

## Betraying Spinoza

*The Renegade Jew who gave us Modernity*

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Alcohol can be made out of many things. Grapes, potatoes, grain, you name it. The drinks which are made are invariably flavored by their origins, however the stronger they are made, the less of a mark do their provenances make on the finished product. Ultimately, the refined product - pure alcohol, retains no traces at all of what it was originally made of. Spinoza is pure alcohol. His Jewishness, out of which he undeniably sprung, has no relevance whatsoever to the vision of his metaphysical philosophy. To claim so to the contrary is tantamount to betraying him. Hence the title of the book.

Rebecca Goldstein grew up in an orthodox Jewish home. This is an inescapable component of her identity. Although her professional career as an analytic philosopher has to some extent been devoted to transcend the accident of her ancestry, it nevertheless is bound to imbue her life, maybe even haunt it. In the same way a dedication to a secular life guided by reason and eschewing the irrationality of religious superstition, can never fully erase her sympathy for religion. Sympathy in the original sense of the word, meaning not necessarily approval but the ability to view from a particular perspective. Spinoza was held up to her as a cautionary tale. A man who betrayed his Jewish roots, who committed blasphemy by denying God itself and proposing atheism. At the time the latter was of course a crime not only against Judaism, but against all religious sensibility, be it Christian, and to a less extent relevant, Mohammedanism. Thus to the intrinsic outrage of betrayal, was added the fear of bringing down external fury from the surrounding majority. No wonder that Spinoza was excommunicated from the Jewish community in Amsterdam, where he had grown up. Spinoza took it, so to speak, philosophically; meaning that he realized that such a punishment only had a real existence if you really believed in it. If you did not, it was more a question of relief. He did well. Although he had to abandon his friends, family and family business, he was able to find meaningful occupation otherwise, as well as a social life, in fact more congenial to him than that in which he had grown up. No wonder this tale must have had a profound effect on the young Rebecca. Somebody with whom to identify and to guide her through a similar rejection, although of course of far less momentous nature, involving no real trauma, and in particular no rejection of family.

Spinoza properly understood is no Jewish philosopher. His philosophy has no ties to Jewish thought, be it or religion or philosophy, and hence he belongs as much to the Gentiles as to the Jews. In short he belongs to all of us. Yet the author feels compelled to include in her book a rather large section on the history of Sephardic Jews, their persecution, their settling in relatively free Amsterdam, and their spiritual fathers. One reason for doing so, as she hints to herself, is to justify the appearance of the book in a series on Jewish thought, by showing that Spinoza was indeed a Jew, and that his background really mattered, that

he was deep down marked by his Jewish destiny. Does she really believe that? Is this not betraying Spinoza? She writes

*To have intimated an extraphilosophical intimacy with Spinoza, come to me by way of the sheer accidents of my and his precedents, would have amounted to a betrayal of his vision.*

Anyway the reader is treated to a potted history of the Sephardic Jews. This is of course interesting by itself, and the ignorant reader learns about persecution of the Jews, especially under the Inquisition in Spain, and how they had been expelled from many European lands, including England. Now, what is so horrible about that, one may wonder. Horrible it is, but hardly in a unique way. The typical victim of the Inquisition was not a Jew, or former Jew, but a Christian suspected of heresy. Of course once Jews converted to Christianity, as many were forced to do<sup>1</sup>, they were under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition; and a relapse into ancient ways did of course constitute heresy. The Inquisition persecuted Jews and brought much suffering on them; but surely it was not really anti-semitic, in the sense that this kind of persecution provided their *raison d'être*, on the contrary those persecutions were just corollaries of a more general approach. The parallels between the work of the Inquisition and of the Stalinism in the 30's are very striking indeed, and have not been overlooked. Now when putting emphasis on the persecution of Jews in telling their history of diaspora, it is very easy to relate their identity to their suffering. Especially with the hindsight of the Holocaust, any anti-semitic persecution in the past acquires an ominousness, it might not otherwise have been imbued with. Every single Jewish victim does not suffer by itself, but its suffering becomes part of a larger pattern, and hence becomes enhanced<sup>2</sup>. The whole becomes in fact larger than the sum of its parts. French Protestants were massacred during the Bartholomew night, and of course many Protestants suffered persecution and murder during the religious war of the 17th century. Yet, they are seen as isolated incidents, and not part of a larger whole. They are in no way seen as a

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<sup>1</sup> And forcible conversion is nothing new. Most people converted to Christianity or Islam, were more or less coerced to do so, although of course, the received wisdom is that they simply had to abandoned more primitive states of religious awareness for more sophisticated ones. However, Judaism was by any account a sophisticated religion, out of which both Christianity and Islam had developed.

