

UNDERSTANDING THE GEOMETRIC METHOD:
HYPOTHETICAL DIALECTIC IN PROCLUS, ABRAHAM COHEN HERRERA AND
BARUCH D. SPINOZA

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*"We are only geometricians of matter; the Greeks were first of all,
geometricians in their apprenticeship to virtue."*¹

Parallels and affinities between Spinoza's philosophy and the philosophy of Platonism include central characteristics of Spinoza's metaphysics and theory of knowledge, as well as decisive aspects of the geometric method. Spinoza's treatment of the highest principle and source of being and knowledge, the *substantia infinita*, his arguments for its singularity, existence, infinity, eternity, causality, its transcendence and immanence, its relationship to the attributes and finite modes, in particular to human individuals, echo essential features of treatment of these problems in Platonic and Platonist philosophy. His understanding of the paradoxical unity of freedom and necessity in the highest principle, and the aim of their reconciliation in the finite intellect by means of the ascent of cognition, culminating in *scientia intuitiva* and the intellectual love of God, is clearly prefigured in Plotinus and his model Plato, as well as in Renaissance Platonists such as Marsilio Ficino, Leone Ebreo (Judah Abrabanel or Abravanel, ca. 1460-1523), and Abraham Cohen Herrera. Spinoza owned the Spanish version of Judah Abravanel's *Dialogues on Love*² and attended the Talmud Torah school in the same synagogue in Amsterdam of which Abraham Cohen Herrera was a prominent member at the close of his adventurous life.³ An abridged Hebrew translation of Herrera's work *Puerta del cielo* was prepared and published by Spinoza's teacher, Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, and later became the basis for Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's Latin translation, the *Kabbala denudata*⁴, and source of what became known as the "Christian Kaballah".

I. Affinities and Parallels between Spinoza and Platonist Philosophy

¹ Simone Weil, *The Iliad or Poem of Force* (Wallingford, Penn.: Pendle Hill, 1956), 15.

² On Judah Abrabanel, cf. Hughes, Aaron, "Judah Abrabanel", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/abrabanel/>.

³ On Abraham Cohen Herrera's life and writings cf. Gerold Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala im Barock. Leben und Werk des Abraham Cohen de Herrera. Studia Judaica. Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Bd. 58 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2011). Necker was able, with the help of a key document from the Dubrovnik city archive, to account for Herrera's whereabouts for a period of time between his release from captivity under Elizabeth I in England and his arrival in Amsterdam, where he became a member of the same synagogue in which Spinoza was to receive his early education.

⁴ Cf. scanned version of the original by Bill Heidrick, Tom. I Sluzbaci, Tom. II Francofvrti 1684, <http://www.billheidrick.com/Orpd/KRKD/>.

Interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy remains fundamentally disputed today, due partly to uncritical assimilation of stereotypes tracing to Spinoza's earliest reception and historiographical assessment⁵, partly to the modern inclination to view Spinoza's philosophy primarily in relation to his immediate predecessors, Descartes and Hobbes, but also to the difficult question of Spinoza's sources. The situation is further complicated by varying assessment of what is termed Spinoza's naturalism. In its earliest reception, Spinoza's "naturalised" perspective, that is, his decision to view human beings and their actions not as a "kingdom within a kingdom", but as themselves a "part of nature", whose being and behaviour follow from Nature or God with the same necessity as it follows from the nature of a triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles, scandalized the predominantly theistic mindset of his contemporaries and caused Spinoza to be condemned as a materialist, determinist, atheist, and pantheist. Today, on the other hand, Spinoza's "fully naturalized psychology" and his "fully naturalized ethics" have led him to be embraced as a truly modern thinker, not only by Spinoza-scholars, but by experts from fields beyond the boundaries of philosophical research, in particular by neuroscientists, cognitive scientists and psychologists, who see in Spinoza's naturalistic approach to psychology, emotion, decision-making and social life an affirmation of insights from contemporary empirical research.⁶ Changing attitudes towards Spinoza's "naturalised" perspective have nevertheless failed to clarify inherent difficulties of interpretation, which result at least in part from a lack of understanding for Platonist elements in Spinoza's thought.

