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SPINOZA AND MATERIALISM¹

THIS article is an amplification of a preface written for the new edition of G. V. Plekhanov's *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*. Its theme is the problem of the relation of Spinozism to materialism or, more precisely, an elucidation and interpretation of the theological elements — what Plekhanov called the 'theological trappings' — in Spinoza's system. This limitation is made in the realization that a study of the materialistic elements in Spinoza's philosophy would form a substantial and comprehensive work. A complete analysis of the theological elements alone would require much space. I shall therefore limit myself to indicating the path which an investigator of this problem should follow in order to elucidate the subject adequately.

I

In *The Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, G. V. Plekhanov defines materialism—with respect to its historical continuity — as a variety of Spinozism. However, he qualifies this definition of the relation of Spinoza's system to materialism by serious and important reservations. These reservations, if they are thoughtfully and attentively considered, clearly indicate that from Plekhanov's point of view Spinoza's philosophy as a whole is not to be regarded as a consistent and sustained materialism, that is, a materialism free from all contradictions.

Yet at the present time the view of Spinoza's system as a rigorously consistent materialism, sustained from beginning to end, is becoming more and more widespread and influential.² In support of this erroneous view, reference is usually made to Plekhanov's attitude toward Spinozism — but the essential reservations made by Plekhanov are entirely lost sight of. Such obscurity and misunderstanding should be removed as far as possible, for a correct appraisal of the predecessors of dialectical materialism determines to a significant extent the correctness of our understanding of dialectical materialism itself.

Let us begin our investigation by quoting a passage from *The Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, in which Feuerbach's attitude toward the philosophy of Spinoza is under discussion. It reads as follows:

'In 1843 in his *Grundsätze [der Philosophie der Zukunft]* Feuerbach remarked with much acuteness that pantheism is a theological materialism, is a negation of theology, but a negation which still professes a theological standpoint. Spinoza's inconsistency is manifested by the way in which he mixes up materialism with theology; but, this inconsistency notwithstanding, Spinoza was able to give "a sound expression, subject to the limitations of his day, of the materialistic conceptions of the modern age." Thus Feuerbach calls Spinoza "the Moses of the modern free-thinkers and materialists" (*Werke*, II, p. 291). In 1847, Feuerbach asks: "What does Spinoza mean when he speaks (logically or metaphysically) of substance and (theologically) of God?" To this question he answers categorically: "Nothing else but nature." According to Feuerbach, the main fault of Spinozism is that "in this philosophy the sensible anti-theological essence of nature assumes the aspect of an abstract, metaphysical being." Spinoza has suppressed the dualism of God and nature, for he regards natural phenomena as the actions of God. But, for the very reason that in his view natural phenomena are the actions of God, God

¹ A translation of 'Spinoza i materializm,' *Krasnaya nov*, No. 7 (1925), pp. 144-68.

² The reference is to the views of A. M. Deborin and his followers.—*Trans.*

becomes for him a kind of being distinct from nature and one on which nature rests. God is for him subject, and nature is predicate. Philosophy, now that it has at length definitely emancipated itself from theological traditions, must rid itself of this grave defect in the Spinozist doctrine, sound though that doctrine is at bottom. "Away with this contradiction!" exclaims Feuerbach. "Not *Deus sive natura*, but *aut Deus aut natura*. That is where the truth lies" (*Werke*, II, p. 350).'

Feuerbach's appraisal of Spinoza's system is expressed here, in general, with a clarity which leaves no room for doubt. From Feuerbach's point of view, certain traces of theology persist in Spinoza's system. Plekhanov's attitude toward this question is also perfectly clear, since Plekhanov quotes Feuerbach, in complete agreement with the noted German materialist's appraisal of Spinoza's system.

Let us examine this appraisal more closely. Feuerbach, and Plekhanov after him, saw in Spinoza's teaching an important and serious contradiction. The root of this contradiction lay in his theologizing of nature. 'The sensible, anti-theological essence of nature assumes for Spinoza the aspect of an abstract, metaphysical being.' Feuerbach overcame this contradiction quite simply, by rejecting all metaphysical essences and making natural phenomena, freed from theological colouring and metaphysical shrouds, the foundation of his philosophy. What precisely was it that Feuerbach found unacceptable in Spinoza's philosophy? Expressed in another way, what was it that represented to him its theological element? Surely not simply the word 'God.' The passages from Feuerbach cited above make it perfectly clear that he was convinced that the term 'God' has a relevant and definite content in Spinoza's system. As Plekhanov points out in his explication of Feuerbach's meaning: 'For the very reason that in Spinoza's view natural phenomena are the actions of God, God becomes for him a kind of being distinct from nature, and one on which nature rests.' Consequently it is clear that, according to Feuerbach and Plekhanov, the 'God' of Spinoza's system is not simply a term borrowed from the theologians, but a term which has its own definite content. And what is this content?

In the remarkable seventh chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza, in setting forth the historical and philological method of investigating the Bible, remarks: 'Moreover it becomes easier to explain a man's writings in proportion as we have more intimate knowledge of his genius and temperament (*genium et ingenium*).'³ And just before this, Spinoza speaks of the necessity, if we would understand a literary work, of studying the 'life, the conduct, and the pursuits of the author (*vitam, mores ac studia auctoris*).'

This methodological rule, which is part of the general method of historical materialism, should be applied to the investigation of the term 'God' in Spinoza's system.

Spinoza's life and spiritual development differs sharply from the life and spiritual development of the thinkers of Christian nations. Thinkers who came from a Christian environment did not experience the soul-shaking inner dramas that were experienced by those who came from orthodox Judaism.

The Christian peoples possessed their own territory, their own states, their own national cultures. As a result, the Christian religion, in spite of itself, was forced to compromise with the scientific tendencies which opposed its very nature. However strong may have been the religious traditions, the religious education, and the religious feeling which grew up on this foundation, in the Christian world these elements were nonetheless tempered and dissolved in the general stream of historical culture: in science, art, politics, etc. As a result, in Christian thinkers religious tradition existed more or less peacefully side by side with the opposing scientific tendencies and cultural problems of a given period. This individual psychological compromise was at the same time a reflection of a larger compromise, prompted by the demands of those progressive classes which dominated economic life — a preservation of religious beliefs, on the one hand, and a furthering of the movement of scientific thought, on the other. Of course, the great

³ Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. Bruder, III, p. 108.

philosophers of the Christian faith, the founders and moving forces of scientific critical thought, were often subjected to cruel persecutions. The 'Holy' Inquisition, for example, with its touching solicitude for the salvation of Christian souls, actively and energetically stifled creative thought. But external persecution, however harsh, does not evoke in strong natures tragic inner conflicts, that is, conflicts in the realm of world-view.

