevent things that do fit together from fitting together. They lack the courage of their convictions, and their lack of courage, which in these cases is the disturbing bias, has suggested the evasions and quibbling by which they have so long impeded the restoration of peace. Having predetermined that certain pegs will not go into certain round holes, they see the pegs square and too large, although the pegs are of the exact form and dimensions to fit the holes perfectly. As, however, this is a slippery field just now, where all sides are groping in the darkness of emotion, believing it to be the light of reason, I shall abstain from dwelling on, or even mentioning, any specific cases of the prevailing disease.

The subject of the arbitration of international difficulties, considered in all its generality, may perhaps be introduced here without particularly hurting the feelings of either the Trojans or the Greeks. The proposition is admitted as self-evident that a man may not be a judge in his own case, and that he may not exercise as a right any line of conduct that others claim to be in violation of their rights, unless a competent tribunal hears the case and decides in his favor. This principle is fundamental; it forms the root of all law; it is recognized as an obvious dictate of justice, approved by both reason and expediency, and no one disputes it. It may be thus formulated in all its generality: "X is not a competent judge in his

own case, against Y, nor Y against X, whoever X and Y may be." The principle is founded on the psychological law of bias; the law, that is, that judgment is influenced by interest; and as that law has no real exceptions, although it has some apparent, the principle is absolute and therefore of universal applicability, both to individuals and to collective bodies. It carries with it the principle of arbitration as an immediate corollary, which, like the general principle itself, has no exceptions. In the case of individuals, there is no hesitation in applying the corollary; no one claims that he surrenders his legitimate rights by submitting to it, nor does any one attempt the subterfuge of distinguishing between the justiciable and the non-justiciable; for X is no more competent to decide whether his case is justiciable or not than he is to decide whether he or Y is right, when their claims clash.

But when X or Y is a powerful nation (the weak nations seldom indulge in such juggling, having nothing to gain thereby), the attitude of many is quite another. They do not deny the general principle, but endeavor to convince themselves and others that nations cannot be substituted for X and Y in the formula, except in certain circumstances. Although they speak of nations, they really have in mind only their own nation, and although they speak of "special circumstances" in general, they really have in mind only the circumstances that may affect that nation. This is not the place to enter into such fallacies, some of which are really ingenious and all the more effective as they appeal to popular prejudices and emotions, by which, indeed, they are begotten. It is sufficient to point out their inconsistency with a proposition that underlies all law; a proposition the acceptance of which is the main safeguard of justice, and the denial of which is an implicit expression of a desire to subordinate justice to selfish interest. No person, no group, no nation that in any case whatsoever says, "I am the law" can consistently defend the imposition of any law by the community on the individual.

III

Theology is perhaps the most powerful spring and the most prolific source of inconsistency. It has always been so, from the earliest times to the present, and in the least as well as in the most enlightened revealed religions. The evolution of religion, and therefore of theology in its broadest sense, has been for the most part a process of elimination and purification. During the historic period of mankind, the process, becoming conscious of itself, has led to much discussion and created much bitter bigotry, formerly acted, but now felt or spoken only.

It is in these discussions, seldom unbiased, that inconsistency makes itself manifest to the impartial student. Its cause lies in the conflict between old conceptions which, having lasted and acted through many generations, have developed habitual *feelings*, and new conceptions, with which those feelings are logically though not psychologically incongruous. This antagonism is what elsewhere I have ventured to call the law of conflict between new judgments and old feelings; a law which states the seemingly strange phenomenon that when a judgment has persisted so long as to produce a deep-rooted feeling, the feeling continues to assert itself long after the judgment has been found to be false and given place to an opposite judgment, which might be expected to create an opposite feeling. One does not realize that the old feeling is the effect of the old judgment, or belief, and as one continues long to experience it, one makes strenuous though fruitless efforts to reconcile it with one's new belief. The efforts, which really are nothing but fallacies unconsciously fabricated by bias, become weaker and weaker, as the old feelings yield more and more to the pressure of the new judgments. It is thus that faiths die. They live as gradually vanishing emotional forms long after their rational grounds have been undermined and entirely destroyed, and die only when the new judgments have developed new mental habits.

