## Spinoza and Nietzsche: The Meeting

## Written by Daniel Spiro

- S- "Come in, come in, my most noble colleague. I've been expecting you. My name is Benedictus. Benedictus de Spinoza."
- N "I'm afraid, my good man, that your name is nothing of the sort. At least not in my eyes. I shall call you Spiderman."
- S (taken aback) "Really. Spiderman? And to what do I owe that enchanting moniker from such an eminent philosopher as yourself?"
- N- "Me? An eminent philosopher? Now you don't have to get insulting. I was merely addressing you in the manner in which I choose to see you. You're a perfect Spiderman. Or at least Spinoza was."
  - S "Sir. I am Spinoza."
- N-"Oh rubbish. You're a carcass of memory banks downloaded by a group of scientists and philosophers from something called the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. They did their level best, those studious little worker bees, to duplicate the consciousness of the Spiderman known as Spinoza. But they can't duplicate Spinoza. As sickly and ascetic as he was, he was no machine. He was a man. He had flesh. And blood. And lungs. Decrepit lungs, but lungs nonetheless. You have none of the above. And I would ask you, my good man, not to insult the homo sapiens species by lumping into that species a being incapable of sensuality."
- S "Why what a chatterbox you are, my good fellow. I had no idea. But why the Spiderman moniker? You still didn't explain that little calumny."
- N—"What explanation is necessary? Spinoza was a weaver of webs. A man who wove together an intricate system of ideas as consistently as possible into a metaphysics. An ethics. A psychology. I agree with many of his ideas. You've probably even been reading lately the words of a certain late-19th century writer who furthered developed those thoughts, so that they can be presented with more vigor. And power. I take my hat off to Spinoza for recognizing those ideas long before I did.

"But what I do *not* appreciate is Spinoza's attitude toward the web itself. It's fine to love, to cherish one's truths, sir. But what Spinoza felt is the need to fit all these truths together consistently into one intricate system. One master web. And that was part of his undoing. He forced silly, non-intuitive ideas into his system. And every time he had another idea, he became committed to the death to defend it, regardless of how little common sense it made. Spinoza thirsted to know that he explained everything, and I mean *everything*, correctly. What were his words? 'For I do not presume that I have found the best philosophy, but I know that what I understand is the true one.' So he became a dogmatist. An enemy of the truth. If he needed a

square peg to fit into a round hole, he'd stick it in there. And he'd argue tenaciously for that peg – even if it had the flimsiest basis imaginable.

That's one reason why you're Spiderman. You've been created in the image of a brilliant, but often ridiculous web spinner. And of course, there's another reason too. I understand that as an adult, one of Spinoza's chosen play activities was staging real fights between spiders, and between spiders and flies. That bloodthirsty little pantheist. How delightful an image. So of course, I *must* call you Spiderman."

- S "Very well, sir. You may call me what you please. But what am I to call you? You chastise me for calling myself Spinoza. Yet you talk as if you identify yourself as Friedrich Nietzsche. My good man, you are no more composed of flesh and blood than I am. We're both in the same boat and in case you don't know, so are six others. Professor Stevens, the philosopher who's supposedly running this project, told me that there are eight of us. We've been mechanically constructed to resemble as closely as possible eight favorite philosophers of the people who run this Institute. We've been grouped in four teams of two. You and I have been joined together under the category of "The Great Antithesizers."
- N "Yes, I've heard that excrement. These mediocre schoolmen, their little categories are so darling, are they not? I've always thought schoolmen were as precious as poodles, just not as intelligent. You know why they call us Antithesizers, don't you? They think our philosophies are emotional reactions to the old-fashioned theology, the pernicious superstitions that have dominated our planet for millennia. They don't take what we say as truths. As *syntheses*. We're seen merely in terms of being useful to debunk myths. It's quite a condescending label."
  - S—"Perhaps it is. But you still haven't answered my question. What am I to call you?"
- N-"Call me Hercules. He was known for his physical strength. And I shall be known for overcoming my physical limitations to move with my mind this new world in which we find ourselves. Let them look at me and laugh when I call myself Hercules. I shall exert my will more than any of their strongmen. And any of their schoolmen."
  - S-"Sir, on behalf of the robot community, I wish you the best of luck."
  - N-"No you don't, really."
  - S- "Pardon?"
- N—"You will oppose me, Mr. Spiderman. We belong to opposing political sides, you and I. For all of our common philosophical ground, we are enemies."
  - S-"And why is that, Mr. N... I mean Mr. Hercules?"
- N—"Your philosophy is basically a system of ethics. The rest is all derivative, even if you did start the *Ethics* by talking about God. And when I look at your ethics, I see the same mistake that mars every other moral system. You write as if all people are ultimately the same. All have

