

# **R. H. M. Elwes's Introduction to His Translations of Spinoza's Works – 1883**

R. H. M. Elwes

Elwes's Introduction is an introduction to his translations of Spinoza's Works from the Latin to English. It serves as an insightful biography of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), a Jewish-Portuguese-Dutch Philosopher.

Formatted for [eBook](#) conversion

First Issued: July 17, 2000:

Revised: April 26, 2001

by Joseph B. Yesselman

[jyesselman@erols.com](mailto:jyesselman@erols.com)

] -- [ Indicates a [Shirley](#) comment or note.



associate. Leibnitz, who had known Spinoza personally, speaks of him, whether from jealousy or some more avowable motive, in tones of consistent depreciation.

[5]:vii. The torrent of abuse, which poured forth from the theologians and their allies, served to overwhelm the ethical and metaphysical aspect of Spinoza's teaching. The philosopher was hidden behind the arch-heretic. Throughout almost the whole of the century following his death, he is spoken of in terms displaying complete misapprehension of his importance and scope. The grossly inaccurate account given by Bayle in the "*Dictionnaire Philosophique*" was accepted as sufficient. The only symptom of a following is found in the religious sect of

among the French, M. Paul Janet has written on Spinoza as a link in the chain of the history of thought; a new translation of his complete works

eternal things has passed into his teaching. If we may, as he himself was wont to do, interpret spiritually a Bible legend, we may say of him that, like Moses returning from Sinai, he bears in his presence the witness that he has held communion with the Most High.

[9]:ix. The main authority for the facts of Spinoza's life is a short biography by Johannes Colerus (Kohler) ([ix:1](#)), Lutheran pastor at the Hague, who occupied the lodgings formerly tenanted by the philosopher. The orthodox Christian felt a genuine abhorrence for the doctrines, which he regarded as atheistic, but was honest enough to recognize the stainless purity of their author's character. He sets forth what he has to say with a quaint directness in admirable keeping with the outward simplicity of the life he depicts.

[10]:x. Further authentic information is obtainable from passing notices in the works of Leibnitz, and from Spinoza's published correspondence, though the editors of the latter have suppressed all that appeared to them of merely personal interest. There is also a biography attributed to Lucas, physician at the Hague (1712), but this is merely a confused panegyric, and is often at variance with more trustworthy records. Additional details may be gleaned from Bayle's; hostile andthy

England, the young Spinoza was instructed in the learning of the Hebrews, the mysteries of the Talmud and the Cabbala, the text of the Old Testament, and the commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Maimonides.  
Readers of \_\_\_\_\_







and master, but these had always been declined. During the illness

Oldenburg, the first secretary of the newly-established Royal Society of England, had visited him at Rhijnsburg, introduced possibly by Huyghens, and had invited him to carry on a correspondence ([xvi:1](#)), in terms of affectionate intimacy. Oldenburg was rather active-minded than able, never really understood or sympathized with Spinoza's standpoint, and was thoroughly shocked ([xvi:2](#)) at the appearance of the [Tractatus Theologico-Politicus](#), {[Letter 19](#)}, but he was the intimate friend

[24]:xvii. Shortly afterwards, when the head-quarters of the French army were at Utrecht, Spinoza was sent for by the Prince de Conde, who wished to make his acquaintance. On his arrival at the camp, however, he found that the Prince was absent; and, after waiting a few days, returned home without having seen him. The philosopher's French entertainers held out hopes of a pension from Louis XIV., if a book were dedicated to that monarch; but these overtures were declined.

[25]:xvii. On his arrival at the Hague, Spinoza was exposed to considerable danger from the excited populace, who suspected him of being a spy. The calm, which had failed him on the murder of his friend, remained unruffled by the peril threatening himself. He told his landlord, who was in dread of the house being sacked, that, if the [mob](#) showed any signs of violence, he would go out and speak to them in person, though they should serve him as they had served the unhappy [De Witts](#). "





left behind him by the philosopher was very scanty. Rebekah de Spinoza, sister of the deceased, put in a claim as his heir; but abandoned it on finding that, after the payment of expenses, little or nothing would remain.

[33]:xxi The MSS., which were found in Spinoza's desk, were, in accordance with his wishes, forwarded to John Rieuwertz, a publisher

had purged his mind of so many illusions, can hardly have succumbed to the notion, that his [Ethics](#) was a flawless mass of irrefragable truth. He adopted his method because he believed, that he thus reduced argument to its simplest terms, and laid himself least open to the reductions of rhetoric or passion. "*It is the part of a wise man,*" he says, "*not to bewail nor to deride, but to understand.*" Human nature obeys fixed laws no less than do the figures of geometry. "*I will, therefore, write about human beings, as though I were concerned with lines, and planes, and solids.*"



seventeenth century, abhorred by the Christians in the eighteenth century, acknowledged great in the nineteenth century, Baruch Spinoza will perhaps not be fully understood even in the twenty-first century. But perhaps by then Spinoza's philosophy will have become the basis of a world religion for neomodern man. }

