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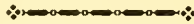
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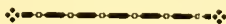


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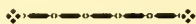
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BENEDICTUS DE SPINOZA .

Cui natura, Deus, rerum cui cognitus ordo,
Hoc Spinoza statu conspiciendus erat.
Expressere viri faciem, sed pingere mentem
Zeuxidis artifices non valere manus.
Illa viget scriptis: illic sublimia tractat:
Huic quicumque cupis noscere, scripta lege .

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SPINOZA AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

BY RICHARD MCKEON

WITHIN the last fifty years scholars have brought to light materials which make it possible to trace the course of Spinoza's life and the evolution of his thought with reasonable accuracy. It is somewhat more difficult however to be sure, from the same data, of the precise antecedents of his thought. The sources of his speculations are implied in a general way, or sometimes are even named, in his works. Moreover, the inventory of the books that formed his library has fortunately been preserved to us, and consequently doctrines may be traced back with some probability to particular authors if the books of those authors are to be found on the list. Nevertheless though it is obvious that we would understand Spinoza's thought better if we could be sure what in the works of the philosophers he read influenced him, there is very little on which to base conclusions and scholars have been able to find evidences of the influence of a most amazing diversity of men in his works.

Born into the tight orthodoxy of the Portugal Jewish colony of Amsterdam, Spinoza seems to have spent most of the effort of a serious youth in absorbing whatever was available of Jewish lore. There is evidence that there was an abundance of pious men to guide him in this study,¹ and critics have been tempted frequently to speculations concerning the possible relations between the youthful Spinoza and Rabbi Saul Morterira and Mannasseh ben Israel and Rabbi Aboab. Whatever those relations may have been, he entered the Jewish school of Amsterdam at the age of seven (1639) and at the age of twenty-three (1655) he still attended the syna-

¹ See for example Kaufmann, *Revue des Etudes Juives*, XXV, 207.

gogue. He acquired in that time at least a familiarity with the Bible and with Biblic criticism, with cabalistic speculations to which he refers in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as "those stupidities of charlatans" and with the Talmud. Biblic criticism would carry him into whatever was known in Amsterdam of Jewish philosophy—to at least a knowledge of Maimonides, of Creskas, of Gersonides, of ibn Ezra. For the second period of his life, after his excommunication from the synagogue (July 27, 1656), we have information, in a sense as definite, but also as inconclusive. Clearly he was widely interested in science; he was influenced by Descartes in scientific and mathematical speculation and in philosophic method; he was impressed by Hobbes in politics and in some points of ethics. Bacon is mentioned in his letters and there was a copy of the *Sermones Fideles* in his library and a quotation from the *Novum Organum* in his letters; analogies in doctrines have led to the conjecture of Bruno as a possible influence.

But despite the rather definite items which can be assembled as possible ingredients to the intellectual formation of Spinoza, there is of course no means of determining the exact history of indebtedness and of growth. He would have had to have been much more self-consciously autobiographical to make possible any precise attributions and incontestably clear lines of influence. We have instead indications in footnotes, letters and the implications concerned in the books he left in his library. For philosophic purposes that should be enough. Even more, the paucity of evidence makes imperative an economy which might be recommended on philosophic grounds: borrowing and influences are important in the history of thought only when they help clarify some doctrine or some stage of development; the obvious effect of Hobbes' doctrine of Natural Rights on Spinoza's philosophy is at least as significant as the fact that a copy of *De Cive* was found among Spinoza's books, and the latter fact is important chiefly as it lends additional substance to the former. It is surely as relevant that Spinoza opposed some fundamental tenets of Descartes' philosophy as that he quoted Descartes and read his works. The indebtedness of philosophers is in doctrines, and ultimately the history of thought is to be traced in more subtle data than the presence of a book in a scholar's library or of a quotation from it in his works.