It was far different with the innovators who came from a Jewish environment. The Jewish people had for thousands of years been deprived of their own territory, their own state, and, consequently, of their own national culture, in the broad meaning of that term. Being strangers, 'foreign' competitors in the socio-economic arena of the various nations, they were systematically subjected to persecution and isolation, as a result of which they isolated themselves more and more, setting their own way of life and spiritual heritage in opposition to the way of life and the culture of their persecutors. Placed by all nations in the position of a renegade sect, the Jewish people, being highly cultured in things spiritual, zealously preserved and cultivated the remnants of their intellectual and moral heritage. One such historical remnant was religion. The Hebrew religion, which in itself and in its dogmas is one of the most realistic of religions, capable of compromise with the demands of reality — froze and ossified more and more as a result of the isolation of the Jewish people. This religious world-view was in fact the only remaining principle of unification of the national spiritual consciousness — that is, the sole form of national ideology.⁴ And since science, art, politics, and literature represented the cultural riches of the Christian world, the world hostile to Judaism, orthodox Judaism bred in itself a religious hatred of all these cultural values. Cultural values of a secular nature were declared to be forbidden fruit, capable only of distracting men from the faith of their fathers and obstructing the true worship of God. And the worship of God was the only, the chief and highest, end of earthly existence. Earthly goods — wealth, the pleasures of the senses, fame, etc. — are not rejected by the Hebrew religion; asceticism is essentially foreign to it. But all these goods retain meaning and importance and receive religious sanction only when they are used in moderation and viewed as means to the worship of God rather than ends in themselves.

In the bosom of this ideology Spinoza received his first spiritual education. He was intended to be a rabbi, and it is quite clear that great hopes were placed in the gifted youth. This early religious training struck deep roots in the receptive, sensitive, and poetic spirit of our thinker. All of Spinoza's works are imbued with religious feeling, despite his rigorously rationalistic and geometrical method of argumentation. One feels clearly that the cult of Jehovah in which Spinoza was reared remained in firm possession of the sensitive poetic soul of the great philosopher. The central thought of Judaism, that the end of life and the supreme good are to be found in the worship and love of God, never left our atheistic thinker. This thought, in another form and with an essentially different content, became the final chord in his rationalistic system, under the aspect of *amor Dei intellectualis*, the intellectual love of God.

Despite his gentle, profoundly lyrical nature, Spinoza was, as Feuerbach aptly put it, a 'strong character.' He was a rigorous, merciless analyst, and at the same time a philosopher of Olympian calm who did not halt halfway on the path of criticism or the search for truth.

Because of the comparatively favourable social and political conditions in Holland during the period of the Renaissance, Spinoza came into intimate contact with the broad scientific problems which were springing up during that great historical period. The principal distinguishing features of Renaissance thought were a criticism of the religious world-view, and the origin of contemporary natural science. It was natural that mathematical reasoning should be opposed to mystical forms of thought, and in the seventeenth

⁴ Spinoza's remark in this connection is extremely interesting: 'Now the Hebrew nation,' he says, 'has lost all its grace and beauty (as one would expect after the defeats and persecutions it has gone through) and has only retained certain fragments of its language and of a few books.' *Theologico-Political Treatise*, VII, 3. (*Opera*, III, p. 113.)

century mathematics attained a very high level in Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Newton, *et al.* The rigour and precision of mathematical analysis was the model of the search for truth in all fields of knowledge, and the method of mathematics was the exemplary method. The significance of mathematics as the model of methodological thought is especially evident in the systems of Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, and Spinoza.

Spinoza's critical thought moves in two directions. On the one hand, he submits the entire historical religious world-view of his ancestors to thorough criticism. On the other, he attempts by analysis to establish a method for the investigation of truth. The results of the first undertaking are set forth in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. *On the Improvement of the Understanding* is concerned with the problem of method. The principal goal which Spinoza sets himself in this treatise is the definition of the supreme good. But in order to attain to the supreme good it is necessary to cleanse the intellect of every kind of error. *On the Improvement of the Understanding* is concerned with investigating and establishing a criterion of truth, which for Spinoza is the highest good.

In defining the essence of method, Spinoza says: 'That will be a good method which shows us how the mind should be directed, according to the standard of the given true idea (*ad datae verae ideae normam*).'⁵ Method, consequently, begins with the very first assumption in conformity with which the investigation is carried out. Expressed in Hegelian language, the beginning, the point of departure, or (what amounts to the same thing) the initial assumption, must be included in the final result. We as dialectical materialists affirm that consciousness is determined by existence; the correct application of this methodological principle should lead us to the conclusion that in every manifestation of consciousness, however complex, existence is revealed. For Spinoza a clear and distinct, or, what amounts to the same thing, adequate idea is the initial idea with which correct method begins. The object of the clearest and most distinct idea is substance or God; and the mind of man possesses this adequate idea. 'The human mind has an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God,' runs Proposition 47 of Part II of the *Ethics*. This knowledge of God is for Spinoza the fundamental source of truth. 'All ideas, in so far as they are referred to God, are true' (Prop. 32, Part II).

If the method of investigating truth begins with substance, and if the world as a whole represents the necessary modifications of substance, it is quite clear that from Spinoza's point of view a philosophical system may be developed and proved in a rigorously mathematical manner. From this conviction sprang the geometrical method of demonstration and the manner of proving fundamental axioms which we see in the *Ethics* and for which *On the Improvement of the Understanding* was a preparation.⁶

II

As has already been indicated, the other direction of Spinoza's thought found its expression in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. This treatise is both the personal, intimate confession of a great man and a scientific, historical critique of the Bible and of religion in general. This scientific, historical critique of Scripture brought Spinoza to the important conclusion, which he was the first in history to 'express, that religion is an historical category, conditioned to a large extent by socio-historical factors. As an illustration of Spinoza's historical thinking in connection with religious ideologies, I cite the following passage from the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, in which the matter under discussion is the central moral commandment of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Whoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.'

⁵ *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, Elwes' translation, p. 12.

⁶ The mass of evidence which Polovtsova adduces so assiduously and pedantically to show that the *mos geometricus* is merely a form of exposition, will not stand up under the least criticism, in our opinion. The inner substance of Spinoza's whole system testifies to the contrary. The terminological and philological investigations which Polovtsova has undertaken have their importance, but what she attempts to prove remains unproven for the simple and natural reason that it is not possible to prove such a thesis.