A certain book, be it Chinese or Hindu, Hebrew or Arabian, appears at a time when the people for whom it is intended are still in their intellectual infancy. It claims, or its authors claim for it, supernatural origin and divine authority, and, owing to the primitive state of society at the time, is accepted without question as an infallible oracle and code. It is held as something sacred, venerated

with a feeling of awe that precludes, as the highest sacrilege, any doubt as to its origin or any inquiry into the true value of its contents. Nor are these feelings independent of prevailing judgments; for the marvelous narratives of the book, its ethical, historical and philosophical crudities are in keeping with the conceptions of undeveloped minds, so that what it does is to give divine sanction to current beliefs, thereby perpetuating them. If it contains something new in its details, that something harmonizes with those beliefs, and is readily accepted with submissive and undoubting devotion and credulity. This feeling of reverence for the book is transmitted from generation to generation; tradition, custom and education, and perhaps physiological heredity, contribute to convert it as it were, into an integral part of the mental make-up of those born and brought up under its sway; it seems to become organized in the nervous centers as the instinctive recognition of an axiom, as something *given*, to be taken as a matter of course. The conditions under which the book originated may have disappeared and be unknown or forgotten; the present judgments and opinions may no longer be those that gave rise to it and are unequivocally expressed in it; but the feeling—the blind feeling—persists that the book is sacred and infallible. The original judgments with which the feeling harmonized and from which the feeling grew may be dead, and yet the feeling continues to assert itself, just as a nervous woman's fear of a pistol continues after she learns that the pistol is unloaded.

It is in these psychological facts that the curious and apparently anomalous process of theological exegesis, or "interpretation," in the usual sense of the term, had its origin, and it is from them that it derives its vitality. At first, the feeling of reverence is too deep, and man shrinks even from the idea of examining the book in the light of reason, as from a sacrilegious attempt to pry into the infinite mind of the Deity. Later, he timidly approaches it with the predetermination to harmonize its contents, still assumed beforehand to be of divine origin, with reason and profane knowledge. In this stage, interpretation is mainly unconscious perversion, and consists in inventing more or less far-fetched, more or less puerile subterfuges whereby both the spirit and the letter of the book are misread, that is, misinterpreted, whenever they do not agree with new conceptions. Still later, perversion gives place to partial elimination. Such parts of the book as do not conform to new ideas are discarded as extraneous elements, introduced either by meddlers or by the original

writers in uninspired moments; or such parts are explained away in some other manner and declared unimportant, while the rest of the book is still considered as divinely inspired. In the next stage, the whole book is declared to be entirely of human origin, but is still held in reverence on account of its moral teachings and of the supernatural or sacred character attached to the beings from which those teachings ultimately emanate. It is not necessary to carry the process of interpretation and criticism any farther, but a concrete illustration of it may prove interesting and helpful. For this purpose, I have chosen a case which is both extreme and typical.

In the seventeenth century lived Benedict Spinoza, the father of modern pantheism and determinism, and one of the noblest and lovable figures in the history of thought. "His life," says Heine with some exaggeration but not quite without reason, "was a copy of the life of his kinsman Jesus Christ." He elaborated a system of philosophy at once awful and comforting, stern and benign, which, later revived, modified and impulsed by Hegel and other German philosophers, is perhaps, in its substance, the prevailing system among the advanced thinkers of today. "If you would be a philosopher," says Hegel, "you must begin by becoming a Spinozist." "There is no possible view of life but Spinoza's," declares Lessing. Goethe, in his moments of weariness and despondency, sought a refuge in the works of the humble Jew, and one of his friends complained that no one could persuade the poet to read anything but Spinoza's *Ethics*. This book stirred the intellectual world as only the works of Kant and of Darwin have stirred it since, and left as deep and lasting an impression on succeeding generations. I mention these details to show the caliber of the man, which makes his inconsistency all the more striking as an illustration of the overmastering subjugation of reason by traditional feeling, and the solicitude of reason to defend that subjugation as an act of free confirmation and acceptance on her part.