To see Spinoza's philosophy as historically or otherwise related to 'Platonism' is to challenge a prevailing viewpoint according to which Spinoza's naturalism and "monism" are fundamentally opposed to the "realism" and "dualism" of Platonic thought, which is seen as positing a separate reality of ideas and irreconcilable opposition of the intelligible and sensible realms. The situation, however, is more complex. As in Plato, Spinoza's naturalism is not opposed to his intellectualism, particularly as regards the relationship of human nature and human virtue. Rather, the two form a paradoxical unity, which is closely related to the

⁵ In the introduction to her book, *Alle origini del panteismo. Genesi dell' Ethica di Spinoza e delle sue forme di argomentazione*,⁵ Giuseppa Saccaro del Buffa describes the earliest reception of Spinoza's philosophy, from François Bernier (*Abregé de la philosophie de Gassendi*, 1674) and Pierre Bayle, originator of the term "Spinozism" (*Dictionnaire historique et critique* 1697-98, revised and expanded 1702), to Johann Georg Wachter (*Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb, oder die von dem heutigen Judenthumb und dessen Geheimen Kabbala Vergötterte Welt*, 1699), Joseph Franz Buddeus (*Dissertation philodophica de Spinozismo ante Spinozam* 1701) und Jacob Brucker (*Historia critica philosophiae* 1742), and the controversies it incited in the transition from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. The debate concerning Spinoza and the "problem of Spinoza" appears thereby as a decisive stimulus in the evolution of the "new vision of the historical development of the ideas and systems of philosophy." (15) Cf. also Saccaro del Buffa, "Il 'Rinascimento' nell'interpretazione degli storici della filosofia tra Cinquecento e Seicento. La nuova periodizzazione storica alla luce di teologia, filosofia, scienza," in *Natura e storia. Saggi di filosofia* a cura di G. Coccoli, C. Marrone, F. Ratto, G. Santese (Il Sestante: Ripatransone, 1996) 55-98. Saccaro del Buffa's valuable and painstaking study of the sources of Spinoza's method of argumentation is somewhat attenuated by the concept of pantheism which it adopts, understood as "total and immediate identification" of individual things with God. Saccaro del Buffa's aim is to show how Spinoza gradually distances himself from Neoplatonism as transmitted through Herrera and the Kabbala, moving eventually towards a "radical pantheism". She traces the genesis of Spinoza's concept of God from an "initial nucleus" reconstructed from the letters and the *Korte Verhandlung*, detailing what she sees as Spinoza's "gradual overcoming of the original hierarchical structure of Neoplatonic-Cabbalistic inspiration" and development of "a more unitary conception": "quella panteistica, dove l'immanenza di Dio nelle cose diventa identificazione totale e immediata, mentre la diversificazione tra i vari attributi e i vari modi, non più costituenti dei dislivelli ontologici, non è che l'esplicazione delle simultanee infinite possibilità dell'infinita natura della sostanza unica" (cf. *Alle origini del panteismo* 207, 478, and n. 1, with references to individual passages where "characteristic aspects of Spinoza's pantheism" have been pointed out).

⁶ Cf. eg. A. Damasio, *Der Spinoza-Effekt. Wie Gefühle bestimmen unser Leben* (Berlin: Ullstein Taschenbuchverlag 2005).

paradoxical unity of naturalism and intellectualism found the Socratic paradoxes and further developed in Plato's dialogues.⁷

Stereotypical generalisations applied by Spinoza's earliest critics, from Pierre Bayle (*Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 1st ed. 1695-1697) onward, have tended to obscure the complex derivation of Spinoza's central philosophical ideas. From the earliest period of Spinoza-interpretation, Spinoza's thoroughgoing adherence to the unity of nature or reality, thinking and extended substance, and the universality of the laws by which it is governed, were seen as a threat to Christian and Jewish theism. The consequences of a thoroughgoing unity of nature included eternity and homogeneity of substance, rejection of the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, and denial of free will, leading to charges of atheism, determinism, fatalism, pantheism. Refutation of these stereotypical views requires proper understanding of the unity of naturalism and intellectualism which Spinoza shares with Platonist and Neoplatonist philosophy, and which is rooted in their characteristic understanding of the immanence and transcendence of the highest principle, the relationship of infinite and finite, and the paradoxical unity of freedom and necessity.