It would be futile, then, to read the history of philosophy for

prognostications and echoes of Spinoza. Anticipations of his doctrines could be found crowded together in wholly impossible places, since almost any doctrine, read with sufficient detachment, could be a remote preparation for any other. To insist, however, that Spinoza's philosophic attitude was defined by the broad learning he had in Medieval Jewish philosophy is a totally different enterprise. Clearly he opposed some of the doctrines that were held almost universally by Jewish philosophers, such for example, as the creation of the world in time. But it is scarcely a question of principles or of individual doctrines. If it were, it would be sufficient to point out that it would have been impossible for a man to assume the whole body of Medieval principles and be—not original and constructive—but only consistent. There was no less divergence in philosophic opinions in the period that separated Isaac Israeli and Creskas than in a period of four hundred years in any other philosophic milieu. But the characteristics of a philosophy are fixed no less surely by the questions that are asked than by the solutions that are found. The purpose of debate is not only to eliminate one of the contending doctrines but incidentally to clarify both, and even the fact that debate is found possible accomplishes something to that end. In that broader sense Spinoza is unintelligible without some survey of the discussions of his Medieval predecessors.

There is at least one total similarity in the philosophies that grew up in the Middle Ages—Arab, Jewish or Christian—that makes it possible to apply the terms Scholasticism to them all in a sense that is not entirely empty and imaginative. There is a growth in them that has for motivation some obscure need, possibly inherent in all religious traditions to interpret themselves and understand themselves. Whatever the motivation, the contact of each of these monotheistic traditions with the works of the Greeks was to bring forth in its particular Scholasticism a philosophy which orders the world on a broadly congruent plan. There were, of course, crossed influences; Jewish thought derived much from Arabic, and Christian thought from both; but even that borrowing was possible only because the problems and the philosophies were already surprisingly similar. The frameworks are consistently Neoplatonic, and the progress of philosophy is usually marked by the degrees in which Aristotle has been made to fill in the details which are

included within the frame. Arab, Jewish and Christian thought elaborated in varying proportions through the centuries syntheses of Aristotelianism within Neoplatonic schemata. Aristotelian doctrines were doomed frequently to combat Neoplatonism, sometimes to correct it, but, though the history of thought in the Middle Ages is largely the progressive triumph of Aristotelian doctrines, it succeeded at no point within the Middle Ages in eliminating it wholly.

The close union of the two strains in each of the traditions can be explained rather simply. Under the encouragement of the Mohammedan Caliphs, particularly of the Abbasid dynasty which was founded in 750 A. D., Syrian scholars and physicians translated the writings of Greek scientists and philosophers into Syriac and Arabic. It was thus that in medicine Hippocrates and Galen, in mathematics Euclid, Archimedes and Ptolemy and in philosophy Aristotle, Theophrastus and Alexander of Aphrodisias became available to Arab scholars. The matter, the method and the terminology for their philosophizing was found in Aristotle. But among the works that purported to be of Aristotle were two treatises, *The Theology of Aristotle* and the *Liber de Causis*. The first of these is in reality a series of extracts taken from the *Enneades* of Plotinus (Books IV-VI) and the second is borrowed from the *Elementatio Theologica* of Proclus.² It was inevitable that Arab philosophy be cast on Neoplatonic lines, and what is true of the Arabs is true in the same degree of the Jews, since they were pupils of the Arabs and found almost an identical use for Aristotle. In fact even Ibn Daud, Maimonides and Gersonides, possibly the most Aristotelian of the Medieval Jews, preferred to appeal to Alfarabi or Avicenna or Averroes for authority concerning the Aristotelian position, rather than go directly to the works of Aristotle.