<sup>2</sup> The carbonized remains of a teenage boy are brought forward somewhere in Germany. An autopsy of the brain reveals that it was alive while the body was being incinerated in the heat. You can only imagine the suffering. Had it been a Jewish boy, his individual suffering would have been tied up with the general suffering of the Jews and all the awful things which were done to them. He would be more than himself, he would provide a lesson and an exemplar of what the Jewish suffering meant in each individual case. As it happens the boy was found by German officials in the street after an allied fire-bombing. In a sense his death was accidental, impersonal, and as we say collateral. In other words shit happens. His suffering was immense, but it was not really part of a communal suffering. Each victim of the bombings suffered by themselves. They were not targeted. To in any way equate the suffering of the Civilian population under Allied bombings with that of the Jews during the War is considered obscene. I concur spontaneously with such a reaction. It is a very sensitive issue. When Friedrich published Brand a few years ago, he was censored by his fellow Germans for having tried to make such a comparison. One may think what one may, but there are some interesting philosophical issues involved here.

threat to Protestantism as a whole. Examples are legion, most of which we as outsiders are not aware of. How many Westerners have been aware of the animosities between Sunnis and Shias in the Muslim world, or that Hindus and Muslims regularly massacre each other in India, not seldom tolerated by the authorities. Of course the numbers are different when added up, but that is not the whole story, from the point of view of the individual that should make no difference. To conclude that Jewish identity is ultimately tied up with their suffering is reductive. And in truth a horrible way to base an identity on. Still much of the present Jewish identity seems tied up with the Holocaust. This is ultimately self-defeating. For most Jews it is also suffering by proxy, those who really suffered and survived to tell the tale, usually do not want to parade it. It was far too horrible for that. But the section poses an interesting idea and relevant to a basic philosophical problem that touches upon Spinoza's thought, namely the problem of identity. Once a Jew always a Jew? You may convert, but no matter what, all your descendants will be tainted by their ancestry. From a modern secular point of view this does not make sense unless one finds a genetic basis for Jewishness. Such a basis does not exist. Jews take on the racial characteristics of the people among whom they dwell for an extended time. Even if they stick to themselves the barriers are not impenetrable, and humans being so genetically uniform, slow diffusion is often enough to even out differences.

I grant that it is of some interest to know about the Sephardic origins of Spinoza. That his Portuguese ancestors came as converted refugees to relatively tolerant Holland, and once here started to revert to their old faith. This is of course a rather peculiar situation, one in which identity is strongly felt in an intuitive way, but without any formal guidance and support. But to learn about the various rabbis and the kabbalistic traditions, and other controversies of Jewish faith, I find to be of secondary importance. And much of that is marred by the author obviously relaying facts she has just read and hardly digested<sup>3</sup>.

We are all imprinted by our early upbringing. Thus it makes sense to point out that Spinoza was the child of a close-knit religious community in 17th century Amsterdam. A city of toleration and commerce, both going well together. Thus one may get a feel for his milieu by looking at the charming genre paintings of the classical Old Dutch. What more congenial place could you have chosen than to live in 'Dutchland' in the 17th century. I am not speaking so much from the point of view of Sephardic refugees, as of a Western dweller of the 20th century. Furthermore his mother died when he was six. Having your mother die when you are a child is the ultimate nightmare, and surely must have marked him, although in what ways is harder to ascertain. His father was rich, and he was given the benefits of an education. Whether the religious education he was offered really benefitted him is another question, anyway it did not stop him from thinking. He was a bright boy. A bright boy (and girl) can be forbidden many things but not be forbidden to think. And here we come to the crucial insight. For the bright, thinking is the most precious gift there is. Maybe this is after all the only thing we really need to know about Spinoza as a child.

