

THE
OPEN
COURT

*New Orient Society Monograph
Second Series Number Six*

DECEMBER

1933

Vol. 47

Number 927

SPINOZA: THE MAN AND HIS THOUGHT

Addresses delivered at the Spinoza Tercentenary Celebration
Sponsored by the Philosophy Club of Chicago

Edited by EDWARD L. SCHAUB

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THE OPEN COURT

Founded by Edward C. Hegeler

Editors:

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SECOND MONOGRAPH SERIES OF
THE NEW ORIENT SOCIETY OF AMERICA
NUMBER SIX

CHINA

EDITED BY
BERTHOLD LAUFER

NORTH AFRICA

BY
WILFRID HAMBLY
AND
MARTIN SPRENGLING

Published

Monthly: January, June, September, December
Bi-monthly: February-March, April-May, July-August, October-November

THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY

149 EAST HURON STREET

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Subscription rates: \$3.00 a year, 35c a copy, monograph copies, 50c

Entered as Second-Class matter April 12, 1933, at the Post Office
at Chicago, Illinois, under Act of March 3, 1879.

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The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

VOLUME XLVII

CHICAGO
THE OPEN COURT PUBLISHING COMPANY

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1933

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LANDSCAPE BY KU LIN-SHI

Frontispiece to The Open Court

THE OPEN COURT

Volume XLVII (No. 8) December, 1933

Number 927

NEW ORIENT SOCIETY MONOGRAPH: SECOND SERIES

NUMBER SIX

EAST AND WEST

A FOREWORD BY BERTHOLD LAUFER

AN avalanche of platitude and blah has fallen on the subject of differences between the East and the West. Discussing the spiritualism of the East versus the materialism of the West is a favorite sport of grandiloquent orators. As if there had never been any materialistic philosophies in the East and any spiritual tendencies in the West! We must not take East and West in the sense of abstract ideas, which will inevitably lead to vague idealizations, but must sense them as living realities in their proper setting and perspectives. In the first place, all orientals taken individually are not radically different from ourselves, they are just as human as you and I, subject to the same human emotions and passions; all shades and grades of character are found among them. Armenians, Arabs, Persians, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese are as shrewd, keen, and enterprising industrialists and merchants as any in the western world. India has been a dreamland of mysticism, speculative philosophies, and good fairy tales, but this has not prevented her from cornering the world market in precious stones for two thousand years. China has been a land of thinkers and great poets and artists, but this has not prevented her mercantile class from dominating the world market in silk, porcelain, and tea.

The fundamental divergencies are not between individuals or classes of people, but are deeply sunk in the thoughts of the folk mind fostered by a different background of civilization. There are only two such fundamental differences between the East and the West, which may be tersely formulated as the difference between the ego and the non-ego and the difference between the definite and the indefinite article.

China has an impersonal or non-ego culture, while ours in consonance with our heritage received from classical antiquity is an ego-

centric or ego culture, largely obsessed by the glorification and overvaluation of the individual, which has resulted in a standard codification of the individual's rights, while the East keenly emphasizes the individual's duties toward the family and the state. The Chinese mental complex has always been detached from the ego, without much regard for the individual, focused on the cosmos, the joy and deification of nature, striving for the beyond and reveling in dreams of eternity and immortality. The same observation holds good, more or less, for India and Japan.