The Neoplatonic mark is placed on Christian scholasticism in a somewhat different fashion. There is a strong Neoplatonic influence in Augustine, and from him perhaps Christian philosophy took its particular cast. If later and more direct influence were needed, there were the translations which John Scotus Erigena made in the ninth century of the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. But whatever the origin, there is in subsequent philosophies an ordering of the world in which all things are derived from and are

² See Valentine Rose, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, p. 843, and Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Introduction.

made to depend on God. In such an ordering a religious tendency manifests itself in an impatience to snap the universe, which has scarcely detached itself from the being of God, back into his ineffable essence. Philosophy is evinced in an inclination to loiter somewhat along the way by which the soul adventures back to the source of things. Where the religion is one of salvation, as the Christian religion is, the world will be noticed only so far as it is a reflection of the nature of God and so far, therefore, as it may clarify some detail of the itinerary of the soul back to God. St. Augustine had in mind more than a criterion of truth when he decided to believe in order to understand and to understand in order to believe; his concern was not entirely to find a way in which his capacities might be applied best to the constructed universe but to find the most efficient realization of the end of man—salvation.³ Philosophy interposes itself in the flux and reflux of the world out of God and back to God, and from that interposition problems of a purely philosophic nature emerge; the relation of an eternal creation to a temporal existence, the nature of human knowledge, involving in its superior forms manifestations of ideas by God, in its inferior forms the action of individual things, and the analysis of the ends of man. These are questions which become finally considerations of true and false, good and evil and of the relation of reason and faith.

In general the form of the philosophy of Spinoza shows signs of having grown from such a pattern. There is at least a relationship close enough to lead, say, to the visiting of the accusation of pantheism on the head of John Scotus Erigena for the very reasons given when it is applied to Spinoza.⁴ Thus Henry Bett (*Johannes Scotus Erigena*, p. 194) would have him influenced either by Bruno (who may not have read Erigena but professed himself a disciple of Nicholas of Cusa who had) or by the Kabbalists who wrote the *Zohar* (which presents coincidents with Erigena's doctrines.) And startling improbabilities in the history of thought may be eliminated by considering this triply intermingling line of

³ See *de Lib. Arb.* 1. II, c. ii. and *Epistola CXX*, c. i. The introduction of St. Augustine is not irrelevant to the formation of Spinoza's thought, since there was a copy of an *Epitome Augustini Operum Omnium* in his library.

⁴ There have been critics sufficiently impressed by the similarities of the philosophies of Christian writers and Spinoza to establish rather fantastic possibilities of connection between them.

Scholasticism, accumulating bits of classical philosophies and moving down the ages to emerge in different centuries with a constantly fuller Aristotelianism bulging from a Neoplatonic frame. Such a view may be effective in quieting some of the critical apprehensions concerning Spinoza's Neoplatonism; it definitely minimizes the curious and rather recent insistence on Bruno's possibly dominating influence. Finally it makes the Spinozistic mysticism, instead of an anomalous addition, the natural outgrowth of the rationalistic *Ethics*: for in high scholasticism, mysticism and rationalism are in the same description of things, save that mysticism prefers to contemplate the return of the soul to God, while rationalism makes the same journey more slowly and discursively that it may also satisfy its curiosity concerning the soul and the grounds of its knowledge. So Spinoza is no more a contradictory development out of Jewish Scholasticism than Duns Scotus out of Christian, and both crown their high intellectual vision with a mystic contemplation.

It is needless to determine more than this concerning Spinoza's antecedents. We know from the inventory of his library that he had copies of Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*, Manasseh ben Israel's *Esperanca de Israel* and Leon Abarbanel's (Leo Hebraeus) *Dialogos de amor*. There is little direct reference in Spinoza to his Hebrew sources, except in matters that concern Biblical criticism. His quotations in that field, however, are so numerous and widely distributed as to indicate a broad knowledge of Hebrew philosophies. He cites Maimonides, ibn Ezra, Gersonides, Hasdai Creskas, Juda Alfa 'Har and Abraham ben David. When he refers to them in philosophic connections it is always done familiarly. But even a cursory glance down the succession of Medieval philosophies would be enough to mark certain family resemblances. In all of them God is the source of things, and though there are many differences concerning the way in which the world emerges, by emanation or by some manner of creation, the qualities that exist in things fall, as a result of God's action or his mere being, into fixed relations to each other, and the world is made in some way to represent or reflect attributes merged in God. God is simultaneously the source of all being and all intelligibility, so a nice parallelism of logic and ontology must run through nature. God defines the being of things and from him flows the power that moti-

vates the whole sequence of movement in physical objects; he is the idea that gives meaning to all things that follow from him. They are and are known at the same time and by means of the same derivation from him. God is therefore reflected on all sides and by all things; that things are and that they should be understood, are equally manifestations of him.