A Dawkins rallies against religion as an affront to reason. But is not faith in reason

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<sup>3</sup> This is not too unusual. A similar charge can be levied against e.g. Bertrand Russell in his potboiler on Western History, where he spends an inordinate amount of space on Catholic philosophers, probably because he discovered them in preparing for his book. In other words she is in good company.

a kind of religion? You cannot give rational reasons to support the claim of reason, as little as you can use induction to make a case for induction. To believe otherwise is to be, in the words of Karl Popper, a victim to uncritical rationality. To believe in reason is if anything a leap of faith. But we have no choice. This was something that Spinoza clearly understood. Does God have reasons for his commands. If he does, than God is an unnecessary intermediary, and not really a God after all, as he obviously is subjected to the power of reason. If God has no reasons for his injunctions but those are merely whims, then why should we honor them? Religion is a matter of superstition, at least this is the surface which we encounter. Do we take the Scriptures literally, than God is a super human being, with all the virtues and vices of a human being writ large. Literally larger than life. Why should we honor him? Why should we love him and cherish him? Why should we be allowed to fear him. Why should we not kill him? But how human is God? The God of Aristotle is a rather abstract being, more that of absolute perfection, and hence by a well-known twist of phrase, necessarily existent. Is it not rather remarkable that Catholic philosophy is so attuned to an abstract God, perfectly acceptable to Greek philosophers, and not the one that you appreciate with Catholic devotion. Where really does the Virgin Mary enter the realm of Aquinas thought, and really how much emphasis is there on personal salvation, the last Judgement? Scholastic thought is associated with arcane questions approaching the limits of thought itself, more in common with modern mathematical logic and its questionable hierarchy of ever higher cardinalities, than with human piety and concern for your fellow beings. It seems that Catholic philosophy is entirely separated from Catholic practice. Similar abstract flights of fanciful speculation is clearly present also in Jewish thought, although with the legalistic concerns of a Talmud scholar, it may be more tied down. How should we think of God, once we no longer think of him in human terms? Can we think of God as simply Truth. If so would not a modern anti-religious crusader such as Dawkins also acknowledge him. How much of the injunctions make sense once we start thinking of God as Truth itself. There is but one truth, we do not tolerate contradiction. And indeed the alleged Jewish 'invention' of monotheism, ties nicely in with this, as does the refusal of having idols, as God is an abstract entity<sup>4</sup>, not even allowed a name<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, we all need to love truth, and woe us that do not, because then we will eventually come to grief. There is no need for Truth to love us back, and coming to grief is not the result of vindictiveness on the part of the deity. And indeed, if loving God may seem a rather sterile pursuit, especially if it can only be manifested in various rituals, pursuing truth is something else, something that should permeate all our actions. Now of course this is exactly what Spinoza does, he equates God with Truth, and Truth being one with Nature. Nature is not what we perceive with our senses, Nature is what we are able to understand, to see by light of reason. If this is not Platonism, what is it then? Clearly Spinoza did not really come up with Platonism all by himself, many Platonist ideas are implicit in Christianity. And I surmise, in Jewish theological thought

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<sup>4</sup> Hinduism has many gods and idols, but as Hinduist theologians assure us, those idols are just aids to concentrate the thought of devotees, and are not even seen by simple people as actual idols. One may also wonder about the relation of the Greek to their gods. Was that similar to those of the Hindus?

<sup>5</sup> The great fallacy of metaphysical speculation is to make its concepts objects for the thought and its manipulations.

maybe as well. Platonism is also, although generally derided, the governing vision behind the disinterested pursuit of science driven by curiosity, to reveal what simple principles lie behind the immediate and chaotic<sup>6</sup>. Now such an abstract religion as is implied by the worship of Truth easily incurs the censure of being impersonal, especially if it is pursued mathematically in the deductive spirit of Euclid, as done by Spinoza. The greatness of Spinoza lies not so much in the abstract scheme, as his ability to imbue this with an ethical dimension. This needs further explication.

The great impression that the first encounter with Euclid makes to the susceptible mind, is of course not the purely geometrical insights which are given. Those are rather trivial. But the power of pure thought and its ability to literally conquer the world, or at least space<sup>7</sup>. This is a very heady experience, and for some enough to turn themselves into a mathematical career. It certainly must have made an everlasting impression on Spinoza, engendering the conviction that the reasoning powers alone are sufficient to apprehend the world around us, and those are indeed our most precious gifts, if such a manner of speaking is allowed, because gift presumes a giver, and the possession contingent. To Spinoza the logical necessity that characterizes deductive thinking was its own generator. You do not need logic to support logic. Logic creates itself, it is by itself enough. Here in logic clearly was the self-creating entity, whose mystical nature people before had speculated about, not really understanding that the same power that made them think of such a first mover, was actually the first mover. Nature existed because it had to, by logical force. And to understand nature was to apprehend it. The catch was of course that nature was infinite. There was an infinity to be understood, and mans capacity was just finite.

