

**TRACTATUS DE INTELLECTUS
EMENDATIONE: ET DE VIA,
QUA OPTIME IN VERAM RERUM
COGNITIONEM DIRIGITUR**

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Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione: Et de Via, Qua Optime in Veram Rerum Cognitionem
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W. HALE WHITE & BENEDICTUS DE SPINOZA

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TRACTATUS
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EMENDATIONE

*ET DE VIA, QUA OPTIME IN VERAM
RERUM COGNITIONEM DIRIGITUR*

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN
OF BENEDICT DE SPINOZA
BY W. HALE WHITE. TRANS-
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PREFACE.

THE *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, written probably before Spinoza was thirty years old, is so important not only historically, as showing how gradually and consecutively what he had to tell the world was revealed to him, but for its own intrinsic worth, that no excuse is necessary for the attempt to translate and explain it.

It was first published in the *Opera Posthuma* in 1677, but we do not know what MS. the editors had before them. They describe it in the general preface as "one of the earlier works of our Philosopher, as the style and thoughts both testify."¹ Prefixed to the Treatise there is also a "Notice to the Reader," to the following effect :—

"The Treatise concerning the Amendment of the Intellect, which we here present to you, kind reader, incomplete, was written many years ago by

¹ We know that it was written in Latin, for the Preface to the *Opera Posthuma*, expressly states that they were written in Latin with the exception of a few letters. (See also Bruder, vol. i. p. xxiv.)

the author. He always had it in his mind to finish it. Hindered, however, by other work, and at length snatched away by death, he could not bring it to the desired conclusion. Since, however, it contains much that is remarkable and useful, which, we do not doubt, will be not a little profitable to the sincere inquirer after truth, we were unwilling to deprive you of it. In order, further, that you may not be disinclined to pardon much obscurity, and even ruggedness and want of polish which here and there appear in it, we have desired also to warn you of these, that you might not be unprepared. Farewell."

In a letter from Spinoza to Oldenburg, undated, but in reply to one from Oldenburg, dated October, 1661, Spinoza says: "As to your new question, in what manner things began to be, and what is the bond of dependence between them and the first cause; on this subject, and also concerning the emendation of the Intellect, I have written a complete little Treatise, and am at present busy in copying and correcting it. But sometimes I stay my hand, for as yet I cannot make up my mind about publishing the work. I fear lest the theologians of our day, with their customary rancour, should attack me, who have such an utter horror of quarrels. On this point I will look for your advice, and in order that you may know what is contained in this work of mine, which may serve for a stumbling-block to these raisers of tumults, I tell you that many attributes which by these theologians and by all—at least who are known to me

—are assigned to God, I consider as things created (*tanquam creaturas*); and, on the other hand, other things considered by them on account of their prejudices as things created, I contend are attributes of God misunderstood by them. Also that I should not separate God from Nature in such a way as all have done with whom I am acquainted."

Oldenburg asked Spinoza to publish the treatise, and at any rate, if he could not, to send an abstract of it. Spinoza in reply, after telling Oldenburg about the *Descartes* which was about to see the light, proceeds as follows :

"At this opportunity, some perchance will be found occupying the foremost positions in my country who will desire to see other things which I have written and acknowledge for my own, and they will take care that I may be enabled to make them common property without any danger of inconvenience. If this should so turn out, I do not doubt that there are certain things which I may immediately publish : but if it should not so turn out, I will rather be silent than intrude my opinions on men, when my country opposes, and so render them hostile to me. I pray, therefore, my honoured friend, that you will not be vexed at having to wait a little longer. You shall then receive from me either the Treatise printed, or the abstract for which you ask."

Now it is quite clear that the *Treatise*, as we have it, does not correspond to the Treatise which Spinoza distinctly said he *had completed* in 1661. There is no discussion of the question "in what

manner things began to be," nor of the "bond of dependence between them and the first cause," nor of the attributes of God, nor of the separation of God from Nature, nor is there anything which would have been likely to excite the special theological hostility so much dreaded. Furthermore, not only does the *Treatise* break off abruptly, but there are numerous gaps in it, and references to passages which no longer exist. Examples of these can be found on pp. 4, 7, 22, 57. There is the note to p. 13—*Hic aliquando prolixius agam de experientia, et empiricorum et recentium philosophorum procedendi methodum examinabo*; a promise which was never performed. It is to be observed that in this last case Spinoza does not say that he has actually written down his criticism on the empirical philosophy. What he intends to write *aliquando* will nevertheless form a part of the *Treatise*.

Once more, not only is the style of the *Treatise* singularly rough, but the connection between the different parts is difficult. It is not easy to fix a definite meaning on many portions of it, but it is still less easy to see how some portions hang together; and I am by no means sure that each of the parts of the rest of the *Treatise* really follows from what precedes.

It is not unlikely, therefore—I do not say that it is certain—that the MS. of the *Treatise* which was used by the editors of the Posthumous Works was not the MS. to which Spinoza refers in the Oldenburg correspondence, but merely an incomplete first draft of it. At any rate, if we accept the printed

Treatise as the integrum opusculum, the difficulties are insurmountable.

I propose now to set forth the principal doctrines of this little book, and to make a few remarks thereon ; but I may observe that it is almost impossible to obtain any explanation of it in detail from Spinoza's commentators. The mass of literature which includes it with Spinoza's other works is very great ; but, with the exception of Sir F. Pollock, nearly all the writers content themselves with an account of what they call Spinosism, and leave particular passages untouched.

First of all, it will be better to explain the meaning of some of the terms used. It may be observed generally that Spinoza, and he is not singular in this respect, often uses one word to cover several distinct ideas. We find it almost impossible to understand how so many meanings could have been shut up into one expression, although we ourselves continually employ one word in order to designate what is not one. Habit blinds us to our inaccuracy, and yet, when we have learned to specialise, we cannot imagine how the entities newly named could have collapsed under a single term. As an example in Spinoza there is the word *idea*.

The idea is the mental correlate of the external object ; or, rather, the idea and the object are the same thing conceived under two different attributes. Soul and body are not utterly diverse entities, but the same thing, the soul being the idea of the body.