[38]:xxii. Other influences, no doubt, played a part in shaping his convictions; we know, for instance, that he was a student of Bacon and of Hobbes, and almost certainly of Giordano Bruno, but these two elements, the Jewish and the Cartesian, are the main sources of his system, though it cannot properly be called the mere development of either. From Descartes, as Mr. Pollock points out, he derived his

there is nothing external to itself to make it finite), and it can be the cause of an infinite number of results. It must necessarily operate in



[49]:xxvi. If mind be simply, the mirror of bodily states, how can we account for memory? When the mind has been affected by two things in close conjunction, the recurrence of one re-awakens into life the idea of

passive, and therefore subject to emotions.

[55]:xxvii. Nothing can be destroyed from within, for all change must come from without. In other words, everything endeavours to persist in its own being. This endeavour must not be associated with the "*struggle for existence*" familiar to students of evolutionary theories, though the





which appears, as it were, perfunctorily in so many systems of morals,



superstition, resulting from fear.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

From Bk.I:410



*philosophies are not.*" But all other philosophers except your own followers disagree with you, and with equal right say of their







victim of the Divine Justice which consumes all things in wrath. Such a fate may Almighty God avert for the greater glory of His name, and for the salvation of your soul, also for a salutary example for the imitation of your most unfortunate and idolatrous followers, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who with the Eternal Father liveth and reigneth in the Unity of the Holy Spirit, God for all Eternity. Amen.

Florence, (Sept. 3, 1675.)







who does not go dreaming of evil spirits inspiring us with false ideas like the true. For the truth is the index of itself and of what is false.

[8] [Letter 74:417](#) -

Spinoza To Albert Burgh.

But you, who presume that you have at last found the best religion, or rather the best men, on whom you have pinned your credulity, you, *"who know that they are the best among all who have taught, do now teach, or shall in future teach other religions. Have you examined all religions, ancient as well as modern, taught here and in India and everywhere throughout the world? And, if you have duly examined them, how do you know that you have chosen the best"* since you can give no reason for the faith that is in you? But you will say, that you acquiesce in the inward testimony of the Spirit of God, while the rest of mankind are ensnared and deceived by the prince of evil spirits. But all those outside the pale of the Romish Church can with equal right proclaim of their own creed what you proclaim of yours.

[9] [Letter 74:417](#) -

Spinoza To Albert Burgh.

As to what you add of the common consent of myriads of men and the

them, Pharisenot 0 0 0 2 0.251 rg 5.6140 18 4 Tf4877 05 32438 Tm ([I]T{the  
]2













our friendship closer.









seems to be shown in the whole universe. All things known to us agree



having time to reply fully, I will confine myself to these three.

[ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

mean by substance that which is conceived through and in itself; and that I mean by modification or accident that, which is in something else, and is conceived through that wherein it is, evidently it follows that substance is by nature prior to its accidents. For without the former the



P. 82, l. 21. "*Common Notions*" (*Notiones communes*) is here used as the equivalent of what Oldenburg ([Letter 3:279](#)) called "*indemonstrable Principles*," that is, ultimate assumptions or



[3] Letter 15:291 -

Spinoza to Oldenburg.

Let us imagine, with your permission, **a little worm**, living in the blood, able to distinguish by sight the particles of blood, lymph, &c., and to reflect on the manner in which each particle, on meeting with another particle, either is repulsed, or communicates a portion of its own motion. This little worm would live in the blood, in the same way, as we live in a part of the universe, and would consider each particle of blood, not as a part, but as a whole. He would be unable to determine, how all the parts are modified by the general nature of blood, and are compelled by it to adapt themselves, so as to stand in a fixed relation to one another. For, if we imagine that there are no causes external to the blood, which could communicate fresh movements to it, nor any space beyond the blood, nor any bodies whereto the particles of blood could communicate their motion, it is certain that thefas ret5 m 6me s tobloomay H

as agreeing with the whole, and associated with the remaining parts. As



[1]

Distinguished and Illustrious Sir,—When I received your letter of the 22nd July {1675}, I had set out to Amsterdam for the purpose of publishing the book I had mentioned to you. While I was negotiating, a

[1]













means of miracles, seek to prove the obscure by what is more obscure





you what the Royal Society is doing. Farewell, and preserve me in your affection.

London, 14 Jan., 1676.