Spinoza started from the basic tenets of being human. To reflect on what is encountered already by the inquisitive child coming to awareness of its own existence as well as that of being in existence. The mystery of identity is the first. The terror of its finitude known to us as death is a consequence. The two are clearly interrelated. Without a sense of a personal identity, there is no basis for a personal death. To comprehend your own identity is a purely intuitive process. It generates desires that are solely related to keeping this identity, not to let it dissolve. 'This is I' is the final motivation. No further motivation is needed. It is 'I' who is 'I', having the sole responsibility for realizing and maintaining it. It is this fixation on the personal identity which is the curse of living. Only by truly confronting your own finitude with the infinitude of being, of God if you so want, can you transcend your own imprisonment, and liberate yourself from just one perspective. The perspective of your own feeble 'I'<sup>8</sup> It is here the ethical element enters in what to many appears to be the relentless impersonality of the mathematical approach that is the form

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<sup>6</sup> Einstein often refers to God. Of course this can be interpreted just 'as in a manner of speaking'. Could it have a deeper basis. If so, would not Spinoza's God be an answer? The author actually refers to explicit quotes to that effect, and exhibits as an illustration, the signature of Spinoza in the guestbook in his museum.

<sup>7</sup> I recall at fifteen on a trip with my parents to Riccione on the Italian Adriatic coast, walking along the sea front at night. The axioms are for the theologians I reasoned, the results for the engineers, but what came between was the true excitement. In other words, the road, irrespective of starting or endpoint.

<sup>8</sup> How come we are imprisoned in our 'I's. How come it is not possible to be someone else? To a child, as I recall, this is not entirely obvious. I wondered, as many other children must have done, whether it was

and the inspiration of Spinoza.

The classical ethical dilemma, already hinted at above, is why we do good things. Is it because of the rewards we reap from them? Or that we do want to evade punishment and censure, whether divine or social, which flaunting generally accepted conventions would entail? When it comes to ourselves the reward and deed is one. Why do we want to have a reward? Because that by itself leads to a reward? This is circular, just as the logical support for logic is circular. In the context of our own identity, the moral choice is generated by itself. Now the larger we become, the more of the infinite we include in our selves, the larger this automatic ethics. Pleasure is the emotion we feel when we enlarge ourselves. And paradoxically by enlarging ourselves we also concomitantly diminish our self-importance. Pain is the opposite emotion (or sensation) and is correspondingly associated to contraction. We become smaller, and as we become smaller, our self-importance increases. Pain centers on itself as to exclusion of the world around us. Now by expanding, as suggested, ethical questions resolve themselves without any need for external reasons. By appropriating a situation, making it our own, internalizing it, the ethical choice becomes as obvious as self-preservation and the pursuit of pleasure guided by desire. In a way ethics and aesthetics merge. We are repulsed when we encounter ugliness and we are seized by a desire to rectify it, not for any reward but the intrinsic. Similarly we are aghast at injustice, just as, at least some of us, are scandalized by an illogical argument, although when it comes to the former we are often admittedly able to suppress our instinctive reaction if it is to our profit. Beauty is supposed to be in the eye of the beholder, ethics in the conventions and mores of society, only truth transcends humanity. Spinoza, like Plato, makes the three approaches coalesce. Truth is beauty, and beauty is truth<sup>9</sup>. The supreme aesthetic experience is the experience of truth. By equating truth with beauty, ethics becomes squeezed between, and the ethical choice becomes just like the aesthetical a disinterested one.

There are some obvious criticisms to be levied against his philosophy. One is that it is so abstract, that the notion of a deity is so watered-down that it is deprived of all meaning. In short, it is not religious at all, and that in fact Spinoza far from being a pantheist is an atheist. This is of course the original and the most serious censure, at least as far as consequences are concerned. It led to his expulsion and excommunication, and surely would have led to his death in less tolerant circumstances. No one took Spinoza as seriously

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not possible to change point of view so to speak. To literally become someone else. After all other people existed, they had their own 'I's being part of the universe of being. What exists can be experienced. Other perspectives exist, why cannot they be comprehended too? Experienced from the inside. Those musings may appear naive. Closer re-inspection reveals that they are not. They are disturbing though, because they seem to open up a road into mysticism. A notion of a shared consciousness. Of there only being one mind, if mind is given one extra level of abstraction, shorn of the constricting 'I'. Later in adolescence similar thoughts may emerge. Now abetted by logical and penetrating reason. Then the logical impasse of the idea of solipsism may become manifest, often before ever having encountered the word and concept. This is if anything disturbing and may scare off a sensitive soul from further inquiry.