It is back this course out of God that the soul is to travel to a salvation of some sort, depending on the tradition, and on the century and phase of the tradition. The Christians developed a neat Trinitarian arrangement, and there were special signs of God in the triple manifestations of him in nature: in the being of things and the logic of things and in the moral way to God. For St. Augustine, God was the source of being as creator, of truth as intellectual light, and finally of moral goodness by his grace; he was the cause of the constituted universe and the light for perceiving truth and the fountain for imbibing felicity. From that, in fact, came the triple division of philosophy into the sciences of Being, of Truth and of Good; into Physics, Logic and Morals. The Medieval Jewish tradition evolved no such stylized form, yet it had the same problems to face; what is the relation of God to the world and what is the reality of the attributes we ascribe to him? Sometimes, as in the case of Saadia, precisely the three attributes were chosen for God—life, power and knowledge. But even in other cases the dangers no less than the solutions are sufficiently similar to permit each tradition to learn something from the other in late scholasticism. The pathway to the contemplation of God is marked and the universe is laid on a definitely similar plan. It is significant that Spinoza's thoughts on God bear kinship at some point to the doctrines of all the great Medieval theologians. But the fact that, say, Israeli might be quoted to elucidate Spinoza's doctrine of God does not force the rest of their doctrine to similar conclusions; the psychologies expounded by the two philosophers are notably different. So too, in the field of God's influence on man, Spinoza may follow Creskas in his doctrine of man's freedom; how far precisely, would be difficult to determine, but the further doctrine that love, not intellect, is the essence of the soul, need not be a necessary consequence, even despite the fact that in the mystic regions where the soul approaches God, being, love and intellect are no more distinguishable in the soul than they are in God.

The innovations then which are to be found in Spinoza's philosophy do not fall out of the line of innovations that had been made through all the Middle Ages. They follow out of the succession of readjustments of dogma and reason, of religion and philosophy. Philosophy had long been concerned with the unity of things, and it was neither out of deference nor by accident that it chose to turn to God and the unity in God. But there were conditions to be fulfilled before reason could be admitted to religion. On the one hand intellectual explanations were to be employed on the traditional documents, and even intellectual ideals and virtues were to be introduced into the tradition. This meant on the other hand the fitting of characteristically religious doctrines to the universe: rewards and punishments, even if they were inscrutable, were henceforth to be meted out in accordance with the system of things; intellectual conditions as well as moral ones had to be fulfilled before the soul could return to its source; it was to be freed from the body by intellectual excellence and right conduct. Judah Halevi and Creskas are the only outstanding exceptions to the common opinion that religion and philosophy are identical in content and different only in method. Israeli defined philosophy as self-knowledge and keeping from evil. When a man knows himself, he knows everything; and the transvaluation has only to be made—the aim of life is to become like God. Religion could make the intellect the sign of God; philosophy in its turn could lend a logical intelligibility to God's workings.

The place of God in the universe was too obvious to permit his existence to be questioned in any intelligible sense. Even when his existence was proved, the logical proofs were usually only more definite illustrations of a definite fact. The significant problem is the relation of God to the universe. Maimonides, in fact, considers God's attributes first, then his existence, so that existence becomes only an attribute of God and the least uncertain of them. All God's attributes, considering God in himself, existence, unity, life, omnipotence, omniscience and others, must merge to the extent that all multiplicity is excluded from them. The very essence of God includes his existence. The only question related to the attributes of God on which opposition was to develop during the Middle Ages was the question of how we come to know them and what significance they can have without endangering God's unity:

clearly the attributes we assign to him do not indicate positive qualities distinct in him but are negations or signs of honor or have some undistinguished grounds in him, and though the debate was hot and constant, it was hardly questioned that God is, or that a plurality of attributes means, not that God is many, but that he acts or he is represented in many ways and that he is characterized by them.