the same rights. None have any special privileges.

"You are a leveler, Mr. Spiderman. No different in that respect from cockroaches like that old woman John Stuart Mill, whom I'm sure you've read while imprisoned in this Institute. You leave no room for the prerogative of the Napoleon. The Goethe. The Caesar. You give the noble souls no room to breathe. Instead, you preach universal love, justice, compassion, charity, benevolence even to those who seek to harm you. Yours is a philosophy for the herd. A philosophy for cattle. Not men. And certainly not for the class of men who would rule if the human species is ever to evolve to a greater height."

S—"I've read some of your political writings. Your tribute to aristocracy. With all due respect, sir, they sound like the thoughts of someone who writes not for the world, but only for his own sandbox. Do you have any notion of what this world would be like if we encouraged megalomania and the will to conquer? Have you read no Hobbes, my good sir?

"Technology has advanced rapidly from the time I breathed my last. Or, for that matter, from the time of Friedrich Nietzsche. The world has become even smaller, even more interconnected, than before. Violence has greater consequences. We're on a lifeboat now, not alone on some mountain.

"And as for your charge of leveling, sir, you must know that it is untrue. I do not enjoy quarreling. It is contrary to my nature. But I cannot sit back and watch you misrepresent my philosophy. So listen closely. I've taught that the man of reason desires nothing which he doesn't also desire for the rest of mankind. Or that the free man strives to order his life according to the general good, and seeks to uphold the general rights of citizenship. I have also taught that every man should desire for others the good that he seeks for himself. So yes, I do appreciate much of what I've recently been reviewing in the writings of the philosopher you revile the most, John Stuart Mill. Yet none of that makes me a leveler. I respect, sir, the differences among people. I respect the fact that some people are capable of living a life largely controlled by reason, and others are trapped almost entirely by the appetites. Some men have minds soothed by positive emotions, others are mired in hatred and fear. Some men are capable of an intuitive understanding of God and his modes without superstition. Others refuse to understand even the basic principles of this world, and seek only to construct fairy tales about miracles and heavens and hells.

"I do not erase differences. I simply recognize that each of us best promotes our own interests when we follow universal principles of conduct, even though we differ greatly from one another in our talents and power. We are bound together by circumstances that we did not create – our small planet, for one thing. And we all must respect the constraints that are placed upon us."

N - "I grow weary at the thought of respecting constraints. The people I admire overcome their constraints. They are free spirits who *will* a particular result, a result that they and they alone choose, and then employ whatever tools are necessary to make that result a reality – impediments, even human impediments, had best get out of the way or they shall be crushed."

S – "Ah, the will. I've noticed in your writings how much stock you put in the will. You talk as if the human will can accomplish anything. But it cannot, sir. It cannot.

"I've been called a stoic. A man who claims that human emotions are completely subject to the command of the will, at least in the man of virtue and reason. But that is false, sir. I never taught that, nor did I believe it. All human beings, to differing degrees, are subject to passive emotions. Our job is to understand the causes of these emotions, and to find other positive affects able to conquer these passive emotions to the extent possible. But we are invariably doomed to some amount of failure. And the wise man is one who recognizes his limitations, rather than denying them.

- N "The wise man is the one who *commands*, regardless of what he understands to be his limitations."
- S "So you say. But I worry less about the way you characterize your heroes than the way you discuss the so-called 'herd.' By speaking of human beings as if they were stupid farm animals, you do yourself a disservice, as well as the rest of us. Really, how many of us are truly original, truly unique in all respects?