<sup>9</sup> One is tempted to refer to the great mathematician Herman Weyl, who professed that he always sought two things in mathematics, beauty and truth. But if he would be forced to make a choice, he would chose beauty over truth.

as his contemporaries. Being taken really seriously as a philosopher is fraught with danger<sup>10</sup>. To us such criticism counts rather in his favor than otherwise. Still his philosophy is considered too impersonal. To many people his axiomatic approach to ontology, and his working out consequences according to deductive reasoning in the manner of Euclid, is off-putting. To a mathematician and a scientist it may on the other hand appear quaint. As to impersonal abstraction, the author points out, with a mixture of surprise and delight, that Spinoza is full of personal observations of a very insightful nature. He was in no way a stranger to the foibles and idiosyncrasies of his fellow beings, on the contrary he has a sharp eye (and tongue) for various psychological states. The author (admittedly only in an end note) quotes Baron-Cohen's alleged findings, that scientists, especially mathematicians, have a strong autistic streak, being blind to the subtleties of social interaction, dwelling in abstract clouds. I am rather skeptical about this, especially as it seems to dovetail so nicely with popular, not to say vulgar prejudices. I would not say that it is as offensive as it is misleading. In a sense it entails a romanticization, especially of the mathematician, who in most cases is a rather ordinary person, and seldom possess gifts of abstraction and thought that are powerful enough to encroach on his or her personality. Of course exceptional mathematical gifts will influence any personality, but then strangeness is more likely to be a result of a rearranging of priorities, rather than social obtuseness. How would Spinoza fare on any of Baron-Cohen's questionnaires, we can only speculate of course. But clearly any response would have more to say on Baron-Cohen than on Spinoza.

Another more serious objection, at least from a modern point of view, is Spinoza's emphasis on deduction. Even mathematicians are skeptical about the power of deduction, at least when it comes to persuasion. It is one thing to encounter the relatively simple proofs that are to be found in Euclid, which I suspect was Spinoza's only encounter with some serious mathematics<sup>11</sup>. In modern mathematics the chains of deductive reasoning are far too long for humans to fully appreciate<sup>12</sup>. Instead conviction is induced by how well a result fits with other results in mathematics. Whether it conforms, and maybe even sheds light on others. This is of course close to the empirical method in science. Exclusive reliance on deduction damns a philosopher in our modern eyes to metaphysics. And in fact, the author admits that she approached him as an adult philosopher with a certain apprehension, as he was clearly beyond the pale from an analytic perspective. Yet, at his time, this could hardly be counted against him, and did not prevent him from being appreciated by an empiricist such as Locke. In fact the power of thought and deduction is not in any way undercut by an empirical approach to knowledge, in fact such an approach very much presupposes such a power.

Finally Spinoza has been questioned as to reconciling a deterministic view of the

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<sup>10</sup> Something academic philosophers are usually safe from

<sup>11</sup> Spinoza ground lenses, this presupposes, at least in an intellectual mind, an interest in optics. He also had some contact with Huygens. But of course the geometrical theory of optics is about as elementary as that of Euclid

<sup>12</sup> In fact in the celebrated Four-Color theorem, deduction is mechanized, which is exactly what both Aristotle (in his exposition on syllogism) and Leibniz envisioned, and performed on a computer. In a way deduction becomes a kind of verification, and not surprisingly this is considered a dead-end street in mathematics.