Discussion of Platonist influences in Spinoza's thought is not new. Brehier noted "an external resemblance" between "Spinozism" and "the Neo-Platonic theosophies that have flourished throughout history."⁸ Similarly, Dunin-Borkowski, in his book *Der junge De Spinoza*, elaborated on a range of Platonist and Platonist-influenced sources which played a role in Spinoza's philosophical development.⁹ Carl Gebhardt saw in Spinoza's first attempt at a formulation of his system in the *Short Treatise* evidence for the influence of three primary "currents of philosophy": Scholastic philosophy, as embodied primarily in Thomas of Aquinas and Suárez, the Platonism of the Renaissance and the philosophy of Descartes.¹⁰ In "Spinoza und der Platonismus," Gebhardt outlines what he sees as the fundamental characteristics of Spinoza's Platonism, in particular with regard to Spinoza's reception of the Renaissance Jewish Platonist and poet Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel), noting important similarities to his *Dialogues of Love*, one of the few explicitly Platonic sources present in Spinoza's library at his death.¹¹

⁷ Cf. M.E. Zovko, "Naturalism and Intellectualism in Plato and Spinoza", in: *Freiheit und Determinismus*, ed. A. Arndt, J. Zovko (Erlangen: Wehrhahn 2012).

⁸ *The History of Philosophy. The Seventeenth Century*, trans. W. Baskin (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), 160. Cited in Alan Hart, *Spinoza's Ethics. Part I and II. A Platonic Commentary*, (Leiden: Brill 1983), 3.

⁹ Stanislaus von Dunin-Borkowski S.J., *Der junge De Spinoza. Leben und Werdegang im Lichte der Weltphilosophie* (Münster: Achendorrsche Buchhandlung 1910)

¹⁰ In his preface to Baruch de Spinoza, *Kurze Abhandlung von Gott, dem Menschen und seinem Glück* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1965, unveränderter Nachdruck der 4. Ausg. von 1922), XVII., cf. IV-XXVIII, XVII-XXIV. Cf. Carl Gebhardt, "Spinoza und der Platonismus," *Chronicon Spinozanum* (1) 1921, 178-234.

¹¹ Cf. below n. 13. Gebhardt discusses four *loci* in Spinoza's works which may be seen as confronting related views presented by Ebreo in his *Dialoghi d'Amore* (186-187). Judah Abravanel's *Dialogues of Love* were found in Spinoza's library at his death in the Spanish edition translated by Abraham Cohen Herrera: *Leon Abrabanel dialogos de amor* ("Spinoza und der Platonismus," op. cit., cf. Adri Offenburger, "Spinoza's library. The story of a reconstruction." *Quaerendo*, Volume 3, Number 4, 1973, pp. 309-321(13), 319; cf. also "Biblioteca di Spinoza," *Archivio di testi per la storia dello Spinozismo*, Istituto per il Lessico Intellettuale Europeo e Storia delle Idee - Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche 2007.

http://www.iliesi.cnr.it/perl/pagina_xhtml.pl?scelta=201&parl=biblioteca_spinoza&operatore=uguale&par2=si) On Leone Ebreo/Judah Abrabanel, his *Dialoghi* and the history of its editions, as well as on their influence on Spinoza, cf. *Amor intellectualis? Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel) and the intelligibility of love*, Joao Jose Miranda Vila-Cha (Braga: Publicações de Faculdade de Filosofia de Braga, 2006; Diss. Boston College, 1999); especially "The Special Case: Baruch de Spinoza," *ibid.* 1001-1031. Wolfson, for his part, finds that, "On the whole, Leo Hebraeus' influence upon Spinoza has been unduly exaggerated. The passages from the *Dialoghi d'Amore* examined by us in connection with Spinoza have all proved to be philosophic commonplaces. Nor has

As opposed to Allison¹², Gebhardt sees both the *Ethics* and the *Short Treatise* as expressing, by their fundamental mood and approach, the same religious longing, the same mystic characteristic found in representatives of Renaissance Platonism like Leone Ebreo. Spinoza's affinity to Ebreo Gebhardt sees as firmly rooted in the doctrine of the types of knowledge which Spinoza also shares with the Platonic tradition, i.e. his threefold division of types of knowledge into empirical, rational and intuitive knowledge, descended from the division of the stages of knowledge first outlined in Plato's Analogy of the Line and transmitted by Aristotle and Plato's successors in the Platonic tradition from Ancient times to the Renaissance, including Plotinus, Proclus, Nicolas of Cusa.¹³ Spinoza's division of the stages of knowledge, according to Gebhardt, "separates his philosophy fundamentally from rationalism", insofar it "elevated intuitive knowledge above discursive," (the equivalent to the Platonic and Neoplatonic concept of *noesis*). Gebhardt interprets in this vein *scientia intuitiva* as a kind of "mystical vision, the *feeling and enjoyment of things, the immediate unification with the things themselves*," to the highest form of knowledge.¹⁴