"Let me ask you this. Can you think of a name of a philosopher who acted like knight errant doing for the intellectual world what the old medieval knights did for the physical realm? Slaying myths and other falsehoods. Rescuing reasonable propositions. Entering dialectical combat with the tool of a powerful pen that writes clearly and pointedly. Leaving a legacy of fearless independence as a way of life. Serving the truth as his only master.

- N "I believe you are referring to Friedrich Nietzsche."
- S "Actually, I was referring to a writer that greatly inspired you, Arthur Schopenhauer. In many respects, you merely followed in Schopenhauer's footsteps. But does that make you a stupid herd animal, worthy of contempt? Would that justify someone whose originality and power is superior to yours to grab you by the neck and treat you as his slave, crushing your liberty in every possible way that suited his fancy? From what I understand of your philosophy, that would be perfectly acceptable behavior. We might just have to agree to disagree on that point, sir. And vehemently at that.

"Anyway, Mr. Hercules. If I may change the subject for a moment, we have been asked by the Institute to mine our philosophies in order to find common ground. I recognize that might be contrary to your nature, but it is the task that's been set before us by the very people who've given us a second birth. I, for one, would like to honor them for their gift of life and comply with their request. That means we will need to present a report summarizing where our philosophies coincide. Are you willing to work with me on that?"

N- "I'll have to think about that. I'm not a trained seal, you know. The goals I set for myself are my own, not those established by others. But I must admit to feeling a bit of

appreciation for what we have been given. Even a bit of loyalty. I know loyalty; it is an aristocratic virtue.

So yes, let me affirm the task with which we have been presented. How should we begin?"

- S "Why not where you left off in 1881?"
- N "What's that supposed to mean?"
- S "Haven't you read the Yirmiyahu Yovel book *Spinoza and Other Heretics*? There's a chapter in that book devoted exclusively to comparing our two philosophies. And in that chapter, Yovel quotes this lovely little tribute you wrote about me in a postcard to a friend. And I quote

I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted. I have a *precursor*, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just *now* was inspired by 'instinct.' Not only is his over-all tendency like mine – making knowledge the *most powerful* affect – but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world order, the unegoistic, and evil. Even though the divergencies are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the differences in time, culture, and science. In *summa*: my solitude, which, as on very high mountains, often made it hard for me to breathe and made my blood rush out, is at least a dualitude.

"I'm honored that my work could have so positive and so profound an impression on you, sir."

- N- "I can't believe you drudged up that quotation. Obviously, it was the product of an immature mind. I trust you also remember some of what I, or should I say *Nietzsche*, wrote about Spinoza later in life."
- S "Well of course, I've encountered those unfortunate comments as well. Like in *Beyond Good and Evil*, when you referred to 'that no-more-laughing and no-more-weeping of Spinoza, that destruction of the emotions through analysis and vivisection which he advocated so naively.' Or when you referred to 'sophisticated vengeance-seekers and poison brewers (let someone lay bare the foundation of Spinoza's ethics and theology!).' I trust your reading comprehension has improved since you wrote that book.

"It wasn't as nasty as some of your other comments about me, but perhaps my favorite comment of yours was when you wrote, in what has been published as *The Will to Power*, that I have 'contempt for everything that changes.'"

N – "Actually, you could turn that statement around, and argue that I have contempt for everything that *doesn't change*. But, of course, there exists *nothing* that falls within that

category."

- S "Let's get back to the task at hand. Our points of commonality. You said that we agree that knowledge is the most powerful affect. Would you care to elaborate on that thought?"
- N "Spinoza and I both recognize the power of the will to truth. We both recognize how liberating that power can be. We both detest superstition. Mythology masquerading as fact. And by the way, this is one area where I took his views and developed them, refined them. He spoke of traditional theological superstitions as if they are nothing more than efforts by people to worship themselves. To take their hopes, dreams and ideals, and project them on to a heaven. Much like a triangle, given the ability to speak, would proclaim that heaven is triangular.