'We must consider,' says Spinoza, 'who was the speaker, what was the occasion, and to whom were the words addressed. Now Christ said that he did not ordain laws as a legislator, but inculcated precepts as a teacher: inasmuch as he did not aim at correcting outward actions so much as the frame of mind. Further, these words were spoken to men who were oppressed, who lived in a corrupt commonwealth on the brink of ruin, where justice was utterly neglected. The very doctrine inculcated here by Christ just before the destruction of the city was also taught by Jeremiah before the first destruction of Jerusalem, that is in similar circumstances.'⁷

This moral precept, which comprises the essence of Christian non-resistance, is from Spinoza's point of view an expression and reflection of the decadent condition of the state. It arises in definite historical conditions and is determined by them. On the other hand, when civil life is normal, such a precept, according to Spinoza, is in direct opposition to morality, that is, it becomes immoral. Thus we read further on:

'Now as such teaching [the precept of non-resistance] was only set forth by the prophets in times of oppression, and was even then never laid down as a law; and as, on the other hand, Moses (who did not write in times of oppression, but — mark this — strove to found a well-ordered commonwealth), while condemning envy and hatred of one's neighbour, yet ordained that an eye should be given for an eye, it follows most clearly from these purely Scriptural grounds that this precept of Christ and Jeremiah concerning submission to injuries was only valid in places where justice is neglected, and in a time of oppression, but does not hold good in a well-ordered state. In a well-ordered state where justice is administered everyone is bound, if he would be accounted just, to demand penalties before the judge (see Lev. v. 1) not for the sake of vengeance (Lev. xix. 17, 18), but in order to defend justice and his country's laws, and to prevent the wicked rejoicing in their wickedness.'⁸

We thus see clearly that two systems of morality, both consecrated by religion, are viewed by Spinoza as ideologies growing out of socio-historical soil.

A systematic and consistent critique of religion leads Spinoza, in the first place, to the important and fruitful conclusion that religious views are *historical categories*. Further, in the process of criticizing religion, the fiction of transcendental teleology is gradually but inevitably exposed. The basic propositions and points of departure for a critique of transcendental teleology which are sketched in the *Improvement of the Understanding* and developed further in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* assume in the *Ethics* a complete and finished form. The method of this critique is realistic and historical, though occasionally marked by rationalistic turns of thought. The pages of the *Ethics* which are devoted to the explanation of the origin of transcendental teleology are truly remarkable. We shall quote one of the most characteristic.

'As men find in themselves and outside themselves many means which assist them not a little in their search for what is useful, for instance, eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for yielding food, the sun for giving light, the sea for breeding fish, etc., they come to look on the whole of nature as a means for obtaining such conveniences. Now as they are aware that they found such conveniences and did not make them, they think they have cause for believing that some other being has made them for their use. As they look upon things as means, they cannot believe them to be self-created; but, judging from the means which they are accustomed to prepare for themselves, they are bound to believe in some ruler or rulers of the universe endowed with human freedom, who have arranged and adapted everything for human use. They are bound to estimate the nature of such rulers (having no information on the subject) in accordance with

⁷ *Opera*, III, p. 110.

⁸ *Loc. cit.*

their own nature, and therefore they assert that the gods ordained everything for the use of man, in order to bind man to themselves and obtain from him the highest honours.⁹

From this and from further analysis of the purely material reasons for the rise of teleology, Spinoza draws the indubitable conclusion that the highest supernatural teleology, which results from causes being taken as means and effects as ends established in advance, is the principal content of religion as such. It thus follows that God is the establisher of ends who created the universe from a previously determined plan, and that the universe is operated by Deity in a fashion similar to that in which a mill is operated by a miller (Novalis' figure).

Spinoza's analysis and criticism of religion led him step by step to the systematic rejection and exposure of all teleological mythology. The God of the theologians is only an aggregate of human qualities, each raised to the level of an absolute. All the characteristics which the theologians ascribe to God are natural characteristics and, in particular, *human* characteristics. This anthropomorphic conception of the universe is to be repudiated once and for all. God as creator and Establisher of ends is a contradiction that is thoroughly revolting and discreditable to human reason. There is no God beyond the universe.

Feuerbach, in summing up the conclusions of Spinoza's system, says: 'If we accept the fact that beyond God there are neither objects nor a world, then we must also accept the fact that there is no God beyond the world.'¹⁰ In this correct formulation Feuerbach necessarily emphasizes the point that in Spinoza objects and the world are still in God. This turn of Spinoza's thought is not mentioned in passing; it represents the general view of the German materialist concerning the pantheism of the Jewish thinker. For the sake of clarity I shall quote another passage from Feuerbach which treats the same problem: 'Pantheism is theological atheism, theological materialism, a negation of theology, but a negation which still professes a theological standpoint, for it converts matter, the negation of God, into a predicate or attribute of the divine substance. But whoever makes matter an attribute of God declares it by the same token to be a divine substance.'¹¹ This characterization of Spinoza's pantheism is extremely acute and profound, and, what is more important, completely corresponds to the facts. By defining matter as an attribute of God, Spinoza gave it the character of Deity. This is as clear as day. Nevertheless, we must not stop at this conclusion; rather, we must proceed from it by the same path of analysis to discover the essence of the deification of nature in Spinoza's system. Thus we return to the question raised earlier: What is God, or the substance that is identical with God?

From the preceding discussion we know that Spinoza's investigation of the problem of method resulted in a criterion of truth which was essentially clarity and distinctness of perception. Mathematical thought, which dominated his age, provided Spinoza with a model of clarity and distinctness. On the other hand, his critique of religion led our philosopher to a complete and decisive rejection of supernatural teleology and an Establisher of ends, that is, to the unconditional denial of God as a creator standing outside the universe. These two streams of thought converged in a common centre whose essence was that all things in the universe should be regarded from the point of view of necessary conformity to law, in so far as we aspire to true and adequate knowledge. Once transcendental teleology had been critically examined and rejected, and with it the Establisher of ends, the universe appeared as *causa sui* — self-caused — an absolute, self-sufficient necessity, an independent and single entity, conditioned by nothing and created by no one.

In the world of events, regarded from the viewpoint of their universal and necessary

⁹ *Ethics*, I, Appendix.

¹⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Werke*, 1904, II, p. 263.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 264-5.

connection, there are no ends; everywhere and in all things strict and inexorable causality reigns. There is nothing teleological, for example, in the fact that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, or that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. Yet both of these facts represent unalterable necessity. Every event in the order of the universe, taken in isolation, may either exist or not exist, but if it exists then it is necessarily the result of a preceding series of events and the cause of a subsequent series. And these series of events continue to infinity, since what is a cause in one connection is an effect in another, and vice versa. Consequently, from the point of view of the universe as a whole, each event and each series of events is conditioned by the universal, unalterable, and necessary connection of the world's conformity to law. What men call an 'end' is the idea of a desired value (whether in the material or the intellectual realm) toward the attainment of which an individual, or a group of individuals united by common interests, strives. In social and historical as well as in individual life, ends and teleologies exist, operate, and retain their full significance. Yet on a closer, objectively scientific inspection all ends, whatever their nature or content, are seen to be evoked and conditioned in the most rigorous manner according to the law of mechanical causality; hence it follows that *teleology itself is only a variety of mechanical causality*. Thus it is evident that the law of absolute necessity, that is, the rigorous conformity to law which characterizes all events, is in Spinoza's system the supreme sovereign law which governs the entire universe. *And this absolute, sovereign law is Spinoza's substance, or what amounts to the same thing, Spinoza's God.*¹²