In the philosophy of Spinoza, as set forth in his *Ethics*, God is the eternal "substance" of which nature, including man, is an infinite series of changing aspects, or "modes," succeeding one another inexorably, according to invariable laws. Everything, whether physical or mental, occurs necessarily and unavoidably, by virtue of eternal properties and attributes; and not one jot of what exists or has existed could possibly have been different from what it is or has been, without annihilating the whole of nature and therefore God himself. "The things that have been produced by God cannot

have been produced in any other manner nor in any other order," says Spinoza. When we say that God creates, produces or makes different things, we mean that he manifests himself in different ways, or, rather, that he necessarily and automatically passes through, or becomes, different "modes" in his eternal activity. But this activity is a succession not of voluntary acts but of necessary states. "God does not act by virtue of a free will," asserts the philosopher. In reality, Spinoza's God does not *act;* he *functions.* Although he possesses the attribute of thought, it is a sort of abstract thought, something vague, formless and indefinite that appears as real mind, with ideas, volitions, emotions and mental processes only in man and other conscious creatures. These states, considered as concrete mental states, do not exist in God. "Neither intelligence nor will belong to the nature of God," is Spinoza's explicit statement. Nothing is done with any purpose or for the realization of any plan, but whatever is, is because it must be. "Nature" (that is, God) "does not aim at any end in its operations, and final causes are nothing but pure fictions imagined by men."

Human acts and thoughts, being but God's modes, are manifestations of his activity. In this sense they may be called his works, or parts of him. They are phenomena necessarily arising from his eternal nature. Man is no more free to act as he does in any circumstances than an unsupported stone is free to obey or not to obey the force of gravity, and a scoundrel is no more responsible for being a scoundrel than a horse for being a horse. Sin and virtue, good and evil, order and disorder are only names of certain relations between man and things. To God such terms are unmeaning; or, rather, they are unmeaning when considered as descriptions of God's works. God is offended at nothing, approves nothing, reproves nothing, in the usual acceptation of these terms. He has neither intelligence, will, passions nor emotions, and in him is neither joy nor sorrow, neither love nor hatred. "Properly speaking," says Spinoza, "God neither loves nor hates anybody." So necessary a part of God is this indifference, that without it God could not be. "He who loves God," adds the philosopher, "cannot make any effort that God love him in return," for this would be to wish that God were not God.

He winds up the first part of his *Ethics* with the calm declaration, "I have explained the nature of God." Elsewhere, writing to a friend, he expresses his profound conviction of the validity of his philosophy by stating that he knows its propositions to be true with

as much certainty as one knows that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles.

It is not my object to enter into the merits and demerits of Spinoza's philosophy, nor to defend nor to attack the truth of such Scriptural teachings as I shall presently have to deal with. My theme here is inconsistency, and nothing else; the logical disagreement between two bodies of doctrine held to be both true, both adhered to and defended by the same person.

Although Spinoza was not a mechanist in the modern materialistic sense, he was nevertheless a mechanist in the sense that he was a thoroughgoing and uncompromising determist, holding that everything happens necessarily as an effect of what happened before, and that every phenomenon, physical or mental, is predetermined from eternity; that is, existed *in potentia*, or as a gradually developing germ, in all the stages of the infinite past. Nor was the process the work of a ruling intelligence, for the existence of such intelligence, as well as of design, or final causes, is explicitly denied. The process may therefore be properly described as mechanical, and God as an eternal mechanism functioning in accordance, not with the dictates of his will, but with certain laws that, although inhering in him, he neither made nor can alter.