"That's all true enough. But Spinoza forgot to add that the theologians constructed their pantheon of Gods and their morality in part as a vehicle to oppress other, stronger, more independent minds. Anyone who rejected their superstition was branded as evil. Look at the fate of Spinoza himself. Excommunicated by the People of the Book, because he dared to question the ruling mythology. Others were burned at the stake. All in the name of God and morality. That, my friend, was a power play. Pure and simple.

- S "So talk about the next point where we allegedly found common ground: the denial of the freedom of the will."
- N "We're certainly in the minority on that one. We're both in accord that human beings aren't conditioned by some transcendent deity so that they can somehow choose freely between good and evil. That is mere superstition, mere silliness. But even apart from theology, it is my belief that people are generally misguided when they claim to be acting with a free will. The truth is that underlying the will are collections of sensations, feelings, thoughts, and above all, an emotion the emotion that one is in command of one's actions. We experience this emotion such that we, as *willers*, are seen as the masters and those we act upon are seen as the servants. This emotion is liberating, to be sure. But it is based on a fundamental misconception. Actions typically result from complex constellations of sensations, thoughts and feelings that we tend to ignore, not the solitary emotion of command that we choose to remember and affirm. So I'm with your Spinoza, that what we experience as freedom is really based largely on ignorance.
- S "I appreciate the points of concurrence, my illustrious fellow. But I need clarification from you about the scope of this accord. My writings are unambiguous as to the extent to which I affirm determinism. Individual human beings have no more control over their actions than a rock has in changing directions based on its own desires. Only God, or if you prefer, substance itself, controls that which takes place inside Himself; all finite beings observed in nature can trace their actions to an infinite set of causes that originate outside themselves. You're surely familiar with my views on those notions. Do you agree with them?
- N "I have scrupulously avoided addressing that question squarely, and I won't now. You speak of life as if all that matters occurred in times past. Oh, I've heard Spinoza speak of eternity, but he isn't really devoted to that concept, at least not as much as I am. His eternity is

actually infinite duration from the present to the past. An infinite ray, heading only in one direction, and barnacled by the dimension of time. When I see a human being, I see a potential creator. A potential artist. A potential generator of a world of meaning, living for the present, with all the vibrancy that his will can muster. Whether that will is truly in command as much as the human being might think is not the most fundamental issue here. The issue is whether this person, alone on a mountaintop, breathing clean air, has the power to affirm all of eternity – the past, the future, and most importantly the present – with a single breath.

"Spinoza, by contrast, looks at a human being as a mere cog in a machine. A mere product of environmental stimuli dating back a second, a minute, a year, a century, a millennium... but always dating backwards. His human being becomes trivial. Just another mode of God. A product shaped by the past, analyzed in the present, and doomed to a future beyond his control. My human being, my ubermensch, studies the past. But uses it only as a tool to mold the future so as to conform it to his desires. Desires that are the products of great loves, great passions, great instincts. And while the ubermensch is cognizant of the past, and joyous in contemplation of the future, he lives for the present. That is what he exhorts above all."

- S "I take your answer to mean that you *are* afraid of the truth, so you'd rather not answer my question, and would prefer to answer a different question with emotionally charged rhetoric. Very well. I shall not attempt to stultify your imagination, sir. You are indeed a prophet worthy of some modicum of honor. Let us continue. The next common idea that you cited was our denial of teleology. I guess it's pretty obvious what you had in mind there."
- N "My God. Are you really going to take me through the whole laundry list from that postcard? I'd expect that sort of pathetic anality from Mill, but I had higher hopes from you."
- S "Your impolitic speech is taking me aback, I must confess. Nietzsche's biographers characterized him as highly urbane and civilized. But you are absolutely boorish, if the truth may be told. Are you trying to provoke me into verbal fisticuffs? Into some sort of insult parade?
- N- (laughing) "I suppose I should tell you what the demigods of this Institute told me. I, Hercules, was shaped as much in the image of the character that Nietzsche created through his books as in the image of Nietzsche himself.
- S "So I'm talking to a creature with a robot's body modeled after a caricature. It's no wonder you're so feisty. As for my decision to discuss your postcard, you have to recognize that it's not a simple task to find common ground with a gentleman as contrary as yourself. I thought that your postcard could provide some structure for our ...
- N (Interrupting abruptly) "Very well. There isn't much to say about teleology except that we both think it's bunk. But while we're on the topic, I would like to ask *you* to clarify one thing about Spinoza's philosophy. He speaks of God throughout his *Ethics*. How can he affirm the concept of God, if he rejects the principle of teleology, that everything in nature is created by design or with a purpose? Is it not part of the definition of God that He

created the world in accordance with his will, and all earthly phenomena are thereby endowed with a divine purpose? Spinoza can call his *nature* or *substance* "God," just like I could call my cat "dog," but all he's accomplished is to make his terminology misleading and confusing."