it been possible to establish any direct literary relationship between these passages and Spinoza." H.A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza. Tracing the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, Vols. I, II. (Cambridge MA/London: Harvard Univ. Press 1934, 1962²) II 277, n.5.

¹² Henry A. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza. An Introduction*, revised ed. (New Haven/London: Yale Univ. Press, 1987).

¹³ cf. Plato, *Republic* 509d-511e, and M.-É. Zovko, "The Way Up and the Way Back is the Same. The Ascent of Cognition in Plato's Analogies of the Sun, the Line and the Cave and the Path Intelligence Takes," in: John Dillon, Marie-Élise Zovko. *Platonism and Forms of Intelligence* (Berlin: Academy Verlag 2008), 313-341; 322-330; as well as J. and M.E. Zovko, "The Metaphysical Character of Philosophy", in: *Metaphysics* (Rijeka: InTech 2012), "Excursus: The Metaphysical Character of Philosophy according to Plato's Line," 16ff. Wolfson, in Ch. XVI of *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, "Stages of Knowledge," II, 131-163, enumerates historical models of three- and fourfold divisions of the stages of knowledge from the original paradigmata in Plato and Aristotle, to models deriving from them from ancient times to the Renaissance: "Fourfold classifications of knowledge occur in Plato. Aristotle enumerates various classifications, all of which, however, are reducible to the threefold classification of Spinoza. Threefold classifications of knowledges [sic] seem to have been in vogue among the Jews, Moslems, and Christians alike. Thus also Algazali speaks of three kinds of knowledge: reason, religion, and sense-perception. Among Christian authors threefold classifications occur in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Maximus Confessor, Erigena, Gilbert, Hugo of St. Victor, Alanus (or Nicolaus of Amiens), Richard of St. Victor, and Nicolaus of Cusa." (ibid. II, 133 with corresponding *loci*, n. 1-11). Wolfson finds most striking in Spinoza's own classifications his "inconsistency in the use of the terms 'three' and 'four'" in referring to his classification of stages or types of knowledge (131, cf. 132 and notes). Wolfson believes that the explanation can be found in Saadia, whose classification he believes can be shown to be the direct literary model "upon which Spinoza formed his own classification" (132). Spinoza's three- and fourfold classifications are ultimately based on an original fourfold division of knowledge, whose origins are certainly Platonic. The majority of the authors Wolfson names are Platonists or thinkers influenced by Platonist philosophy.

¹⁴ Gebhardt, "Einleitung," *Kurze Abhandlung*, XXIV. Abravanel and Spinoza share the ideal of the philosopher as the "erotic" *par excellence*, whose original model is to be found in the Socrates of Plato's *Symposium* and the speech of Diotima. The pinnacle of knowledge and the primary object of knowledge from which all knowledge and virtue flow is for Spinoza the knowledge of God. The *scientia intuitiva* is participation in the knowledge with which God knows himself and the love with which God loves himself (*amor Dei intellectualis*). It is thus an expression of the "ultimate goal of human life" and "the achievement of blessedness." Allison sees this as constituting "Spinoza's purely philosophical alternative to the beatific version," and the language associated with this ultimate goal as providing "much of the religious, perhaps even mystical, tone some have found" in Spinoza's philosophy (*Spinoza. An Introduction* 34). Allison, however, is at pains to correct this impression, since in his view its ground is to be sought "in Spinoza's uncompromising rationalism rather than his religious sensitivity." (ibid. 35) Allison contends that: "[a]lthough much of his language is reminiscent of the religious tradition, [Spinoza's] overall point of view is diametrically opposed to that of this tradition." Allison's opposition of religious sensitivity and rationalism is based, however, on a misunderstanding of philosophical mysticism, in particular of its Platonist variants. Whereas, namely, a "God who functions as the first principle of knowledge and who is the object of a purely intellectual love" may appear to have "very little in common with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," insofar as it lacks the anthropomorphic features which make the latter in some

