



---

A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza by Harold H. Joachim

Review by: J. Ellis McTaggart

*International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Jul., 1902), pp. 517-520

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2376061>

Accessed: 20/12/2014 14:23

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Journal of Ethics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The word "boundaries" suggests, finally, what in some ways is the most valuable part of this book, viz: the treatment of Greek thought in relation to the influences—internal and external—which did so much to shape, sometimes even to originate, it. The geographical, climatic, social condition of ancient Greece and, above all her relations to Egypt and the East are described in fascinating pages. "Greece looks East and South." It is impossible to understand the Greek mind if we confine ourselves to Greece alone, and few writers, if any, have grasped this truth so clearly or expressed it so well.

W. H. FAIRBROTHER.

LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

A STUDY OF THE ETHICS OF SPINOZA. By Harold H. Joachim, Fellow and Tutor of Merton College, Oxford. Oxford, 1901, Pp xlv, 309.

This is a very admirable and very useful book. It differentiates itself from other English treatises on Spinoza, by confining itself to the Ethics, and by offering a very detailed commentary on them. Mr. Joachim knows how to avail himself of the work of previous commentators, while keeping the independence and individuality of his own. This book will not, I think, prove a good introduction to the study of Spinoza, but it will be invaluable to those who have already gone far enough to perceive for themselves the difficulties with which Mr. Joachim deals.

Of these difficulties, the one which meets us almost on the threshold of the system is the question of the objectivity of the Attributes. On this point Mr. Joachim is clear—surely rightly—that the Attributes are not merely subjective forms by which the intellect conceives substance. Nor does he admit that this is inconsistent with the "*quod intellectus percipit*," of the fourth definition. "The conception of Attribute," he says, "is Spinoza's way of expressing that the Real is what is known. Commentators have simply stepped outside this attempt to identify 'what is' and 'what is known,' and have said brutally, '*Either Reality or what is known or knowable.*' There are difficulties enough in Spinoza's conception; but it is no use to begin by postulating dogmatically the ultimate severance of that which he conceives as fundamentally one" (p. 26). This comment seems to me to just express the truth as to Spinoza's general intention. But the definition can

scarcely be saved from verbal inconsistency when we remember, on the one hand, that we know the *Propria* of Substance, which are not Attributes, and, again, that we only know two attributes out of an infinite number.

With regard to the relation of unity and plurality in God, Mr. Joachim finds Spinoza's conception to be inconsistent as to the Attributes, but not as to the Modes. The Attributes "are not only in a sense determinate, but further must retain that determinateness in the unity of God's nature" (p. 105). Now God is conceived as excluding all negation, and therefore all determination from his being. And this is incompatible with the existence of the Attributes, so that the system is, at this point, self-contradictory.

But with the Modes it is different. For "the Modal apprehension of the Reality is (at least in part) illusory." And this permits the determination and negation of the Modes to be transcended in Substance. "Spinoza's substance is one (not as a unity of diverse but related elements, but) as a unity which has overcome and taken into itself the distinctness of its diverse elements, and this absorption is so complete that in it there remain no 'elements,' no distinction, no articulation" (p. 108). And again, "How in detail, this is possible, we cannot explain. But the principle of the union of oneness and variety is that the 'limitations' and distinctions are defects and unresolved differences only for an imperfect apprehension; that in God, of whom the Modes are states or degrees, all such limitations are overcome, since for a true apprehension they are bare negations which are not negations of God" (p. 111).

This, it is evident, gives Spinoza's Substance a nature not materially different from Mr. Bradley's Absolute. Is this correct? Mr. Joachim admits (p. 115) that such a conception of God is not held invariably and consistently by Spinoza, but that he "constantly lapses into language which implies that God's unity is abstract." On the other hand, it is impossible to deny that much of the system is quite inconsistent with any conception of God which is not as concrete as Mr. Bradley's conception of the Absolute. But shall we say that Spinoza sometimes, though not always, adopts the more concrete conception, or only that he held opinions which logically involved the more concrete conception?