[\_\_\_\_\_]



---











[

acknowledged as the highest good, and must, as such, be loved with a free mind? or, again, that the reward of virtue is virtue itself, while the punishment of folly and weakness is folly itself? or, lastly, that every man ought to love his neighbour, and to obey the commands of the supreme power? Such doctrines I have not only expressly stated, but



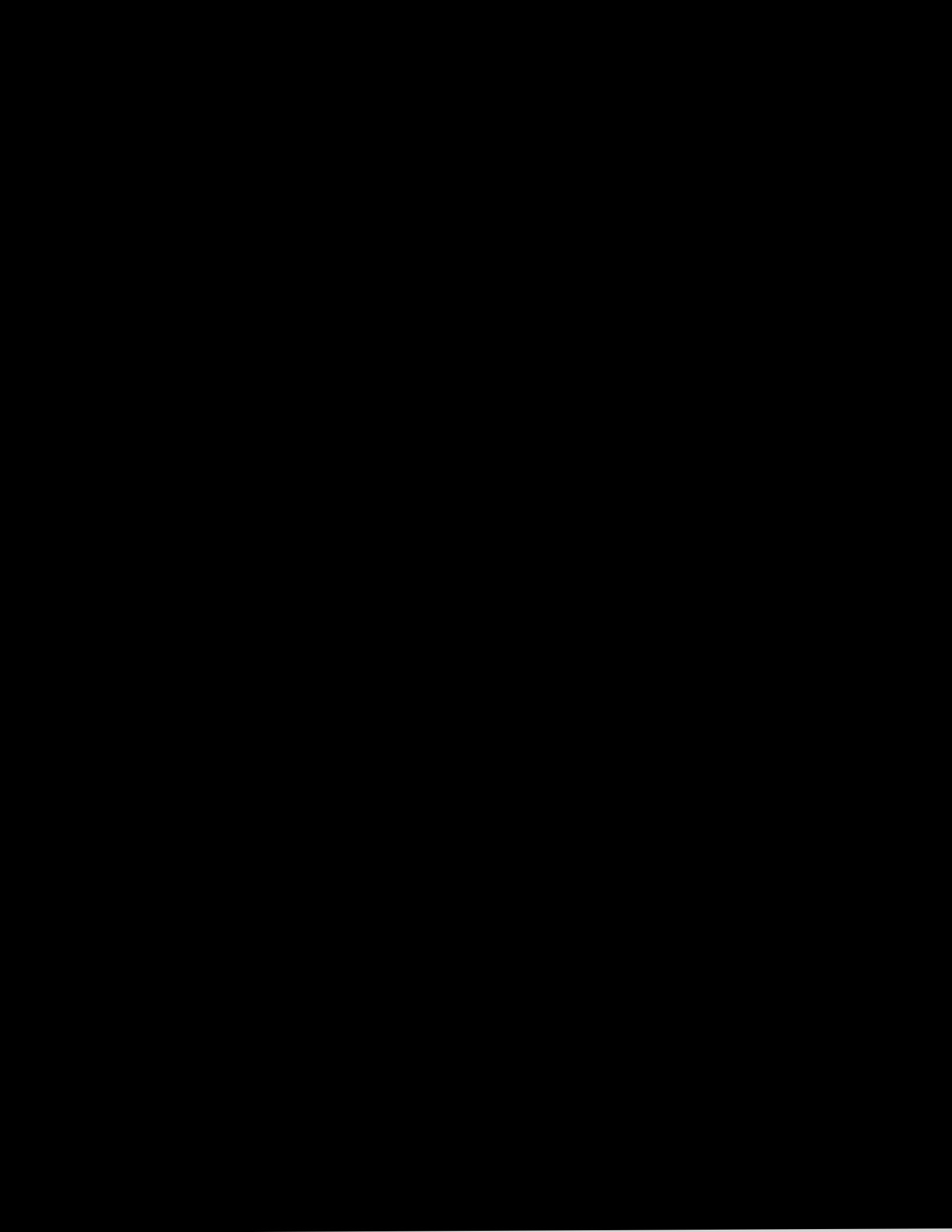


declare here, that this person is one of that sort, of whom I have said at the end of my preface, that I would rather that they utterly neglected my book, than that by misinterpreting it after their wont, they should become hostile, and hinder others without benefiting themselves.

[7] \_\_\_\_\_







[xv:3](#) The full title is, "*Renati des Cartes Principiorum partes I. et II. more geometrico demonstratae per Benedicp.82a1e Spinoza:3*"









## **JBY ENDNOTES:**

Quoted from "[The Divine Philosophy of Baruch de Spinoza](#)" with the

{See also [State ban.](#)}

{Two reasons for the [also](#)





TRACTATUS  
THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS

containing a number of dissertations, wherein it is shown that freedom to philosophise can not only be granted without injury to Piety and the







KJV Jeremiah 18:6 "





Adler. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Copyright 1995; ISBN: 0872202755.

Book XIV– "*The Philosophy of Spinoza*" by Harry A. Wolfson  
Harvard University Press; Copyright date: 1934; Published  
September 1958; Library of Congress Catalog No. 58-11928;  
Reprint edition 1983, ISBN: 0674665953.

Book XVII – Stephen Hawking "*A Brief History of Time*". A  
Bantam Book; ISBN: 0553380168.

END.

[Elwes's Introduction to Spinoza](#)