One obstacle to adequate understanding of Spinoza's affinities to Plato and Platonist philosophy has been Spinoza's own criticism of what he understood to be the Platonic theory of ideas, his explicit rejection of the "speculations of the Aristotelians and Platonists," and his disregard for the "Autoritas Platonis".¹⁵ As Gebhardt showed, however, it was not the works of Plato himself – which Spinoza in all likelihood did not know in the original – to which Spinoza's criticism referred. Nor does his rejection of Plato and Aristotle rest on confrontation with their original works. Gebhardt rightfully esteems the importance of Spinoza's Platonism as a question not merely of some "arbitrary influence upon his system", but of the very "substance and value of his teaching."¹⁶ He fails, however, to provide

respects more accessible to the imagination, it is nevertheless unjustified to assume that religious sensitivity about a God conceived according rational exigencies of the concept of a highest principle and source of being and knowledge is impossible. The striving by means of discursive and noetic thought to transcend both to a vision of the unconditional beginning of thought is a fundamental characteristic of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy and is intimately connected with *eros*, love, as the desire for goodness, beauty, truth which constitute together our striving for immortality and union with the source of our being and knowledge. The human need to conceive God as "a personal being who created humanity in his own image and manifests a providential concern for each individual, as well as for the race as a whole" (ibid.) is an expression of only one, albeit irreducible, aspect of religious experience. Spinoza's understanding of God as "a being absolutely infinite, i.e. a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence," (*Ethics* I, D6), gives expression to an equally legitimate and equally irreducible, "rationally inspired" form of religious sensitivity, whose roots trace to Plato, Plotinus, and other Christian and pagan thinkers of the Platonic tradition. The tradition of philosophical mysticism is grounded in a rational view of the metaphysical and theoretical foundation of human knowledge and of its inherent limitations, which corresponds in many respects to orthodox theism's requirements for rational explication of the God of revelation, the main difference being that the orthodox theist chooses to let stand inconsistencies between the anthropomorphic view of the Deity and rational explication of the ultimate principle, whilst Spinoza, in keeping with his "geometric standpoint", is forced to reject these.

¹⁵ Gebhardt cites Spinoza's fundamental rejection of the theory of ideas in the *Short Treatise* I, 6 § 7, whereby he admits that Spinoza must have been conscious of the fact that his criticism was directed more toward (unspecified) "Neoplatonists" than against Plato himself ("Spinoza und der Platonismus" 183). Spinoza may have been thinking of Plato's theory of ideas when he criticized those philosophers "who wish to explain natural objects through mere representational images", and attributed the origin of "transcendental terms" such as being, thing, and "universal notions", such as man, horse, dog, to the limited ability of the human body and mind to form distinct images of a number of different things at the same time, i.e. to a psychological requirement for production of general notions (*Ethics* II, 40). In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza rejects the *speculations of the Aristotelians and Platonists* as unsuitable to interpretation of Holy Scripture ("not content to rave with the Greeks themselves, they want to make the prophets rave also"), and in refers unapprovingly to the *commenta Aristotelis aut Platonis* which one wants to impose on an interpretation of the Bible (*Theological-Political Treatise*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy eds. J. Israel, M. Silverthorne Cambridge Univ. Press 2007; cf. Preface, Ch. XIII). In his correspondence with Hugo Boxel (Ep. LVI, Ende 1674), Spinoza sums up his opinion of Plato in the sentence: "*Non multum apud me autoritas Platonis, Aristotelis ac Socratis.*" (cited in Gebhardt 183 and in P. O. Kristeller, "Stoic and Neoplatonic Sources of Spinoza's *Ethics*," *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 5, Nr. 1 (1984), 1-15; also in: *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* Roma, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1956-1996, IV, 354, n. 51). The *Ethics*, nonetheless, incorporates an understanding of the role of ideas which manifests distinct similarities to Platonic and Platonist views. For example, the relationship of God to the *idea* which constitutes the actual being of the *mens humana* is said to be analogous to the relationship of the idea which constitutes the being of the *mens humana* to the object of that idea, the body, forming *de facto* therewith something like the Platonic "chain of being" extending from the *ens a se* or *causa sui* to individuals and their bodies, and based on a relationship of *idea* and *ideatum* which is clearly not psychologically, but ontologically generated.