That this is actually the case may be seen from the whole structure of Spinoza's system, as well as from individual passages in the *Ethics*. But, in an article whose limits are necessarily narrow in relation to its subject-matter, it is impossible to go into all the details of the argument. (A detailed examination of this problem, as was pointed out above, would require a comprehensive work.) Therefore I shall confine myself to quoting one passage from the *Ethics* which bears directly on the conclusion we have reached. In the scholium to the well-known seventh proposition of Part II we read:

'Substance thinking and substance extended'¹³ are one and the same substance, comprehended now through one attribute, now through the other. So also, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, though expressed in two ways... For instance, a circle existing in nature, and the idea of a circle existing, which is also in God, are one and the same thing displayed through different attributes. Thus, whether we conceive nature under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find the same order, or one and the same chain of causes — that is, the same things following in either case. I said that God is the cause of an idea — for instance, of the idea of a circle — in so far as he is a thinking thing, and of a circle, in so far as he is an extended thing, simply because the formal being of the idea of a circle can only be perceived through another mode of thought as its proximate cause, and that again through another, and so on to infinity; so that, so long as we consider things as modes of thought, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, or the whole chain of causes, through the attribute of thought only. And, in so far as we consider things as modes of extension, we must explain the order of the whole of nature

¹² Among historians of philosophy the conviction has become widespread that Spinoza's system and its point of departure — the doctrine of substance — is a critical continuation of Descartes's philosophy. Such an explanation of the origin of Spinoza's philosophy does not correspond to the facts. On this question I fully share the opinion of Höffding, who writes: 'He was never a Cartesian, although he learned much from Descartes' (as well as from Hebrew theology, scholastic philosophy, and the works of Giordano Bruno). He read, and used some ideas of, Bacon and Hobbes. (Höffding, *History of Modern Philosophy*, Russian edition, p. 64.) And on the following page, Höffding defines Spinoza's substance as 'the principle of conformity to law of everything that exists.' This definition, which is substantially correct, is reached by Höffding through a series of arguments which is not entirely clear and which somewhat obscures the objective character of conformity to law in Spinoza's system.

¹³ 'Substance' is used here instead of the term 'attribute.'

through the attribute of extension only, and so on, in the case of other attributes. Wherefore *God is really the cause of things* as they are in themselves inasmuch as he consists of infinite attributes.¹⁴

We thus see that the two known attributes which Spinoza took from empirical reality — extension and thought — as well as the unknown attributes which he assumed, display the same connection and the same order. *Conformity to law* is the principle common to the unknown as well as the known attributes.

Imbued to the depths of his being with a deeply-rooted religious feeling, Spinoza transferred this religious feeling to the supreme sovereign law of the universal order. Directing both an open and a veiled polemic against transcendental teleology and theology, our philosopher set up in opposition to the religious, anthropomorphic world-view his own world-view, which was permeated through and through with reverence for the infinite strength and power of the universal order. The God of theology is only an aggregate of contradictory, mutually exclusive human qualities, the more contradictory in that each of them is raised to an absolute degree. Such a God is a self-contradictory and absurd being; even if it actually existed it would not command the least respect of any thoughtful man. However, true religious feeling and genuine reverence are evoked by the universal bond of steel, the unconditional necessity and inexorable order which rules over all things and in all things, permeating the entire universe and all phenomena without exception. There lies strength, majesty, and infinite power. There is the true God of Spinoza.

Spinoza's philosophy was interpreted in this way by his great follower, the poet Goethe. Faust, in the dialogue with Gretchen — where he expounds Goethe's own philosophy — characterizes Spinoza's pantheism in poetic form. To Gretchen's question of whether he believes in God Faust answers:

Mein Liebchen, wer darf sagen,
Ich glaub' an Gott?
Magst Priester oder Weise fragen,
Und ihre Antwort scheint nur Spott
Ueber den Frager zu sein.¹⁵

Here Spinoza's critique of theology and idealistic metaphysics is clearly in evidence. But what is God? He is:

Der Allumfasser,
Der Allhalter,
Fasst und erhalt er nicht
Dich, mich, sich selbst?
Wölbt sich der Himmel nicht dadoben?
Liegt die Erde nicht hierunten fest?
Und steigen freundlich blickend
Ewige Sterne nicht herauf?
Schau' ich nicht Aug' in Auge dir,

¹⁴ *Ethics*, II, 7, scholium. [The italics are Akselrod's.]

¹⁵ Dear, who can say
I do believe? Ask a philosopher,
Question a priest, and you will find that all
Their answers are but throwing words away,
And ring like mockery to the questioner's ear.

(*Trans.* G. M. Cookson.)

Und drängt nicht alles
 Nach Haupt und Herzen dir
 Und webt in ewigem Geheimniss
 Unsichtbar sichtbar neben dir?
 Erfüll' davon dein Herz, so gross es ist,
 Und wenn du ganz in dem Gefühle selig bist,
 Nenn' es dann wie du willst,
 Nenn's Glück! Herz! Liebe! Gott!¹⁶

And Faust concludes:

Ich habe keinen Namen dafür!¹⁷

The supreme principle for which Goethe has no name is here defined as the eternal order of nature, in accordance with which all of its parts and manifestations have their place and co-exist in mutual harmony. The subjective aspect — the mutual love of Faust and Gretchen — is here a manifestation of this same objective universal order. Just as the heavens, the earth, and the stars exist in a rigorously defined relationship, so are the lovers' glances and the emotion that engulfs them permeated with this same order.

Goethe was more cautious than Spinoza: he did not venture to call this universal order 'God.' As a great scientist, an objective investigator, Goethe was captivated by Spinoza's calm, objective method of explaining nature. But as a poet and an artist, he perceived the eternal cosmic order aesthetically, artistically. Spinoza's religiously contemplative feeling assumes in Goethe the form of aesthetically contemplative feeling.

III

Let us return to Spinoza. Does this mean that in Spinoza's mind God still existed, that God was reflected in his system as a whole? — No, not the slightest trace of the God of theology remained in the doctrine of our thinker. That fantastic creature was demolished at its very foundation. *Causa sui* was put in the place of an act of creation. Spinoza was a *deeply convinced atheist*, but, because of the deeply-rooted religious temper of mind which remained from his earlier reverence and worship of God as creator, he *transferred this feeling of religious worship to the universal order. An isolation and separation of the universal order, that is, of the conformity to law*

¹⁶ The All-Enfolder,
 The All-Upholder,
 Does not He fold, uphold
 Himself,—you,—me?
 Is not the dome of heaven there?
 Is not the stable earth beneath?
 Do not the everlasting stars arise
 With lovingkindness in their eyes?
 Do I not look in yours?
 Do you not feel the sacred Whole
 Throb through your soul?
 Does it not weave its mystery,
 Visibly, invisibly
 About you everlastingly?
 Open your heart until
 That vastness fill
 Your breast; then call it what you will,
 Joy, Love, Felicity, God.