A personal God, whether conceived as a being different from the world or as the soul of the world, is logically excluded from Spinoza's philosophy. In particular, the God of the Bible is so excluded; for one of the characteristics of that God is his personality—his direct intervention in the destiny of the world and man; his free, premeditated acts; his human-like attributes of knowledge, mercy, justice, anger, indignation; his intention to fulfill his plans or designs, freely conceived and freely executed. And all that implies this personality, including the phraseology that describes it, is *ipso facto* excluded from that philosophy. For Spinoza to speak of prophecy and revelation, of God's plans and decrees, of God's providence, clemency and solicitude for the welfare of man, and of "Holy Writ" as "the word of God" (these are his own expressions) is a palpable, monstrous and almost inconceivable logical incongruity. And yet he does so speak. When off his guard, he seems to use all the theological terminology in its accustomed sense; but occasionally, remembering the cast-iron principles of his *Ethics*, he alters the meanings of words; so that, in order to reconcile his *Ethics* with his *Theologico-Political Treatise*, in which he "interprets" the Scrip-

tures, a process of philosophical exegesis, more complicated than his theological exegesis, would be necessary.

This very adoption of theological terms, this very attempt at "interpretation," shows the strong theological bias under which Spinoza labors. His philosophy evidently leaves no room for traditional theology nor its nomenclature, nor much less for apologetics. But his education, his associations and the continued action of many centuries of faith in his ancestors had made on him an impression that new, antagonistic conceptions could not suddenly efface. Although he had been expelled from the synagogue and excommunicated as a heretic, he still was a Jew in his heart; and, although not a Christian, he held Jesus in the deepest veneration, as the greatest of the prophets, the true spiritual envoy of God, to whom God revealed himself from soul to soul, not in imagination nor through material signs, as to the prophets of old. One would think, on reading Spinoza's outbursts of piety, often very touching and beautiful, that they were the utterances of the most fervent and orthodox believer. He had inherited the strong religious disposition of his forefathers; he had grown in an atmosphere of implicit faith; in his childhood, he had learned to regard Scripture as the revealed word of God—had learned to believe that before he had even read it, without knowing why, and even before being explicitly taught, because he heard it every day as a matter of course from the mouth of his seniors, saw every day the expression of their feeling of reverence, was called every day to act in accordance with that feeling; and so the feeling grew in him and with him automatically, as a response of the plastic organism, perhaps predisposed by heredity, to the molding action of its medium. This feeling, this faith, he acquired before he knew its real object; figuratively, and perhaps literally speaking, it crystallized in his brain as a permanent or at least very stable element of his mental equipment. Other currents of thought might afterwards enter the brain, and tend to dislodge that feeling, but it was too strong, too well rooted and organized, to be swept away or disintegrated, and, although somewhat weakened, would deflect the impinging currents into the devious channels of fallacy. As a bold rationalist, Spinoza arrived, after long cogitations and through a logico-mathematical machinery of deduction that he thought unerring, at certain conclusions that contradicted his faith; but, it being psychologically and perhaps physiologically impossible for him to discard his faith, he betook himself to the task of harmonizing it with his new thoughts, and to this end elaborated, with

the greatest sincerity, a system of fallacious casuistry, which his overmastering bias caused him to regard and present as logical reasoning.

He approaches his subject with the previous, unshakable feeling that the Bible, in its substance at least, must be true, and that whatever it contains that does not tally with his philosophical theories must be so "interpreted" that there shall be no discrepancy. "Being convinced," he says, "that when I have found a solid proof (of anything or principle), it is impossible that I can ever doubt it, I am certain, even without reading Holy Writ, that Holy Writ cannot contradict it." His purpose therefore was, as the purpose of nearly all interpreters has been, to read into the Bible whatever he thought his reason had already shown him to be true, however much it might be necessary to distort and pervert the text.