A few practical examples will clarify this distinction between the ego and the non-ego aspect of culture. The Chinese, and other Asiatics likewise, have never hit upon the idea of erecting personal statues or monuments to their emperors, statesmen, generals, and war heroes, such as decorate or disgrace the squares and parks of our cities. No portrait of an emperor appears on any Chinese coin—quite in opposition to Greek, Roman, and late European coins. The Chinese erected marble arches or gateways to commemorate moral and abstract ideas, for instance, an extraordinary act of filial piety on the part of a dutiful son, or to honor a virtuous widow who did not remarry after her husband's death. This contrast of the ego with the non-ego philosophy finds its most noteworthy expression in the field of art. With the majority of our artists (there are exceptions, of course) vanity, ambition, self-love, and an inordinate craving for fame and notoriety are the principal incentives to work. Ostentatiously they paint or carve their names in huge letters on their pictures or sculptures and are prone to ascribe their work to their own merit and genius, usually forgetful of what they owe to their milieu, to their predecessors and teachers, and to the inspiration of a long and time-honored tradition. Thoughts drift along different lines in the East. China has produced the most skilful bronze founders, potters, and lapidaries the world has ever seen. We know their works, but are ignorant of their names. These men were too modest and too sensible to mar their productions by affixing to them their signatures. Among more than a thousand carvings assembled in the Jade Room of Field Museum there is not one inscribed with an artist's name. Why is it? The Chinese master just because he was a superlatively great artist was not fool enough to believe, nor did he flatter himself into the belief, that he personally was the creator of his creations, but humbly attributed them to the action of a higher power, to the merits and benign influence of his ancestors, or to the

will and decree of Heaven. The artist was a sort of high priest: practising an art was a sacerdotal and sacred function. He produced, not to make a living or to please his contemporaries, but to honor his ancestors and to attain his own salvation.

As to the difference between the definite and the indefinite article, it amounts to this that East and West have an entirely different attitude toward religion. All Asiatic nations, excepting those that profess Islam, look upon religion as *a* means of salvation, as *a* road possibly leading to salvation—in opposition to the religions of Semitic ancestry, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, each of which claims to possess *the* road, *the* only possible, truthful, infallible, permanent, and unchangeable road to salvation. It is at the surface merely the difference between the definite and the indefinite article, but this difference is profound, vast, and far-reaching, and has shaped the trends of history in the East and the West in almost opposite directions. The exclusive Semitic attitude toward religion naturally made for intolerance and persecution; the inclusive, broad-minded Far-Eastern attitude resulted in liberality, moderation, and tolerance. The Chinese in particular have been the most tolerant people in matters of religion, and have willingly listened to and extended hospitality to all religions that knocked at their door. No Chinaman has ever launched a campaign for religious persecution or would ever go to war for the triumph of a religious dogma, nor does he long to die for the glory of his country. He desires to live for it to the greater glory of his ancestors.

The ancient Semitic idea of blood-sacrifice, and redemption of sin by blood has always been alien to the humanized and refined spirit of India and the Far East. These happier nations were spared the ordeals and terrors of religious struggles and persecutions, as staged in Europe, all emanating from the merciless and violent Semitic idea of a jealous, ever irate, and vindictive deity thirsty for a sacrifice. Hence we face the sorry spectacle of what is called the history of Europe—an eternal rivalry and strife between the Church and the State, the temporal and the ecclesiastic powers, an endless chain of religious wars and persecutions, massacres of heretics and dissenters, burning of witches, the tortures of the inquisition—all for the triumph of theological dogmas. The one word, Canossa, denotes the martyrdom of our medieval society; then the clash of the Cross with the Crescent in the Crusades, the clatter of creeds, Spain combating the Arabs, the only cultured nation during the

middle ages, to which Europe, then owed everything in the line of philosophy, medicine, and sciences. At the same time arts and letters flourished in China and Japan, and the great Chinese masters developed their sublime landscape painting which is now a source of joy and inspiration to the entire civilized world.

China has always had plenty of religion and religions, but religions only; never, however, an organized Church or a hierarchy or priesthood that would have meddled with state affairs or interfered with social customs or the freedom of the individual. One of the wisest institutions of China is that marriage has always been strictly a matter of civil law, the exclusive business of the family without interference on the part of a priesthood. This is the more remarkable when we consider that in all European countries civil marriage is an achievement of recent date and that our ancestors were compelled to struggle for centuries until the separation of the State from the Church was brought about and the Church was assigned to its proper place.