Pure speculation furnishes warrant enough for the existence of God, and from such inferentially-ballasted belief in God, additional proofs, strewn through all nature, follow necessarily. The arguments shift easily from the realm of logic to evidences in fact. The differences of the arguments may be reduced ultimately to the question of whether they are derived primarily from Aristotle or are influenced more by the late Neoplatonic contemplation of Unity. If the philosophy is markedly Platonic the proper examination of the idea of God will adduce warrant for his existence; if it is Aristotelian, corroboration must be sought on the surfaces of life, for each thing and each event will be possible and conceivable only by a necessary nature. Most Platonic philosophies will furnish a basis for cogent *a priori* proofs and it was these that Spinoza was to follow. Both Creskas and ibn Daud considered that God's existence was proved conclusively by the distinction between necessary and possible existence. But on the other hand, ibn Daud was good enough Aristotelian to insist on the proof by the necessity of a prime mover; ibn Zaddik began with the consideration of the contingency of the world; Saadia, Bahya and ibn Pakuda began their proofs from the fact that the world is composite. So there are logical manifestations of God in his world and physical evidences. Out of the unity which is God the manifold world proceeds according to the conditions of existence that just his being imposes on it. God is the principle of order and of law in the world of particular things. Joseph ibn Zaddik thought God must be single because the cause of many things must be one, and consistent with that he insisted that the study of theology be preceded by a knowledge of the sciences. Maimonides too, held that a knowledge of physics and metaphysics was indispensable to a knowledge of God. And it should be remembered that Spinoza once said that everyone knows that ethics must be based on physics and metaphysics.

Yet the problem on which there was perhaps most variation

in Medieval Jewry was concerned with the way in which the world was related to God. The multitude of particular things could not be affected directly by this unity that is God; his efficacy had always to find some intermediary principles and usually the universe was formed in some graduated hierarchy. Ibn Daud insisted that the world to exist at all, had to exist in just the graduated series in which it actually does. But there is no general agreement among Jewish philosophers concerning the number or the nature of the interpositions which are necessary between unity and diversity; where the transition is made by Neoplatonic emanations, as in the case of Maimonides, there are frequently ten stages. Yet there are elements that are fairly constant among the variations of the schema—the inclusive unity which is God, his defining intelligence (with sometimes the addition of a soul) Nature and the corporeal world. Sometimes the mediations between God and the world are accomplished by way of the attributes of God, and eternal matter and their modifications. Creskas, in that fashion, held that there was an infinite extension connected with and opposed to the infinite intelligence of God. Extension was not itself bodily nor made up of parts, and there existed beside it an eternal matter which was qualified by it; the act of creation was only the ordering of this matter. It requires no great violence to the subject matter to fit Spinoza into the discussion of this problem.

In some form or other, then, God is usually manifested in Nature, and the manifestation is such that the universe by existing is essentially rational. To exist, a thing must be intelligible. But not only is everything by its very essence capable of being known, but knowledge by that same fact is part of the world; each thing is so related to God that it aspires, as it were, to be known; Nature, in man, grows into its own comprehension. Anything known is referred to God; there are regularities in the processes by which things are altered in the Sublunar world. Each time a law of nature or a concept of logic is discovered in experience, another indication of God has been noticed. He is the ultimate principle regulating all laws by only thinking all things. By that very fact, of course, it is clear that his attributes are difficult to name since a universal principle would have no particular determinations that could be described. But the logic of the Jewish Medieval philosophers was one they found in the world; it was no longer an Aristotelian instrument applicable to the world; it was in things and

things were arranged in precise concatenations. The metaphysics of Aristotle had, by the exigencies of doctrinal monotheism and through the offices of Neoplatonism, become a cosmology and the *Organon* had come to lay the ground plans for a metaphysics. It was not that things were thought to exist in designated genus and species—these were abstract ideas and repudiated as such by most Jewish philosophers—but there were accurate interrelations by which one thing was connected with another and implied by it. Ultimately they were embraced in the complete unity which was in turn implied by these interconnections. In this fashion Aristotle had been fitted to the Neoplatonic universe. The process was completed somewhat earlier in Jewish philosophy than in Christian, for Aristotle was known earlier in the Jewish than in the Christian tradition; it was never carried to a perfect conclusion, since even in late scholasticism, Aristotle was known only imperfectly, by texts that were sometimes fragmentary and misconceived, often of an authenticity that was mythical and always with a bias set rather by Avicenna and Averroes than by Aristotle.

