

There can be few odder episodes in the history of ideas than the story of Spinoza's reputation. For a hundred years after his death he was, on the whole, execrated without being read, and those who knew him more intimately and had a respect for him tended to be as keen to advertise the fact as a prudent American professor of today would be to acknowledge a debt to Marx. Then, with the speed and suddenness of the populace recognising the Emperor's nakedness after the child had mentioned it in the celebrated tale, Spinoza became acclaimed after Lessing's confession of admiration for him: only to become, this least romantic of philosophers, the philosophic hero of the Romantics...

It becomes clear that the paradoxes did not end with that, when a member of the "linguistic" school of philosophy, which has as one of its basic tenets the impossibility of speculative metaphysics, publishes a highly sympathetic study of this most uncompromising of metaphysicians. Even this sympathy is not unprecedented, for Cambridge philosophers such as Bertrand Russell or C. Broad, who probably have some difficulty in restricting themselves to polite language at the mention of Hegel and Absolute Idealism, nevertheless seem to have a tender spot for Spinoza to whom the Absolute Idealists owed so much.

In view of Mr. Hampshire's deserved position in the movement which at present dominates academic philosophy, and in view of his elegant and smooth prose (too smooth, perhaps: the stream of agreeable prose tends to sweep one too easily over underlying difficulties), a popularisation by him of Spinoza's thought is bound to be an event. When, so to speak, a Tibetan describes his impressions of New York, one expects a new slant on the subject. There is of course the danger that one will be disappointed, that either such a description will be so conventional that one will not be able to tell that the author is indeed a Tibetan; or alternatively that one will be able to tell nothing else. Mr. Hampshire manages on the whole to avoid both dangers: from his book we can tell that its author is a linguistic philosopher, and yet the book manages to be about Spinoza and not about language and metaphysics in general.

The book is not in any way directly concerned with Spinoza's thought or personality qua Jewish. In discussing

Spinoza's intellectual antecedents Mr. Hampshire concentrates almost exclusively on Descartes. But the historian's loss is the general reader's gain, for the resultant possibly simplified view of Spinoza's logic and metaphysics, as emerging from Descartes' inconsistencies with the inevitability of a clean and ironed shirt coming from an efficient laundry to which one had submitted a dirty and crumpled one, is an excellent piece of lucid exposition. One of the few points where Mr. Hampshire seems to approach Spinoza as characteristically Jewish is when he traces a similarity between his moral outlook and that of Freud and refers to "the two great Jewish thinkers". This particular parallel seems rather strained to the present reviewer, if only because Freud's ethical naturalism was simply a part of his time and not an individual contribution, and this of course is not true of Spinoza's. At the same time Mr. Hampshire is to be congratulated on the manner in which he brings out Spinoza's moral naturalism; for the fact that Spinoza was an ethical naturalist without being an empiricist is something which may lead the modern reader to miss half the point of his thought, in view of the unusualness of that combination today.

To sum up: this book is an admirably lucid exposition of what the universe looked like to a great metaphysician facing the 17th Century world and science, and of what that metaphysician looks like to a 20th Century linguistic and empiricist philosopher.

ERNEST GELLNER.