

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

CARTESIAN REFUTATIONS OF SPINOZA

I

EARLY VIEWS CONCERNING THE RELATION OF SPINOZISM TO CARTESIANISM

IF the student stray from the great highway of philosophy's history, to wander in its collateral byways, he may be sure of adventures. Quite possibly he will attain, here and there, a vantage point from which the highway itself may be viewed in a new perspective. The highway itself and the world through which it leads may be glimpsed from a bypath that in itself leads nowhere.

The relation between the doctrines of Descartes and Spinoza is a matter of continued re-interpretation. The extremes of opponent interpretations can be easily characterized. On the one hand, Spinozism is defined as a revised and systematized Cartesianism. On the other hand, the relation of the former to the latter may be regarded as extrinsic rather than essential; Spinoza, it may be urged, employed Cartesianism in order to facilitate the expression of a radically different philosophical vision. These opposed views concerning the relation of the two philosophies emerged quite promptly after Spinoza's works became accessible. The settlement of the question was not a matter of merely academic and historical interest. It was rather a matter of living importance. The exciting controversial issues of the day borrowed weapons from one or the other philosophy. The philosophic defense of theology was at issue. Materialism was in process of formulation. Empiricism was coming to the continent from Britain. If the doctrines of Descartes and Spinoza were essentially one in spirit, they could be evaluated in a single process. But, if similarity of expression, and to some extent