An object, when God knows it, participates in the logical ordering of the universe, for it means precisely that for God to know. To insist that God knows all things is to maintain the complete intelligibility of the universe. All things exist with logical references to other things and to general principles. If God is, as he frequently is in Medieval Jewish philosophy, the source by way of the Intelligence, of the Active Intellect, it is he who gives content, on the one hand, to the rational powers of man, and on the other endows sublunar nature with purpose and intelligence. It is natural that men, placed in that ordered world, be endowed with abilities to appreciate both the world and its order: so he may consider individual things living each its life and undergoing its particular evolution or he may contemplate the rational principles under which all the processes of growth and decay are arranged. He may reflect on things similar to himself and on creatures possessed of bodies like his own developing his practical reason by such reflections, or he may face upward to the realm of pure rationality and receive wisdom from the angels or the Active intellect, developing in that way his intellectual knowledge.

The beginning of man's existence is the beginning too of his knowledge, for he begins to think at the same moment and for

the same reason as he begins to exist. His first knowledge is a sensitive knowledge of the bodies about him through the intermediary of his own body; he can not be insensitive to things that affect him and he can be affected by anything like himself. Whatever thing is similar to his body is potentially an object of his knowledge; as the human body is the most perfect one conceivable, it bears some similarity to all physical objects and nothing material is beyond the scope of man's knowledge. As ibn Daud put it, the soul is an indivisible form, the first entelechy of the natural body, arising in connection with the body and realizing and actualizing it. The soul of man is exactly suited to the mixture of elements which makes up his body. The early Jewish philosophers held specifically that the human soul can arrive at a great development and a broad knowledge because the human body resembles all manners of plants and animals; in many statements the human body is a microcosm.

Man knows particular things through the encounters of his body with other bodies and through the sensations which are the result of those encounters. This is the beginning of his practical knowledge; in this manner things are known, their courses and sequences may be traced and means of controlling them discovered. In addition to this practical knowledge, there are intellectual powers which the soul possesses through the perfection its body has conferred on it; it is elevated to such perfection that it is the form nearest the eternal forms and it can reach therefore to the system of significations which orders, like laws, the existence of things. The intellect is indebted to sensations and to bodily functions only for the initial ideas it acquires. Sensation and reason are as far apart as body and mind; their functions are as separate as the particular and the universal; sensation perceives the form of the individual thing, while the intellect, inspired by the data of sensations, apprehends the nature which makes things essentially what they are. Here again there is opportunity for disagreement between the Platonist and the Aristotelian, the former holding that all knowledge is derived directly in some fashion from universal ideas innate in the soul, the latter that the intellect works over the data of sensation and abstracts its general ideas. But whatever the solution to that problem, there arise the different ways of knowing: practical knowledge from the fact that we meet and react

to other individuals, intellectual knowledge from the fact that individuals are nevertheless intelligible and have meanings which come from their place in the logical system. The intellect grasps truths immediately, while the practical intelligence forms precepts from experience. So the decision of the intellect concerns truth and falsity; the practical intellect pronounces a thing good and bad, and it can be good or bad, obviously, only as it affects some sensitive being; in the unity of the eternal being such an affection would have no place.