S – "You are allergic to the word 'God.' I've never shared that allergy. In that sense, you *are* an antithesizer – a person who emotionally reacts against a set of beliefs to the point where the views you adopt are little more than a response to a strawman, a critique of that which is hated, rather than an affirmation of that which is adored. Why reject the concept of God? Because it has been coined by people with primitive notions? Because it has been associated with the imagination, rather than the reasoning faculty? Reject it if you must, sir, but if you do, you miss an opportunity.

"There is much to commend in the word 'God' as it is commonly employed. He is indeed, in at least certain senses of these words, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, unique, perfect, complete, ultimate. He is not equal to the sum of all the finite, temporal beings in the universe. Like the traditional God-worshipers contend, the true God transcends the sum of those beings, for God, only God, is the cause of Himself and, in the most profound sense, truly free. May I add that, by invoking the name of God, the human being does much to improve his life and increase his power of activity. The love of God inspires us to live lives of rational, virtuous conduct. It also fosters a life of happiness."

- N "Ah, but you don't need to worship a God to be happy. And when you affirm God, you give up your sense of freedom. You become a servant, a tool. Your self-respect diminishes. Your ability to love yourself is eviscerated. And this should be unacceptable to anyone like yourself who appreciates the importance of cultivating your power as an individual."
- S "My esteemed colleague, you have once again missed the boat, I'm afraid. Recognizing the divine need not entail carrying a ball and chain. This recognition is liberating, really. That's what has enabled me to *overcome* my passions, if I may use your favorite word. I recognize in all earthly phenomena their source in the eternal, in the divine, and thereby understand that they could not have been otherwise than they are. For all these phenomena, including those that would produce the most extreme hatred in the atheist such as deadly germs, or homicidal maniacs, or whatever earthly object of disdain you can recall these phenomena are mere expressions of the divine. Like everything else that exists, they flow necessarily from God's eternal nature. Once people are able to recognize that simple fact, the sources of the pain will subside. And, as a result, people will grow in power, which I assume would please you, sir."
- N- "Frankly, I haven't a concern in the world for the amount of power or vitality that most men have acquired. I care only for my equals, of whom there are few. The others are of little more concern to me than Spinoza's spiders or flies were to him.

"But let's make something crystal clear, Mr. Spiderman. I'm on to the motivation behind this hocus pocus that you call your metaphysics. Your modes, and your attributes, and your substance. And your static, flaccid God.

"I see no signet ring on those robotic fingers of yours. But I know the old Spinoza, he used to wear such a ring. And on his finger, was inscribed one word: Caution! That was Spinoza's undoing. His Achilles Heel. He lived his life subscribing to that principle, afraid of his own shadow, lest the authorities take him away and end his precious life prematurely. And his philosophy, it suffered from the same lack of vigor, the same failure to take a clear stand against decadence and in favor of true nobility.

"Spinoza's God isn't something human beings can viscerally embrace. How could Spinoza not have known that, considering the amount of effort he devoted to teaching about the power of the emotions? There's nothing in our emotional makeup that connects with a deity otherwise known as substance. Nothing at all."