Were the account of the first days of the world and man, as given in Genesis, laid before a Hindu, Chinese or Japanese scholar who had previously become a Spinozist, but whose mind had not been molded by Jewish and Christian influences, he would probably discourse somewhat as follows: "I cannot believe that account; for, according to Spinoza's system, which I hold to be true, the world had no beginning; even its present form was not 'made' by an act of free will, because God has no free will. Things cannot have been created nor arranged with deliberation to accomplish the ends stated in the book, because God neither deliberates nor aims at any ends whatever. God cannot have appeared to men, spoken to them and given signs of pleasure and displeasure, because he has no form, no speech, no emotions. He cannot have made man in his image or likeness because he has no image, and even mentally he is not at all like men, having neither will nor intelligence, in the human sense of these terms. The very statement that he made anything contradicts the true nature of God, for he is not separate and different from the world; he *is* the world, and he *becomes* the various forms of nature, not *creates* them. As to the meaning of the book, it cannot be plainer; nor does it require a privileged or scholarly mind to understand it. The book describes the beliefs of a people in a certain stage of development; beliefs that in their substance have been common to all mankind when in that stage. Its contents are just what would naturally be expected in the circumstances. The text is as clear as the light of day, and to put into it a reading different from the literal is to pervert it. Jews and Christians do not pervert our books in that way, but justly take for granted that our books

mean what they say. Neither Jews, Christians nor ourselves distort the accounts transmitted by either written or oral tradition of the beliefs of the ancient Greeks or Romans, Celts or Scandinavians, Aztecs or Incas. We accept them as faithfully depicting the intellectual state of early mankind, not as mysterious hieroglyphics clad in the deceptive garb of plain language requiring many thousands of years to decipher. He who reads the book must, if he is unbiased and would be fair to the past, take it as it reads. If, so reading and taking it, he believes it, he may be right, but then he certainly is not a Spinozist." And our heathen friend would apply the same reasoning to the rest of Scripture. For him there would not be, nor could be, a special revelation, nor a chosen people, nor inspiration, nor personal manifestations of divine power, nor divine commandments, nor sacred books; nor would he use the language of Jewish and Christian theology in describing either physical or mental phenomena.

But Spinoza, having entered the field with the feeling of reverence for Scripture already firmly established as a part of his mental organization, could not but strive to justify it, since it was impossible for him to dispel it. He surrenders his rationalism, his naturalism and his logic when he declares that revelation is something out of human reach, and that yet he was "bound to take it" as he found it in the Bible. He does not say why he was so "bound," nor could he have given any explanation of the fact; for his feeling that the Bible must contain a divine revelation had developed in him as a part of his being, and he took it as a matter of course and of necessity, neither capable of being explained, nor needing to be.

It is true that he handles the prophets with scant respect as to their learning and intelligence; true that he rejects many puerile details, ascribing them to the ignorance of those same prophets, who, *having really and actually received the revelations of God*, transmitted them in terms of their own personal beliefs, or interpreted them in accordance with prevailing conceptions. But this does not prevent him from accepting them as *prophets*, and their utterances, *when properly interpreted*, as "the word of God," especially spoken to them as representatives of the chosen people of Israel. "I firmly believe," he says, "although I do not know it with mathematical certainty, that the prophets held intimate counsel with God and were his faithful ambassadors." And elsewhere: "I do not wish to deny that the laws of the Pentateuch were prescribed by God to the

Hebrews, nor that God spoke to that people, nor that they witnessed a great many wonders unknown to other nations."