world, which logically should make us all fatalists (and Goldstein pointedly reminds us that Spinoza is no fatalist); and still maintaining our free will and ability to make moral choices. This is intimately connected with the allegedly strange mixture of idealism and materialism which constitutes Spinoza's world view. Idealism is top-down and materialism is bottom-up. Two radically opposed approaches, which are however hard to separate, not only in the case of Spinoza. Any philosophizing has a strong idealistic element. Spinoza takes as starting point the human intellect, the ability to reason and the universal basis of logic. On the other hand to Spinoza everything is explicable. Everything has a cause, even if only itself as in the case of logic. This is a bottom-up approach, and can be seen as such, as a materialistic. Now, does Spinoza make any distinction between the world as it is, and our attempts to understand it? Of course not, at least he is committed not to; yet does he not subconsciously make a distinction? Our attempts to understand the world is the idealistic one, and the world itself is materialistic. The latter is deterministic, while the former is part of our free will. I am of course not authorized to make such a censure, having not read the works of Spinoza first hand. Yet, the question itself is a legitimate one to guide your future reading of Spinoza. It all boils down to making the object (physics?) part of the metaobject (metaphysics?) of considering the object itself<sup>13</sup>.

To return to the original issue. Is Spinoza a Jewish philosopher? Does it make any sense to put him in a Jewish tradition of thought at all? One may take another tack and ask whether it makes any sense to ask him if he is a human being. And here of course, in front of such a radical view, we instinctively withdraw. Of course he is human, and thus all his human strengths and weaknesses are of interest to us, although his philosophy is so abstract, or at least tries to attain such abstractness as to fully transcend its origin<sup>14</sup>. We are nevertheless curious about gossip about Spinoza. How was he as a human being. And of course his Jewish roots are as relevant to the purely human aspect as to what friends he had, that he was once victim of an attempted murder, that he may have been in love (and rejected?) by a young woman, daughter of one of his mentors. In fact the human Spinoza strikes us as maybe the sweetest and most likeable of all the great classical philosophers. And in fact the author is very tempted to fictionalize his life (a danger ever present to people whose fame survives their deaths) and in fact briefly lets herself indulge in such interpolations (and extrapolations?). Maybe she should have written a sympathetic fictional account of Spinoza.

All of this ties down with the contrast between the concrete world which we sensually enjoy, and an abstract world out of which it supposedly immanates<sup>15</sup>. A world of sensory experience, which to a large extent is contradictory and confusing, versus an abstract world of illumination. The first is particular, the latter is universal. In fact our own

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<sup>13</sup> This is what Gdel almost achieves in his illustrious proof. He does not quite achieve it, and that he is of course well aware of, and out of this little gap, his specific insight. To a mathematician this is of course nothing else by the famous diagonal trick of Cantor, pushed to its limit. The diagonal trick is almost self-reference, but not quite. And that not-quite is the whole point.

<sup>14</sup> This is what science in a fact does. It is done by human beings, but when it comes to its most basic questions, its aim is to marginalize the human perspective, its findings having less and less significance to our puny human lives. This is of course particularly prominent in cosmology and fundamental physics.

<sup>15</sup> In the sense of making something immanent. Does not such a word exist in the English language?



sensory experiences are unique to us, they cannot be compared with those of another being, because to do so, they need to inhabit the same consciousness. But of course between different sensory experiences of the world, there are connections, nicely encapsulated in the mathematical notion of isomorphism. The more abstract a concept is, the easier it is to share. My sensation of a color red cannot be transmitted to anyone else, however the notion of difference between colors, being a more abstract concept, is easier to convey in its experience, as noted in one of Platos dialogues. So in a sense we are all solipsists, imprisoned in our own private worlds which will for ever dissolve upon our deaths. And it is to those particulars of experience, to which we have such deep personal attachments. They certainly are part of our finitudes as beings, but that does not stop them from being so dear to us. To become a philosopher, to attain some level of religious epiphany means in a sense to abandon that which ties us down. But do we really want it? The accidents of our birth, our surroundings, our lives, whether they work out for bad or good, are indeed so dear to us. In a sense they make lives worth living. Spinoza can of course not have been immune to those charms, this makes his philosophy more than just an abstract enterprise, it makes it part of a human drama, and as such liable to engage us.

When reading a mathematical or scientific text, it really does not matter that much how it is written, as long as it is factual and limpid. With a philosophical text it is different. We want it to be well written, even personally so. It somehow does matter. And while in mathematics say, you encounter an idea that you have had yourself, you are irritated. The pleasure of priority is snatched from you. This is not so prominent in philosophy (maybe in academic philosophy which is pursued differently) where finding your own ideas anticipated instead of provoking irritation on the contrary, becomes reassuring. I am not alone in the world. Someone else has thought of this before. We share something, even if vicariously, as the other person may have been dead for centuries. Maybe this is the closest we can ever come to the possession of an immortal soul.

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