¹⁶ Cf. Gebhardt, "Spinoza und der Platonismus," 183, 184.. A. Hart attempted to close the book on what to Popkin and others saw as a "striking analogy between Spinoza's philosophy and Neoplatonism." Admitting that "it is doubtless true that Spinoza knew the writings of Plotinus, neo-Platonists, and Ebreo," Hart nevertheless sees no reason to conclude that Spinoza's metaphysics or ethics is neo-Platonic (*Spinoza's Ethics*, 5). He counts rather the neo-Platonic interpretation Spinoza among types of interpretation like the "Cartesian, Aristotelian..., Maimonidean, Hegelian, or positivistic Spinoza," which "more clearly indicate the philosophical commitment of the writer, or of the times, than they reflect Spinoza's thought" (1, 3). Hart's criticism of the weaknesses of a

sufficient analysis of Platonist influences in Spinoza's central philosophical convictions and arguments, due in part to the inadequacies of his exposition of Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy.

Perhaps the most comprehensive overview of Spinoza's ties to Platonist and Neoplatonist thought is provided by Paul Oskar Kristeller in "Stoic and Neoplatonic Sources of Spinoza's *Ethics*".¹⁷ Along with the "strong Stoic flavour" of parts III and IV of the *Ethics*, Kristeller notes "a distinct Neoplatonic element in Spinoza's doctrine of the highest end of life" as described in part V. Despite the absence of Plato and the Neoplatonists, except for Abravanel, from Spinoza's library, and despite Spinoza's rare mention of Plato and his "critical or even polemical" tone when he does mention Plato or the Platonists, it is undeniable in Kristeller's view "that there are many Platonizing concepts in the thought of Spinoza". Kristeller argues that, "Even if [Spinoza] never read Plato, Plotinus or Proclus, he could not help knowing many of their thoughts through other indirect sources..." Among significant points of similarity, "The concept of God as a cause of himself... is ultimately traceable to Proclus, as was noticed long ago, and the same is true of the famous distinction between God as *natura naturans* and the sum of all modi as *natura naturata*", terms that "occur in the medieval Latin versions of Aristotle and Averroes", whose immediate source, however, Kristeller conjectures to be a passage from Thomas Aquinas. "[T]he concept itself," nonetheless, "is no doubt of Neoplatonic origin", as is "the distinction between the various forms of knowledge as it appears repeatedly in the *Ethics* and ... also in the early treatise 'On the Improvement of the Intellect.'"¹⁸ Besides these important similarities, Kristeller points to the striking affinity of Spinoza's concepts of eternity and freedom to those of Plotinus, and suggests Augustine and Boethius as possible mediators.¹⁹ Spinoza's "links to the Neoplatonic tradition", finally, "become even clearer" in Kristeller's estimate, when one considers the exposition of his doctrine of the Love of God in Part V of the *Ethics*.²⁰

One source of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought whose affinity to the *Ethics* was still recognizable to Spinoza's contemporaries was the *kabbalah*. This source is particularly significant as regards its Neoplatonic, philosophical interpretation, but also the hypothesis of its Platonic extraction.²¹ R. Popkin, in his article "Spinoza, Neoplatonic Kabbalist?,"²²

Neoplatonic interpretation of Spinoza is based, however, on a superficial understanding of Plotinus and of Ebreo's *Dialogues*, and the summary he gives of Platonist views on certain philosophical problems is seriously impaired by misunderstandings he uncritically adopts from the authors of secondary sources he cites (So Copleston [ibid. 3], Gebhardt [4, 5], Bréhier [3, 5], Wolfson [5]). It is telling that despite his rejection of a Neoplatonist interpretation of Spinoza, Hart nevertheless believes he can provide "an aid to the perplexed" by comparison of the *Ethics* "with themes and insights found in Plato's later dialogues" (ix, 1).

¹⁷"Stoic and Neoplatonic Sources of Spinoza's *Ethics*," in: *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* 333ff.

¹⁸ ibid. 334f.

¹⁹ ibid. 336f.

²⁰ ibid. 337.