The difference between those two alternatives is not very great, and it is with unfeigned diffidence that I venture to disagree with

Mr. Joachim. But I cannot avoid the conclusion that Spinoza never really asserts the more concrete view, while he does assert the more abstract view. Mr. Joachim, I take it, admits that, for Spinoza, it is a fundamental truth that all determination is negation, and that his doctrine of God is very largely determined by this. Now to reconcile this with the more concrete view of God's nature, we should have to take negation as something which was not *merely* negation. It would have to be considered as something which had a more or less—doubtless, mostly less—positive nature. For it has to be transcended and reconciled in God. And, while we can conceive that apparently contradictory realities can be reconciled on the level of a higher reality, there is no meaning in suggesting that the mere blank of absolute negation could ever be reconciled with anything else.

Can we say that Spinoza ever had this conception of the negation of determination being, in some sort, positive? I cannot see that he ever takes it as anything but a mere negation, so that all the characteristics which make such a mode what it is, and separate it from the others are simply unreal and have no part, even as transcended, in God's nature. And so, though with great hesitation, I should say that his treatment of God as the cause of the essences of modes should be attributed to inconsistency in following out his own conception of God, and not to the presence of two inconsistent conceptions.

Mr. Joachim's treatment of the most fascinating problem in Spinoza—the *scientia intuitiva* and the intellectual love of God—also invites careful attention. He finds, if I understand him rightly, no inconsistency between these doctrines and the earlier part of the Ethics. Such a view affords, no doubt, a useful corrective to the crude antithesis according to which the system is a rigid and consistent mechanism till the Twentieth Proposition of the Fifth Book, and then becomes almost completely idealistic. But the new theory is nearly as one-sided as the old one. Even if we adopt Mr. Joachim's view of Spinoza's Absolute, this will not make the *scientia intuitiva* compatible with the rest of the system. For in the *scientia intuitiva* the human mind perceives how itself as individual, and how other things as individuals, follow from the nature of God. As Mr. Joachim points out, it implies a self "which is at once permanent and necessary, and individual" (p. 302). And in the same paragraphs, he says, "the self of complete knowledge is an individuality, which has universal, necessary and

permanent being in its oneness with God, but is yet concrete and uniquely characterized." This is equivalent, as far as I can see, to saying that in God the individual is preserved and not transcended, though, of course, many of his apparent qualities are only preserved in so far as they are transcended.

Now an Absolute in which the individual is an eternal and adequate manifestation of God is not even the Absolute of Mr. Bradley. It is, at the very least, the Absolute of Hegel. And surely it cannot be maintained that the conception of God in the earlier parts of the Ethics is in the least degree Hegelian. For these reasons it seems to me impossible to bring the doctrine of *scientia intuitiva* into complete harmony with the rest of the system.

I should wish to conclude, as I began, by recommending Mr. Joachim's work to every serious student of Spinoza, as a piece of work which is worthy even of such a subject.

J. ELLIS McTAGGART.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND.

ROBERT BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER. Being the Burney Essay for 1900. By Arthur Cecil Pigou, B. A. London: C. J. Clay & Sons. Pp. xii, 132.

As Mr. Pigou hastens to explain on his first page, he has interpreted the phrase "religious teacher" in the widest possible sense, so that in expounding Browning's views on religion in its metaphysical, ethical and emotional aspects, and in attempting "to bring out the relations between them, and to unite them into some kind of system," he really aims at reconstructing for us Browning's theory of life. The objections to, and difficulties in the way of such an attempt are mostly anticipated by the essayist himself. Among objections, perhaps the most serious that could be offered against the subject as one for a prize essay, is that the ground has been already adequately covered by Prof. Henry Jones in his book on "Browning as a Religious and Philosophical Teacher." But, as Mr. Pigou points out, Prof. Jones, being himself a philosopher of the Hegelian persuasion, estimates Browning's teaching from the point of view of its correspondence with or difference from those doctrines which he holds as valid, whereas the humbler aim of this essay is to expound clearly the views held by Browning, and to criticize them, where criticism is ventured on, only on the basis of their consistency with each other.