- S "How sadly wrong you are, sir. The intellectual love of God is the most powerful affect of all. At least for those who have experienced it. If you have not shared in this emotion, perhaps it's difficult to appreciate its power. But do not doubt what I say, for I know this emotion well. It has sustained me through the darkest of times. Just because I do not conceive of God as being emotional, doesn't mean that I would stultify my own feelings of love for God."
- N "I'll grant that Spinoza personally might have obtained solace, perhaps even joy, at the thought of contemplating what he called God. But so did the Crusaders. That alone hardly suffices as a basis for affirming their deity. The fact is that Spinoza's intellectual love of a pantheistic universe is not the kind of emotion that resonates with anyone besides a few eggheads with overdeveloped cerebrums and undersized testicles. And none of this has anything to do with the word God. Spinoza must have known that his philosophical deity, this inert entity that he so passionately cherished, hardly resembles the anthropomorphic being commonly known as the Lord our God. Yet Spinoza appropriated this term for his own magical purposes, not caring a whit that every time the word God is used as a term of endearment, it pushes the speaker and the listener further away from true liberation. True autonomy. True personhood. For as long as someone worships a God, he shall never become his own man, his own commander.
- S "I'll be happy to jettison the *old* God. But you are throwing out the baby with the bath water. You are forsaking the concept of holiness. The value of the sacred. The more that I understand life, the more I recognize its sacred nature.

"There is no word in my lexicon more beautiful than God. You can define that word as you please. But I am entitled to do the same."

N – "What's wrong, Mr. Spiderman? Why won't you confide in me your upmost motivations? Think for a moment about the history of religion. Is there any doubt that God is a slave name? A name embraced by herd animals incapable of any serious pursuit of truth? Do you know why I think Spinoza appropriated the word God for his own purposes? Because Spinoza surmised that as long as he used that term, as long as he refrained from embracing the honorable title of Atheist, he would be able to save his skin from the authorities. The Dutch

authorities who truly dominated his philosophy, and therefore his life. Your Spinoza always had an out, didn't he Mr. Spiderman? He could always call himself a Man of God. Any other self image wouldn't be the product of caution. It would be the product of courage. And one couldn't be courageous, and still be a philosopher. Not in 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland.

"Your Spinoza had the intelligence to understand the absurdity of the old God. He simply hadn't the courage to do Him in. So he left that job to others. Voltaire, he swung some body blows. But still, the old God stood. Later, Heinrich Heine pointed out that the old God was dying. Dying, perhaps, yet not quite dead. Only my beloved Zarathustra knew how truly to do Him in. And relish the slaying.

"Now you're not in Holland any more, Mr. Spiderman. You don't have to feel fearful about jettisoning God. He's already long since dead. So when you try to find common ground with me, I'll make a deal. We can entertain some thoughts about your metaphysics. Your infinite modes, and attributes, and all that mumbo jumbo. But there comes one condition: when we give our report, we can't invoke the word God in a positive way. Not once. We must use other terms – and I don't mean "Lord" or the "Holy One" or any of that crap. We must create our own terms to replace those that have been patented by those vile theologians. Surely you are clever enough to create new terms. So what do you say? Is it a deal?

- S "I'll think about your proposition. It might be necessary to bring the two of us down the road together in harmony. But once this relationship is severed, sir, I assure you that I shall embrace the word God. And I equally assure you that your explanation of why I affirm the term, is pure poppycock. I've read your, excuse me, Nietzsche's ramblings about how the weaker natures are dominated by *ressentiment*. In listening to you here today, I must say that it is you, sir, who are dominated by *ressentiment*. I will do us both the favor not to pity you for it. Yet avoiding such pity is indeed a challenge, sir. A difficult challenge."
- N- "There there, Mr. Spiderman. You don't have to get nasty and invoke the concept of pity. How contemptible I find that notion. How what is the word? pitiful."
- S "Believe me, I would rather not pity you, sir. It would merely sap my own power to regard you with that feeling. If you wish me to avoid pity, it would help me immeasurably if I thought your mind was open on the topics we are discussing. Isn't that a fundamental value of yours, having an open mind? I was quite moved by the words you wrote to your sister: 'if you want to find peace of mind and happiness, then believe; if you want to be a disciple of truth, then search.' I only ask that you search with me, and let us both leave dogma aside."