(Trans. G. M. Cookson.)

¹⁷ There is no name that I dare give.

(Trans. G. M. Cookson.)

of the universe, from the universe itself was the result of this religious reverence. Spinoza's religious feeling hypostatized conformity to law — which by its very nature cannot be separated from the universe — into an independent entity. It thus created from an anti-religious beginning an abstract entity, dyed with the hues of religion. Consequently, Feuerbach was perfectly right when he said that in Spinoza we have a 'negation of theology, but a negation which still professes a theological standpoint.'

This 'theological standpoint,' which was a legacy from the religious past, this religious feeling which led to the separation of nature's conformity to law from nature itself, had a serious and decisive effect on the fundamental premises of his system. This fateful separation, which overflowed into a hypostatization and conversion of conformity to law into substance or 'God,' *separated matter and thought, turning them into independent and isolated attributes and thus depriving them of their vital internal causal connection.*¹⁸ Therefore, in an ontological sense, and also, inevitably, in an epistemological sense as well, the basic assumptions of Spinoza's doctrine involve a static parallelism from which there is no escape.

Yet, despite the static character of his basic ontological assumptions, Spinoza's complete and decisive break with theology, with God as creator, and with extra-empirical teleology, exercised an incomparably greater influence on the course of thought of his system as a whole. As a result of his consistent critical rejection of extra-empirical teleology and his no less consistent establishing of mechanical conformity to law, Spinoza's system is thoroughly permeated with *genuine materialism*. His theory of knowledge is rigorously materialistic in those points where he proceeds from mechanistic principles. The whole basis of his theory of the origin of morality, toward which the majority of idealistic thinkers take a supercilious attitude — contemptuously calling it the 'physics of morals' — is rigorously materialistic to an even greater extent.

The famous seventh proposition of Part II of the *Ethics*, referred to above — 'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things' — is developed in this very important section of the *Ethics* in a purely materialistic sense. The parallelism which is implied in this proposition gradually evaporates to the degree that the necessary dependence of mind and body, indicated by mechanistic principles, is developed. The body assumes a place of primary importance, that of the mind being secondary; the mind is wholly conditioned by the body.

Proposition 13 of Part II reads as follows: 'The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else.' And further on, in the scholium to this proposition, Spinoza asserts decisively that 'no one will be able to understand adequately or distinctly the union between mind and body, unless he first has adequate knowledge of the nature of our body.' It is quite evident that Spinoza abandons in essence the viewpoint of parallelism, taking his stand unambiguously on materialistic ground. For the unity of mind and body is known clearly only when as a preliminary, or as Spinoza says 'first' [*prius*], the body is 'adequately' known. But why, one might ask, should the body be known 'first'? For, from the point of view of parallelism, the unity of mind and body can be known only on the condition of the *simultaneous givenness* of the processes of mind and body. (Here I leave aside the complex problem of whether, in general, simultaneous knowledge of the connection and order of two attributes is possible, that is, whether parallelism as such is possible. In my opinion, parallelism generally does not stand up under criticism, since by its essence it eliminates time. But this is in passing only.) It is perfectly evident that Spinoza's

¹⁸ Although the attributes — matter and thought — represent two aspects of a single substance, they nevertheless remain mutually independent, since 'body cannot determine mind to think, neither can mind determine body to motion or rest or any state different from these, if such there be.' (*Ethics*, III, Prop. 2.)

requirement of *preliminary* knowledge of the body is here completely materialistic, since knowledge of the indicated unity is dependent on *preliminary, adequate* knowledge of the body. In the first place, the process of knowing does not proceed *simultaneously*; in the second place, *knowledge of the body* is primary. Here is another striking passage with the same materialistic significance:

'In proportion as any given body is more fitted than others for doing many actions or receiving many impressions at once, so also is the mind more fitted than others for forming many simultaneous perceptions; and the more the actions of one body depend on itself alone, and the fewer other bodies concur with it in action, the more fitted is the mind for distinct comprehension.'¹⁹

The same thing is said in Proposition 14 of Part II: 'The human mind is capable of perceiving a great number of things, and is so in proportion as its body is capable of receiving a great number of impressions.' These lines need, I think, no further explanation. Their materialistic content is evident. However, it will do no harm to emphasize once more that the passages adduced are not accidental and that in all parts of the *Ethics* where theory of knowledge, psychology, and the origin of morality are under consideration, i.e. in its principal parts, parallelism evaporates and the materialistic principle emerges in clear predominance. Consequently, Feuerbach was right once more when, after defining Spinoza's philosophy as 'theological materialism,' he exclaimed: 'Away with this contradiction! Not *Deus sive natura*,²⁰ but *aut Deus aut natura*.²¹ That is where the truth lies.'

IV

A century before Feuerbach, La Mettrie, the great and daring founder of eighteenth-century materialism, expressed his attitude toward Spinoza briefly but very clearly. This attitude is marked by great respect and sincere gratitude, but at the same time it is thoroughly critical. In the first place, La Mettrie criticizes Spinoza's view of thought as an attribute of the universe.

'It has been proven,' says La Mettrie, '(1) that thought is only an accidental modification of our sensitive principle and that consequently it is not a thinking aspect of the universe (*partie pensante du monde*); (2) that external things are not represented in the mind, but only certain of their properties, distinct from the things themselves, wholly relative and arbitrary; and that, finally, the greatest part of our sensations or of our ideas depend on our organs to such a degree that they change at once when the latter do.'²²

Thus it is clear that from La Mettrie's point of view thought is a product of the interaction of man and nature and, consequently, is conditioned to a certain extent by the human organism. This means, further, that thought arises at a definite stage of biological development and represents, in Engels' words, the highest product of organized matter. It is clear, therefore, that from La Mettrie's point of view, as from that of materialism generally, thought is not an eternal and immutable attribute of the universe.

Furthermore, although La Mettrie considers Spinoza an *atheist* in the full sense of the word, he nevertheless compares his atheism to the labyrinth of Daedalus, 'so many are its tortuous paths and turns.' Concerning Spinoza's ontology, La Mettrie notes its similarity to the doctrines of the Eleatics and points out the metaphysical immobility of his system. But, after making all of these critical comments, La Mettrie strongly emphasizes that 'according to Spinoza, man is a veritable automaton — a machine subject to the strictest

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 13, scholium.

²⁰ 'God or nature' (the identification of God and Nature).

²¹ 'Either God or nature.'