The acquired intellect depends then on the sensitive soul for its existence only; its manner of receiving knowledge is separate from it. It stands to the sensitive soul in much the relation that, till recently, the soul had stood to the body in modern philosophy. But in the Middle Ages the distinctness of the functions was more sharp. The intellect is not receptive in the manner that the senses are; it is not a function of the body. The act of reason is purely immaterial, a proceeding from premise to conclusion or wholly intuitive. Thinking is not done by means of corporeal organs, but just as there is a real and actual object to arouse the senses to perception, so there is an actual intelligible object to arouse the intellect to comprehension. Individual things could no more endow man's rational capacity with actual ideas than a surface could endow his sight with the sensation of color if there were no light. God or the Active Intellect is to the mind what light is to the senses, or to be more Aristotelian, the Active Intellect is the faculty by which sense experience is converted to concepts. So knowledge is possible; the senses are concerned with particular things and their accidents; there can be no knowledge of such things, but reason and intellect perceive essences and are concerned with the universal and the permanent.

The mind passes into actuality through the knowledge acquired from the Active Intellect; the birth of the soul is intellectual. Abraham ibn Daud resorts to the frequent metaphor comparing the soul to sight; without light vision is potential; light makes it actual. So the Active Intellect makes the potential soul actual and gives it first the axioms which are universally certain and hence could not have originated from experience. The transition from imaginative or practical knowledge to the intellectual knowledge is the origin of the soul. Now the mind can recognize the systematic

unity which connects all things into one whole, for it comes upon, not only ideas, but an understanding of their relations one to the other. The principles of the universe are known through the same immaterial power by which they were set. God shows his efficacy at once in the logical principles by which things are understood and in the logical, or even teleological, ordering of events in their actual processes. Particular souls exist only by virtue of a universal soul; particular minds can operate because a universal mind has set down the implications they discover of the Intelligence whence all being absolutely and all intelligibility flow. The mind can know only by virtue of something analogous to it in the things it knows.

In the beginning, then, the soul is only a capacity, a potential intellect, which is so intimately connected with the body that it shares the body's mortality. Sensations, which are bodily activities, are the first intimations of knowledge, and by knowledge the soul comes into being, so that the beginning of knowledge is the first intimation of immortality. The rational soul can attain to the Active Intellect, and having thus become an actual intellect, no longer potential, it is dependent for its ideas, thenceforth, not on its body, but on the Intellect that is the ordering principle of the universe. The rational soul is identical with the ideas it has: there is only one idea in the part and in the whole, in man's intellect and the whole, in man's intellect and the infinite intellect; that idea is equally and at the same time comprehended by man and present perfectly in the Active Intellect. The more perfect the soul becomes, the more closely it cleaves to the Active Intellect and fastens there on the logic of the universe and on all intelligibility, for the Active Intellect bears in itself the form of all existing things. Clearly this process of knowing must be immaterial; there can be no entrance of the body into logical sequences.

The aim of ethical endeavor becomes obvious; to return the soul to the upper world to which it belongs. All things in the world tend naturally to God, and intellect in man is the instrument which permits him to return most completely. So far as the soul succeeds in identifying itself with immaterial Ideas it is indestructible. The aim is obscured by the entrance of the soul into the body. But the body is a necessary incident in the biography of human knowledge; from the knowledge of individuals which the

soul has by its body, it is recalled to the higher knowledge of eternal truths and ceases to be dependent on the body though its thinking began with it. Whether or not there would be any adequate intuition of the absolute truth is a question on which neither Arab nor Jewish scholastics could agree; some philosophers, among them Maimonides, insisted that God could not be known, others, like Avicenna, Algazali and ibn Tofail, that such knowledge was possible.

Whatever the solution to that problem, there was greater unanimity in the answers to the more significant problem of the relations of God's knowledge to man's. In God, thought, thinker and object of thought are one. God knows all things before they come into existence and his knowledge does not change as things appear and disappear. But man in even his most perfect knowledge must remain an individual and so, there must be always a separation of himself as subject from the object of his knowledge. Maimonides held that only the *absolutely* non-existent can not be known; things which only happen not to exist can be known since they have their being in God's knowledge and he brings them into reality. God is the cause of the phenomena which are the data of experience, and those phenomena follow according to the laws and principles of his knowledge. In man, on the contrary, knowledge follows from experience. God knows all things knowing simply himself, and all things conform to and illustrate the efficacy of that self-knowledge. The problem moreover of the relation of man's knowledge to the world has its answer in this action of God's knowledge.