Among us, an individual is definitely labeled like a wine-bottle, in his peregrination from the cradle to the coffin. We consist of a birth certificate, a baptismal certificate, a vaccination certificate, possibly a marriage certificate, and infallibly a death certificate; or, as a cynic once expressed it, when we are born, they pour water on us, when we marry, they throw rice on us, and when we are buried, they throw dirt on us. Moreover, we are definitely labeled in matters of religion: we profess a religion officially and publicly, we may be associated with a certain denomination and be registered by a church to which we belong for a lifetime. Nothing like that exists in the East. The question so frequently addressed to a Chinaman as to whether he is a Confucianist, Buddhist, or Taoist is irrelevant; for, as a matter of fact, he is nothing of the kind or may be everything of the kind. No one in the East makes a showing of religion or professes it *urbi et orbi* as we do, and no one is attached to a church, for the simple reason that there is no such institution as a church in our sense of the word. The temples of China, Japan, Tibet, and Mongolia are essentially for the benefit of the monkhood which resides in them. The layman may visit a temple for the purpose of seeking the advice of a priest or consulting the deity by resorting to some means of divination, and he may visit a Buddhist or a Taoist temple on the same day, but there is no community service. Contributions to the maintenance of religious buildings and the clergy are frequent-

ly made, but there is no obligation or coercion, and any service is voluntary. The main concern of a Chinese is to obtain long life in this life and salvation in the other life. To him religion is a vehicle carrying him into a better land of bliss, and he welcomes any religion that holds out any promises of salvation and offers the best guarantees. He has never been willing to believe exclusively in one infallible religion that alone might be capable of bringing this result about. Whatever we may think about this attitude toward religion, we are compelled to admit that it has made for tolerance toward all religions and for a large measure of personal religious liberty. One of the most curious features of this development then is that the East with its non-ego, anti-individualistic tendency has ended with granting greater personal liberty to the individual, while the West with or despite its theory of the pursuance of individual happiness has finally succeeded in fettering the individual and restricting his movements to a minimum.

In studying other nations outside our own culture sphere and especially oriental nations we awaken to know ourselves and to see our own limitations. We have a great deal to learn from India and the nations of the Far East. We have frequently reproached the Chinese for their lack of patriotism and national spirit and have thereby merely displayed poor judgment and sheer ignorance of the historical factors involved. The ancient Greeks were not nationalists, but merely aimed at being civilized. True they were swallowed by the Romans politically, but their superior civilization conquered the Romans and the entire Roman Empire. Like the ancient Greeks, the Chinese people were never united by the principle of nationalism, but solely by the consciousness of a common bond of a great civilization. In a similar manner the Germans of the eighteenth century were not nationalists; Goethe and Schiller, Lessing, Herder, and Kant were cosmopolitans whose home was the world. German nationalism dates from 1871 with the foundation of the German empire. Nationalism will always run to extremes, and that extreme supernationalism such as prevails at present is no blessing we have seen from the days of the World War and see more and more from day to day. The present Chinese government, in accordance with the teachings of Sun Yat-sen, inculcates and fosters the spirit of nationalism, which is alien to their people and never formed part of their traditional background. Unfortunately they are compelled to adopt it from our "civilization," together with militarism, bomb-

ing planes, and other instruments of warfare. In some quarters this may be hailed as "progress." We are confident that this will merely be a transitory stage evolving into a finer and bigger era of true culture in the near future.

The New Orient Society of America, as evidenced by this series of monographs, endeavors to promote public interest in the Orient and to diffuse accurate knowledge of the oriental nations of the present time. Its objects are both scientific and educational, for only by serious study and research can we hope to be a safe guide and to fulfill our mission. We have no ax to grind, we carry on no propaganda, we are not pro this or anti that, but we preach a gospel of good-will and understanding, of honest cooperation and friendly reconciliation. We are not interested in politics nor in the promotion of trade; we do not tell you that if you will study the Orient and the customs and manners of its peoples you will be able to extend your business connections. But we promise you something more than mere material gain, we promise you that if you will study the Orient you will enrich your intellectual and spiritual life, that you will gain a new soul and that you will make the greatest discovery of your life—discovering yourself by discovering others.