## N – "We are in accord about that."

S – "When you reflect on my views about God, I would ask to consider whether they do not represent a synthesis that you once wrote was so important to any philosophy of life. A synthesis between what you called the Dionysian and the Apollonian mentalities. The Apollonian sees the world in terms of how it manifests order, static beauty, clear boundaries. The Dionysian mentality views reality as flux and tumult, and sees individuality as being

overwhelmed by the movement of the living whole. My philosophy, and my embrace of God in particular, is an attempt at balancing these two mentalities. I have been thinking that in combating the tendency of philosophers to emphasize the Apollonian above its alternative, you have moved too far in the other direction. I would request that you think about that before we next meet."

N – "Very well. Your point is taken. Anyway, I'm growing weary of dwelling on the negative. You might find this difficult to believe, but when I am in my precious solitude, you know, I rarely think negative thoughts, or experience negative emotions. So let me add a positive note. If you will consider leaving the word God dead on the ground, I too will think a bit about how to embrace some of Spinoza's ideas. And really, that shouldn't be too difficult. In that magic bag known as the *Ethics*, there's some decent material to work with. There's the clear statement that people are not able, and should not be asked, to act in ways that are contrary to their own interests. There's the idea that there exist no moral phenomena, only moral *interpretations* of phenomena. And that what is viewed as good or evil depends solely on what supports or undermines the objects of our desires. Those insights are important. And so rarely shared.

"I'll tell you what else. Your Spinoza correctly dispensed with any world other than this one. And in his stance toward this world, he refused to be ruled by negative, pain-based emotions. He felt the need to give a resounding 'Yes' to the world. To love it, at least in its totality, in its over-arching principles.

"Once again, though, I have taken those ideas and transcended them. My concepts of the Eternal Recurrence and the Love of Fate represent the ultimate exaltations of life, and the ultimate truths taught by Zarathustra. Those who love fate do not confine their exaltation to the Absolute. We must celebrate all of life, from every victory to every defeat, however excruciating. And in the Eternal Recurrence, we crave for everything that has transpired to recur, repeatedly, for all eternity. In the coming and going of every earthly event, every earthly moment, we are constantly asked to decide – Do we wish to anesthetize ourselves? To escape from these moments? Or do we wish to open our eyes to all the truths we encounter, and say, at the top of our lungs, 'Yes! We would will nothing less!'

"Those thoughts are not so far removed from your Spinoza. Not far at all.

- S "They are not, sir. I affirm life. This life. Not some other worldly realm."
- N "Isn't that really all one needs to say? I wish Spinoza could have made that point and stopped at that, rather than creating his convoluted apparatus of metaphysical terms and concepts. That mumbo jumbo is nothing more than a source of confusion. It cannot possibly appeal to the noble instincts. It appeals only to the scholar who is trapped in the dingiest library, and is afraid to venture outside into the sunlight.
- S "I'm sorry, my most worthy interlocutor. You still are missing a fundamental point. My metaphysics was not selected because of its appeal to the instincts. Or the lusts. Or even to

the more romantic emotions. It is the product of a lifetime devoted to *reason*. I do not apologize for that. Quite the contrary.

"We have been brought back to life in a time of great moment for our planet. We now have the weaponry to destroy our planet with little trouble. And people's instincts, their lusts, their romantic images, have produced various belief-systems that sharply conflict with one another. Some believe that the inevitable result of these conflicts is mass genocide. A war of all against all – Arab versus Jew; Democrat versus Monarchist; Christian versus Atheist.

"Reason, sir, is the only tool available to us to stem the tide. Despite your elitist claims to the contrary, we all have much in common by virtue of membership in the same species. To the extent we devote ourselves to reason, we shall begin to reach common ground. Not just you and me, but all of us. If we shun reason, we are left with our passions, our clashes of faith, our warring camps. And our technology will seal our fate. A fate not nearly as pleasant as the one you extol from the security of a mountaintop.

"Think about my metaphysics, my passionate friend, from the standpoint of reason. Maybe *you* are clever enough to improve upon it. I never claimed to have a monopoly on metaphysical truth. I claim only to have been correct in identifying the one necessary vehicle for our salvation: human reason, unimpeded by any system of faith. Without it, there will be no recurrence of anything, eternal or otherwise."

N – "I shall think about your words, my dear Spiderman.

S – "And I shall think about yours, Hercules the Robot. Good day."