But since God is omniscient man can hardly be free, if freedom is to mean complete indetermination. God knows all things, but there was some hesitation concerning whether he could know the changing individual as well as the changeless principles that govern it. Evil in the world would seem in the presence of God's knowledge a criticism of his goodness, and if man is not free to choose how he will act, the punishment of his transgressions would seem to be little consistent with God's equity. Since it seemed possible to save God's goodness only at the cost of his wisdom, arch-rationalists did not hesitate to leave the opposition unsolved. Maimonides said that God was omniscient and man free and that neither statement should be denied only because it or the relation between it and the other was not understood. Spinoza took a

somewhat similar position in his defense of Descartes' doctrine of the freedom of the soul. His position in his own works was different from the first; "the slavery of a thing," he says in the *Short Treatise*, "consists in its being subject to external causes, while freedom on the other hand consists in its not being subject to them but freed from them." According to Joel, the study of the philosophy of Creskas had brought him to a realization that God's omnipotence is incompatible with man's freedom. Creskas had solved the problem by curtailing the sense of human freedom. The act of will, he said, is in a sense free and in a sense contingent; but it is determined by its causes. The act of will, no more than any other act, is not fated to take place cause or no cause; if the cause is granted the act of will is necessary, but if the cause is removed it can not occur. Spinoza's conception was probably inspired by Creskas' statement, but still his emphasis, as in other problems, was distinct from that made by the Middle Ages. Moreover it is one which he never changed. Even in the *Short Treatise* he defines freedom as the power of the soul by which it is able to develop ideas in itself and produce results outside itself which correspond with its nature and the production of which is not altered by external interference.

Doctrines such as these and the discussions of them must have attracted Spinoza in his study of Medieval Jewish philosophy. It would be purposeless to try to determine from which of them specifically his own thought developed. It is safe to assume that he knew them. Certainly he took up problems that are noticeably similar. His solutions are not always precisely these, but then, almost every doctrine that has been outlined in the preceding paragraphs in the name of Jewish philosophy could be contradicted by some specific text from some philosopher. A comprehensive statement of Medieval Jewish philosophy could no more be made than a comprehensive statement of modern philosophy, and for precisely the same reason that contradictions could be found at every point. Even so general an outline is no more than broadly congruent with Spinoza's conceptions. Spinoza's position was unorthodox in many questions, some of them important ones—the creation of the world in time, prophecy, miracles, God's knowledge, his providence and his attributes, the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, rewards and punishments. But his departures too could be fitted into some orthodoxy if care and erudition were to

be employed so poorly. Many of Spinoza's novelties were anticipated with the Hebrew tradition. Ibn Ezra, ibn Gabirol and Gersonides denied creation *ex nihilo*; the latter two maintained the eternity of matter. Creskas held that God had an attribute of extension, and denied the validity of final causes; like ibn Ezra he taught a complete determinism. Some of the Jewish mystics held that Nature is animated. Maimonides denied personal immortality, insisting instead on the immortality of the single Active Intellect: he also taught the relativity of good and evil. Then too, other influences than Medieval Jewish philosophy entered into the formation of Spinoza's thought; and the logical development he sought, required, for the solution of his problems, mechanisms in which considerations of orthodoxy were irrelevant.⁵ But if Spinoza's philosophy is approached without an awareness of this history that lies behind it, it must lose its fine virtues of philosophic pertinence and insight and become, as it does in the hands of most modern critics, a hardly explicable confusion illuminated by only occasional flashes.

⁵ Professor Harry Wolfson has announced a book to be entitled *Spinoza, the Last of the Medievals* which will take up the detail of the Medieval antecedents of Spinoza. Three very illuminating chapters have already appeared in the first three numbers of the *Chronicon Spinozanum*.