²² La Mettrie, *Histoire naturelle de l'âme*, The Hague, 1745, p. 253.

necessity, drawn by impetuous fatalism, as a ship is drawn by a current of water.²³ And the famous materialist concludes his characterization by agreeing completely with Spinoza on what is for him the *most important* point: 'The author of the work *Man a Machine*,' says La Mettrie, 'wrote his book as though on purpose to defend this melancholy truth.'²⁴

We see thus that in the first place La Mettrie, while disagreeing with one of Spinoza's basic propositions — that thought is an attribute of the universe — that is, while rejecting parallelism, at the same time finds Spinoza's doctrine of man consistently materialistic, for he identifies Spinoza's point of view on this subject with his own materialistic point of view. In the second place, La Mettrie lays chief emphasis on Spinoza's determinism — a doctrine which found precise expression in the title of his best known work (*Man a Machine*). It is also clear that La Mettrie was right in regarding determinism as one of the principal foundations of materialism.

Spinoza exercised a very important and decisive influence on Holbach's *System of Nature*. This remarkable and noble book, permeated through and through with a deep love of mankind — despite the absurd charges of immorality which have been levelled against it by idealistic historians — is the true manifesto of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. Its content is directed mainly against the ruling clergy and all forms of religious thinking, which Holbach regarded as the ideology of every kind of oppressor. The *System of Nature* has a social character; it carries on an energetic revolutionary struggle against the mythical heaven of religion and its fantastic inhabitants, in the name of the welfare, happiness, and enlightenment of mankind. Unlike Spinoza, Holbach was a rigorously consistent materialist. *Substance is matter and thought is a property of matter*. But leaving aside this difference, we see clearly his kinship to Spinoza *in the whole method of criticism of teleology and in the consistent defence of the law of mechanical causality*. Transcendental teleology, and the idea of God and creation associated with it, are the chief object of Holbach's attack and of the careful and subtle analysis which distinguishes the *System of Nature*. This critical analysis is carried out, as in the case of Spinoza, on the basis of a rigorously consistent and sustained determinism. The chief conclusions of this undertaking are gathered together in a truly remarkable passage, which deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

'From what has been said, it may be concluded that the names by which men have designated the concealed causes acting in nature, and their various effects, are never more than necessity considered under different points of view. We have found that *order* is a necessary sequence of causes and effects of which we see, or think we see, the entire connection and course, and which pleases us when it is conformable to our existence. We have seen in like manner that what we call *confusion* is a sequence of necessary causes and effects which we consider unfavourable to ourselves or irrelevant to our existence. *Intelligence* is the name given to the necessary cause that brings about in a necessary fashion the sequence of events which we designate by the word *order*. *Divinity* is the name given to the necessary and invisible cause which sets in motion a nature wherein everything acts according to immutable and necessary laws. *Destiny* or *fate* is the name given to the necessary connection of the unknown causes and effects which we observe in the world. The word *chance* has been used to designate those effects which we are not able to foresee, or of whose necessary connection to their causes we are ignorant. Finally, *intellectual* and *moral faculties* are the names given to those actions and modifications necessary to an organized being which, it was supposed, is moved by an incomprehensible agent, distinguished from the body and of a nature totally different from it, designated by the word *mind* or *soul [âme]*.'²⁵

In this profound and lucid formulation Holbach sets forth nature's conformity to law and

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²⁴ *Oeuvres philosophiques de la Mettrie*, Berlin-Paris, 1796, Vol. I, pp. 261-2.

²⁵ Holbach, *Système de la Nature*, Paris, 1821, pp. 433-4.

the various aspects and manifestations of it which *prevent man from understanding it*. This lack of understanding itself occurs in conformity to law and depends upon whether given events or laws do or do not correspond to man's inherent striving for self-preservation. From this point of view human errors conform to law as much as anything else. Nevertheless, they can and should be dispelled when man grasps the principle of conformity to law which embraces all events without exception, including man himself and his entire 'inner world.' According to both Holbach and Spinoza, the religious world-view, as well as various metaphysical systems, have cultivated an anthropomorphic view of the universe, which consists chiefly in man's ascribing to himself free will and free intelligence, that is, *failing to consider himself from the point of view of necessary conformity to law*. This false view of man and his allegedly free actions was transferred to the universe as a whole, which was then regarded as the result of the free acts of beings similar to man but more powerful. A clear and distinct understanding of this error will remove the blindfold from man's eyes, and he will understand at last the laws of the world about him, the laws of his own being, and their reciprocal, indissoluble connection.

La Mettrie as a physician and naturalist strove chiefly to pave the way for biology, psychology, and medicine, at the same time understanding very well that these branches of knowledge could be set on the right scientific path only within a general materialistic world-view. But Holbach, being a follower of La Mettrie, broadened his task and attempted to create a general materialistic ideology which would embrace all forms of life. As a result, Spinoza's system was reflected with more variety and completeness in the *System of Nature* than in the works of La Mettrie.

Holbach, who reflected the rationalism and revolutionary tendencies of his age, was convinced that a correct understanding of the world's conformity to law in general, and of the laws of human nature in particular, must lead to a just social order and to human happiness. A hundred years before, Spinoza had reached these same conclusions from his own consistent determinism. For example, in the conclusion of Part II of the *Ethics*, we read:

'This doctrine raises social life, inasmuch as it teaches us to hate no man, neither to despise, to deride, to envy, nor to be angry with any. Further, as it tells us that each should be content with his own, and helpful to his neighbour, not from any womanish pity, favour, or superstition, but solely by the guidance of reason, according as the time and occasion demand, as I will show in Part III. Lastly, this doctrine confers no small advantage on the commonwealth; for it teaches us how citizens should be governed and led, not so as to become slaves, but so that they may freely do whatsoever things are best.'

In this summary of his position Spinoza, like his follower Holbach, directs his polemic against the representatives of theology and idealistic metaphysics who, from Plato on, have never ceased to criticize materialism for its alleged elimination of ethical ideals which, in their opinion, flow from the recognition of free moral will and transcendental moral values. From the point of view of materialism and objective conformity to law, they affirm, it is impossible to establish a distinction between virtue and vice, between crime and heroic action, in short, between good and evil. In a word, morality is impossible without the recognition of free moral will and, by the same token, social life is likewise impossible. Spinoza turns these propositions upside down. Recognizing, as the idealists do, the fact of the existence of ideals, the distinction between good and evil, and the absolute social function of ideals and moral values, he regards these necessary categories as a result of that same conformity to law. Conversely, Spinoza's objective view of man and of human conduct leads to a just and tolerant appraisal of all human actions; and from the whole doctrine it follows that the improvement of society as well as of individual men can be brought about not through impotent moral indignation but through active measures, through action and counteraction based on a knowledge of the causes of anti-moral and anti-social conduct.