This last statement would lead one to conclude that Spinoza actually believed in Scriptural miracles, a conclusion further warranted by his declaration that he believes in the actual apparition, of Jesus to the disciples after his death. Although he says this was a "spiritual" apparition, he does not mean that the disciples imagined it, or saw it with their souls, for he categorically says that anybody else who had been there would no doubt have seen it as vividly as they did. And yet, in other places he rejects miracles as such, but, eager to save as much of the text as possible, accepts for the most part the results as historical facts either embellished or wrongly interpreted by the prophet or writer. Thus, when it is said that a blind mind was miraculously cured, we may believe that he was really cured, although by natural means; when the text says that a dead man was resurrected, the actual fact was that a sick man who seemed dead was cured, also by natural means; when it says that God hardened Pharoah's heart, we are to understand merely that Pharoah was hard-hearted. Even the stopping of the sun by Joshua can, according to Spinoza, be interpreted as a somewhat distorted account of a historical fact. On that day, Scripture itself says, there was "an extraordinary quantity of snow in the air," which, by refraction, may have caused the sun to remain visible longer than usual, thus creating the impression that it had been stopped! So, too, the parting of the waters of the Red Sea was probably a natural phenomenon due to a strong wind blowing from the east! To one not familiar with the law of conflict between feeling and judgment, it would seem inconceivable that the same man was the author of the *Ethics* and of these childish puerilities. Nor is it surprising that, armed with his exegetical machinery, Spinoza declares that he "has discovered nothing in the miracles narrated in Scripture that does not agree with reason," since by miracles he does not understand miracles, but embellished, allegorized or perhaps mistaken accounts of actual facts. In other instances, as in the case of the apparition of Jesus and the wonders witnessed by the Hebrews, he interprets the records literally, while still in another, pressed by his opponents and confronted by his own fundamental principles, he boldly brands the belief in miracles as ignorant superstition. All this makes more chaotic the chaos of his inconsistency, his exegesis constantly contradicting not only his philosophy but itself.

In the *Ethics*, he deprives God of all personality, of all plans, of all intention. But now he speaks of God as any ordinary believer would, admitting in him all those human-like attributes that make him really a person. Thus, in explaining some of the "wonders" already referred to, he, far from denying them, says that they were "but means that God employed to place himself within the reach of men's intelligence and make his wishes known to them." And elsewhere he concurs in the Scriptural teaching that "God's providence is universal, that he wishes the righteous to be rewarded and the unrighteous to be punished, and that our salvation depends on his grace only." Remember that the God of the *Ethics* has no wishes, no feelings, and that in him the distinction between sin and virtue, the righteous and the wicked does not exist.

Of the story of creation, Spinoza disposes with ease and conviction; for, divested of its poetical garb, that story means, and is by God intended to mean, only this: "The Supreme Being caused this sensible world to pass from chaos to order, and placed in it the germs of natural things." In his philosophy, however, there are no such things as chaos and disorder. Leaving aside this inconsistency, his interpretation is in keeping with a tendency, first appearing, if I remember well, in St. Augustine, to harmonize Scripture with natural science; a tendency which has constantly gathered strength with the flow of the ages and the scientific development of civilization. "The history of the theological doctrine of creation is for many centuries the history of natural science," says Dr. Phillip Schaff, the eminent ecclesiastical historian. In this strange process, the facts and accepted theories of science have first been boldly denied, afterwards read into Scripture, and finally substituted for Scripture.

To the method of unconscious, or at least well-intentioned, perversion of the text, Spinoza adds the method of partial elimination, and finally develops a hermeneutical formula which at once shows his reverential feeling for the Bible, his supreme efforts to retain at least something on which that feeling can rationally rest, and his implicit and inconsistent acknowledgement that the Bible must be tested by reason, and where found wanting, discarded. "Everything that is true in the accounts of Scripture," he says, "has happened in accordance with the laws of nature ruling all things; and if anything is found in it obviously contrary to natural laws, one must necessarily believe that it was added to Holy Writ by a sacrilegious hand." One fails to see the value, or feel the authority, of

a book that can occasionally confirm, but never independently teach, the truth.

Had Spinoza, before learning philosophy, remained longer under the influence of the synagogue; had he made theological studies under learned conservative rabbis and developed to manhood under their sway and guidance, he might still have constructed his philosophical system as a product of thought moving temporarily in other than orthodox channels, or, speaking physiologically, by working with another part of the brain than that where orthodoxy had become organized and hardened. The subsequent clash might have been more violent, and yet, for him, equally barren; the fallacies more glaring, and yet equally sincere; the inconsistency more eagerly denied, and yet equally real. And if succeeding generations had continued the conflict, one of the two cerebral areas would now be totally or well-nigh totally invaded by the other, and one of the two opposing forces would now be totally or well nigh totally destroyed by the other. One of the two germs would now be, if not dead, dying, seized with agonizing paroxysms, symptoms not of renewed but of departing vitality.