SPINOZA AND RELIGION; A STUDY OF SPINOZA'S METAPHYSICS AND OF HIS PARTICULAR UTTERANCES IN REGARD TO RELIGION, WITH A VIEW TO DETERMINING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS THOUGHT FOR RELIGION AND INCIDENTALLY HIS PERSONAL ATTITUDE TOWARD IT Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

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ELMER E. POWELL

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Spinoza and Religion

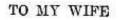
A study of Spinoza's metaphysics and of his particular utterances in regard to religion, with a view to determining the significance of his thought for religion and incidentally his personal attitude toward it.

By

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PREFACE.

A German translator and expounder of Spinoza's works declares that in the whole history of human thought there is not to be found a system more difficult to understand and to explain. After studying the system in its details, I am disposed to accept this assertion as probably true. I have blinked no difficulties, however; but have felt it my duty to study each one until I have succeeded either in harmonizing it with the system as a whole, or in clearly showing it to be a logical inconsistency. Spinoza's logical inconsistencies are of two kinds: (1) fallacies of reasoning, and (2) the acceptance of contradictory propositions which are correctly deduced, although from different and incompatible presuppositions.

My excuse for adding another book to the already formidable pile of literature on Spinoza is the fact that his relation to religion has not yet been made the subject of specific, comprehensive, and candid treatment; and that consequently there prevail not only among intelligent people in general, but even among students of philosophy, the vaguest possible notions in regard to this matter. Anyone who may feel disposed to think that I am performing a work of supererogation, is asked to suspend his judgment until he has read Chapter II. of my "Introduction."

In order to go to the bottom of the question and attempt to settle it, it has been necessary to pass beyond Spinoza's specific utterances in regard to re-

PREFACE

ligion, and to subject his metaphysics to careful analysis. Those who are not used to abstract thinking (if any such should do me the honor of reading my book), will doubtless find my exposition of Spinoza's metaphysics in some parts difficult, perhaps dull; although I have spared myself no pains, in order to attain the utmost clearness.

In conducting my investigations and in presenting the results, I have endeavored to maintain a strictly impersonal attitude, aiming solely to determine (1) what Spinoza taught and (2) how his doctrine is related to the religious consciousness. Accordingly, I must disappoint those who seek in the present work either a polemic against Spinoza or an apology for him. I will not deny, however, that my book is after all a polemie, a polemic against a mistaken interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy and personality.

While, as the basis of my judgments, I have taken, of course, Spinoza's own writings (in the original Latin where extant, and in the Dutch translation where the Latin is lost), I have derived valuable hints from several of his expounders. My obligations are acknowledged in the foot-notes to The "Biographical Sketch" is the part the text. for which I claim the least merit; for, considering it as of minor importance for the question at issue, I have been willing to accept, in regard to the original sources, the critical labor of others, save when facts significant for our estimate of Spinoza's personality were involved. In this part I am most indebted to Dr. Freudenthal of Breslau, who has done so much in recent years to enrich our scanty knowledge of Spinoza's life; although I have sometimes

viii

PREFACE

been led to express quite other judgments on the facts. In a general way, I owe most to my former instructor in philosophy, Professor Benno Erdmann, although he should not be held responsible for the point of view here represented.

Spinoza's works I have cited according to Van Vloten and Land's edition: "Benedicti de Spinoza Opera," The Hague, 1895.

E. E. POWELL.

March, 1906.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.

Page

| 1000 | | 1 1 1 T T T T T T |
|---------------|---|-------------------|
| Chapter | r I. Biographical Sketch | 1 |
| 1. | Historical Antecedents | 1 |
| 2. | Environment in which Spinoza's Lot was | |
| | Cast | 3 |
| 3. | Spinoza's Early Years | 6 |
| 4. | Rupture with the Synagogue | 12 |
| 5. | Sojourn in Rijnsburg | 23 |
| 6. | Sojourn at Voorburg | 26 |
| 7. | At The Hague | 33 |
| 8. | His Personality | 42 |
| 1, 2, | r II. Diversity of Opinion in Regard to Spinoza's Relation to Religion Various Expressions on the Subject Causes and Significance of the Diversity of Opinion | 45 45 51 |
| Chapter 1. | r III. Spinoza's Doctrine of Knowledge Certain Peculiarities of Spinoza's Psychol- | 66 |
| 244 | ogy | 66 |
| 2. | The Imagination | 75 |
| 3. | The Reason | 80 |
| 4. | Logical Presuppositions | 86 |

PART I.

SPINOZA'S CONCEPTION OF GOD.