These propositions, which follow from the principle of determinism and apply to social life as a whole, passed from Spinoza to the French materialists. The central revolutionary

idea of the French materialists — which found its most radical social expression in Helvetius — the idea which was noted, emphasized, and elaborated by Marx, that man is the product of circumstances and that consequently the modification and improvement of man's moral nature depends on the modification of his circumstances, represents on the one hand the result of the critique of innate ideas carried out by Locke and on the other a further development of Spinoza's consistent determinism.

But to avoid distortion it should be mentioned that in the above-cited passages from the *Ethics*, which contain a correct appraisal of determinism as a truly social and humane principle, we note at the same time a passive, fatalistic tendency, expressed in the very important comment that determinism 'tells us that each should be content with his own.' In other words, an adequate understanding of the causal necessity of events should suppress the tendency to alter one's position. The resulting mental tranquility, attained through an adequate knowledge of necessity, is inner freedom. This view of the relation of freedom to necessity is expressed with even greater definiteness in Proposition 6, Part V, of the *Ethics*, where we read: 'The mind has greater power over the emotions and is less subject thereto, in so far as it understands all things as necessary.' And then the explanation follows:

'The more this knowledge that things are necessary is applied to particular things which we conceive more distinctly and vividly, the greater is the power of the mind over the emotions, as experience also testifies. For we see that the pain arising from the loss of any good is mitigated as soon as the man who has lost it perceives that it could not by any means have been preserved. So also we see that no one pities an infant because it cannot speak, walk, or reason, or lastly, because it passes so many years, as it were, in unconsciousness. Whereas, if most people were born full-grown and only one here and there as an infant, everyone would pity the infants, because infancy would not then be looked on as a state natural and necessary, but as a fault or delinquency in nature; and we may note several other instances of the same sort.'

Spinoza attempts to prove by these extremely acute examples that freedom is conditioned by the complete and absolute recognition of necessity. In general this thesis is not open to question. But in Spinoza it assumes a fatalistic colouring. Concentrating most of his attention on inner freedom, Spinoza came to the conclusion that the recognition of absolute conformity to law should lead to complete mental tranquility, even in cases of the most terrible blows, whether of a personal or social character. From his point of view, a knowledge of the causes of suffering eliminates suffering and leads to happiness. Thus, in the scholium to Proposition 18, Part V, of the *Ethics*, we read:

'It may be objected that, as we understand God as the cause of all things, we by that very fact regard God as the cause of pain. But I make answer that, in so far as we understand the causes of pain, it to that extent ceases to be a passive condition, that is, it ceases to be pain; therefore, in so far as we understand God to be the cause of pain, we to that extent feel pleasure.'

The knowledge of the causes of suffering, according to Spinoza, is an active principle and as an active principle it: (1) eliminates passivity, which is caused by imaginative, i.e. confused and inadequate, knowledge; and (2) as true knowledge, it affords pleasure, since the activity of infinite intellect is manifested in it. Freedom and happiness are thus attained through the adequate comprehension of necessity and conscious subordination to it. Confirmation of this important idea is supposed to be provided by the facts adduced, such as, for example, our complete unconcern for the fact that infants first appear in the world in a helpless condition.

From the premises, chains of reasoning, and examples which Spinoza offers, it follows with full logical necessity that for our freedom, happiness, and mental tranquility we should assume an attitude of stoic indifference toward all the negative events of our life,

since they are strictly conditioned by causality and from this standpoint are in no way different from the helplessness of infants. Thus the question arises: Is not determinism identical with fatalism? Are not the indeterminists right in affirming that the doctrine of determinism undermines will and activity? And if this is not true, if the indeterminists are mistaken, then in what does Spinoza's error lie? — Spinoza's error consists principally in his conceiving human freedom in the sense of the Stoic doctrine of 'inner freedom.' The whole struggle for the attainment of freedom and happiness is carried on exclusively within the subject. Activity, as opposed to the principle of passivity, is declared to be a manifestation of infinite intellect, revealing itself in the adequate knowledge of necessity and finding tranquility in this knowledge. This inner mental activity leads in the final analysis to a passive contemplation of the universe.

The question of the relation of freedom and necessity is quite different in dialectical materialism, according to which the relation of freedom to necessity consists in the knowledge of necessity, i.e. the knowledge of the laws of nature and of history, and the influencing of nature and history on the basis of this knowledge. The recognition and knowledge of these laws, that is, the *realization of necessity*, guarantees the positive results of human action and influence and at the same time strengthens and reinforces the striving and active will. The attainment of the goal — the acquisition and increase of power over the external world, i.e. over the forces of nature and over social relations — is itself freedom. *Spinoza's freedom leads in the final analysis to the dominion of the intellect over the emotions, over what is called man's sensuous world; freedom according to dialectical materialism consists in the achieved results of creative activity, changing and subjugating the environment, since the environment determines the inner life and freedom of the individual.* In the first case, the knowledge of necessity leads the individual to passive inner contemplation; in the second, the knowledge of necessity is the prerequisite for activity directed toward the changing of the external world, which is the determinant of individual freedom.

Concentrating all of his philosophical attention on inner 'stoical freedom,' identified with the knowledge of universal necessity, Spinoza came naturally to the culminating point of his system — the intellectual love of God. True — that is, adequate — knowledge, freedom, and supreme happiness coincide. The ultimate attainment of this ideal leads in the final analysis to the complete dissolution of individuality. Beginning with freedom and the perfection of individuality, Spinoza ends by seeking the dissolution and annihilation of the latter in Deity.

Against this final conclusion of Spinoza's system, Schelling raised an acute and forceful objection:

'No visionary could ever have taken pleasure in the thought of being swallowed up in the abyss of Deity if he had not in every case replaced Deity by his own ego. No mystic could ever have conceived of himself as annihilated if he had not always conceived his own ego as the substratum of this annihilation. The necessity of continuing to conceive *oneself* everywhere, which came to the aid of all the visionaries and mystics, came to Spinoza's aid also. While he contemplated himself as *submerged* in the absolute object, he yet contemplated *himself*, he could not conceive himself as *annihilated* without at the same time conceiving himself as existing.'²⁶

In this penetrating passage Schelling shows with profundity, acute-ness, and classic simplicity that the ideal of mysticism — the absolute overcoming of the concrete personality — is unattainable, and that even if the mystic could attain it he would not find in it the freedom or the happiness which he seeks. For surely complete absorption in the 'abyss of Deity' is slavery.

²⁶ Schelling, 'Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus,' Letter VIII, *Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgart, 1856, I, pp. 319-20.

The final ethical result of the system as a whole is strictly conditioned by its point of departure, i.e. the identification of Deity with universal conformity to law. Religious feeling, reverence, and worship were transferred to this universal conformity to law. From this it followed that instead of knowing the laws of nature in order to subject nature to man, and thus attain all possible freedom, Spinoza would have us know the laws of nature in order to attain a conscious, tranquil, and reconciled subjection to them. The intervention of religious feeling led inevitably to a religious, mystical culmination; Spinoza's determinism in this very important problem of the relation of freedom to necessity assumed the fatalistic character natural to religious thinking.

Yet even here we must make a reservation, namely, that the 'consistent and logical culmination of the *Ethics* in a spirit of passive stoicism and rationalistic mysticism is significant only in relation to the wise man. Only exceptional natures, individuals endowed with inner intellectual strength, are able to rise to the highest level of adequate knowledge and attain to true freedom and happiness. The attainment of this height is as 'difficult' as it is 'rare,' runs the conclusion of the *Ethics*. The ordinary morality of the majority of mankind has its origin in egoism and is entirely conditioned by material, earthly interests. And our philosopher, remaining true to his objective scientific method of investigation, to determinism, inspects and investigates the fundamental human emotions disinterestedly and dispassionately, exactly as though they were geometrical figures. Involvement, in the analysis of human mores, indignation and sentimental moralizing about a given form of human conduct, are subjected to quiet yet biting irony. The subjective method or, what amounts to the same thing, the method of evaluation, is capable only of obscuring the true causes of moral conduct and thus of hiding from us the nature of events which are of great importance to us. Every Marxist knows that this scientific, objective method permeates the whole world-view of Marx and Engels, beginning with their general philosophical assumptions and ending with their socio-political conclusions and principles of tactics in the realm of political activity.

V

We have seen how its religious foundation gave Spinoza's determinism a fatalistic colouring and led in the final analysis to the mystical culmination of his system. But, on the other hand, its rigorously developed determinism made the system materialistic in many of its most important points. Certain important elements of materialism have been indicated above. It will not be superfluous at this point to turn our attention to an important element of Spinoza's materialistic thinking — to his theory of the state.

Spinoza's *Political Treatise* is on the whole a rationalistic work. Like all of his contemporaries who wrote about the state, he was unfamiliar with the idea of the development of societies and governments. He was not aware of the objective material conditions which lie at the basis of the social group. The class structure, the content of class contradictions, and the class struggle remained entirely hidden from his view. For this reason, Spinoza's picture of the state did not embrace all the varieties of existing correlations of power. For him the point of departure is not concrete social man but the abstract metaphysical 'nature of man,' not social classes, but the individual. As a result, his construction is on the whole abstract and rationalistically oversimplified. Yet, despite his general rationalistic approach, Spinoza established the legislative system of his state on a foundation of *material interest*. Thus, for example, whenever it is a question of the creation of some important and responsible governmental institution, our philosopher recommends placing at its base the *economic* interests of its members. In the selection of the supreme council of the state it is necessary, according to Spinoza, to be guided by the following considerations:

'As human nature is so constituted that everyone seeks with the utmost passion his own advantage, and judges those laws to be most equitable which he thinks necessary to

preserve and increase his substance, and defends another's cause so far only as he thinks he is thereby establishing his own, it follows hence that the counsellors chosen must be such that their private affairs and their own interests depend on the general welfare and peace of all.²⁷

And here is another characteristic passage in which Spinoza sets forth his conception of the way in which it is possible to avoid unnecessary wars (Spinoza did not, however, reject war in principle):

'The emoluments of the senators should be of such a kind that their profit is greater from peace than from war. And therefore let there be awarded to them a hundredth or a fiftieth part of the merchandise exported abroad from the dominion or imported into it from abroad. For we cannot doubt that by this means they will, as far as they can, preserve peace and never desire war.'²⁸

The whole *Political Treatise* is permeated with this materialistic thought, and many similar passages could be adduced. But those that have been cited are, I think, sufficient. From these passages it is clearly evident that Spinoza sees the guarantee of just actions in affairs of state not in the moral qualities of the statesman, but in his property interests, for 'everyone ... judges those laws to be most equitable which he thinks necessary to preserve and increase his substance.' If we translate this into Marxist language, it would state that the legal consciousness of the individual is conditioned by his property interests. This same thought is also developed in the second passage, where the important problem of maintaining peace is under discussion: war may be prevented not by the preaching of brotherly love, but by having the representatives of the state materially interested in the preservation of peace. As has been mentioned, Spinoza's materialism takes a rationalistic turn at this point, as a result of his general individualistic rather than class point of view; but in principle the direction of his thought remains materialistic. And for this reason we may say without exaggeration that wherever Spinoza is an *investigator* he stands on firm materialistic ground, that is, he persistently seeks the material basis of events and he finds it, *to the extent permitted by the level of knowledge of his time*. Our philosopher follows this method with complete awareness of its correctness. Because of his general deterministic view, matter — in the socio-historical sense as well as in the cosmic sense — does not represent to him something sinful, but is essentially an attribute which has equal status with thought. Hence his calm, objective, truly scientific attitude toward all the manifestations of reality, regardless of which of the attributes they are modes of. And hence his famous rule: not to bewail, not to deride, but to understand.

It will not be superfluous in this connection to recall the very eloquent lines — forgotten by the idealistic historians for quite understandable reasons — in which our philosopher expresses with great clarity his attitude toward both materialism and idealism. In a letter to Boxel, Spinoza wrote:

'The authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates does not carry much weight with me. I should have been astonished if you had brought forward [to prove the existence of ghosts, which was the subject of Boxel's letter — L. A.] Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius, or any of the atomists or upholders of the atomic theory. It is no wonder that persons who have invented occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms, and a thousand other trifles, should have also devised spectres and ghosts, and given credence to old wives' tales, in order to take away the reputation of Democritus, whom they were so jealous of that they burned all the books which he had published amid so much eulogy. If you are inclined to believe such witnesses, what reason have you for denying the miracles of the

²⁷ *Political Treatise*, VII, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII, 31.

Blessed Virgin and all the Saints? These have been described by so many famous philosophers, theologians, and historians that I could produce at least a hundred such authorities for every one of the former.²⁹

The appraisal here given of the founders of idealism and materialism does not require extensive commentary. The essence of classical idealism, the transcendental ideas of Plato and the transcendental forms of Aristotle, are scornfully likened to old wives' tales. The philosophical doctrines of the creator of idealism are compared to belief in 'the miracles of the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints.' On the other hand, our thinker regards the founders of materialism — Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius — as his authorities. It is from them that Spinoza traces his philosophical lineage.

The unity of the universe is the central doctrine of Spinoza's system. The basic propositions which follow from this universal principle are, in essence: (1) the rejection of the act of creation, of creator, and of transcendental teleology; (2) the recognition of investigation of mechanical causality as the only and universal method. These basic propositions, which permeate Spinoza's whole system, testify to its kinship to the old materialism as well as to the new — to dialectical materialism.

²⁹ Spinoza, Letter LX (LVI) to Hugo Boxel.