²¹ L. Baeck attempted to show that the *Sefer Yetzirah* or *Book of Creation*, the earliest source of Jewish esoteric thought, is an adaptation of certain central ideas of Proclus, cf. *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*, vol. 70 (1926) p. 371 - 376; vol. 78 (1934) 448 - 455. (One of the sources of Spinoza's division of the stages of knowledge, Saadia ben Joseph, b. Egypt 882/892, d. Baghdad 942, Jewish philosopher and exegete, also wrote a commentary on the *Sefer Yetzirah* [Cf. above n. 13].) G. Scholem, found Baeck's hypothesis "that the author wished to reproduce in Hebrew garb Proclus's doctrine of Henads" unconvincing, forced and unsubstantiated. Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, Schocken Books, 1971), 368; and Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, tr. A. Arkush, Princeton, 1987, 29, n. 46. "Nonetheless," as Merlan notes, "Scholem admits that *Sefer Yetzirah* has been influenced by Greek sources," and finds that if we extend the designation "Proclus" as presumed source to include Proclus' likeminded compatriots in Neoplatonic thought, "then Baeck's hypothesis appears to be essentially correct." P. Merlan, "Zur Zahlenlehre im Platonismus (Neuplatonismus) und im *Sefer Yezira*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. III, 2, 1965, 167-179; and

considers the possibility whether "Spinoza was a secret Kabbalist, who drew his philosophical system from the mystical one of the Kabbalists."²³ Spinoza's statement in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*,²⁴ that he had "read and known certain Kabbalistic triflers, whose insanity provokes my unceasing astonishment," appears to confute this view, but at the same time confirms Spinoza's familiarity with kabbalist sources.

Gebhardt's opposition of Spinoza's reception of Abravanel to any "youthful reminiscences of a kabbalistic-neoplatonic emanantism" oversimplifies the complex historical and contextual circumstances of a possible assimilation of Platonic ideas through the kabbala. In contrast to Gebhardt, who saw Spinoza in decided opposition to the irrationalistic core of kabbalist belief,²⁵ Popkin cites an early source, Jacques Basnage, who describes Spinoza as representing "a third Opinion" regarding Creation, one which he "borrowed from the Rabbis of the Nation, who were known to him," and not from "the *Chineses*, or the Heathen Philosophers." By "Rabbis" Basnage means the "Cabalists," whom in his view Spinoza only failed to cite because he "was so extremely jealous of the immortality of his Name, that he designed to pass for an Original..." Whereas the "Cabalists" veiled themselves in an "obscure and Mystical Language" and produced their "Dreams and Visions as Explications of Scripture, and spiritual Conjectures rather than as decisions of Faith," Spinoza reduced their opinion of Creation to a System and "endeavoured to prove it" – making himself thereby in Basnage's eyes even more reprehensible, and arousing at the same time the hatred of the Jews, "who rose up against him," with the charge of Atheism.²⁶

In the period immediately following Spinoza's death, the writings of the Kabbalah became more widely accessible in a work called the *Kabbala denudata*, an anthology of texts in Latin translation by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, whose aim was to provide the reader not versed in Hebrew access to this source of mystical speculation. The *Kabbala denudata*, published in the same year as the posthumous edition of Spinoza's works, contained as appendix to vol. I an abridged version of the posthumous Hebrew translation by Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, published in 1655,²⁷ of Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Puerta del cielo* and *Casa de*

181].

²² In: L. Goodmann, ed., *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 387-409.

²³ *ibid.* 388.

²⁴ *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. IX,; quoted in Popkin 388.

²⁵ Spinoza, according to Gebhardt, "[hat sich]... von jeher gegen den in die absurden Geheimnisse der Qaballa verkrochenen Mythos entschieden, indem er den Logos über diesen entstellten Mythos erhob..." "Spinoza und der Platonismus," 181, cf. 180f.

²⁶ *The History of the Jews from Jesus Christ to the Present Time: Containing their Antiquities, their Religion, their Rites, the Dispersion of the Ten Tribes in the East, and the Persecutions this Nation has suffer'd in the West. Being a Supplement and Continuation of the History of Josephus* (London, 1708); cf. Popkin, 387 and n. 1. The accusation that Spinoza was "the first to reduce atheism to a system," appears also in Bayle's article "Spinoza," in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (cf. Popkin, 389, and note 10). As Popkin notes (*ibid.* note 11), Henry More offered the same "diagnosis" of Spinoza's opinions (Letter to Robert Boyle, December 4 [1670?], in *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle* [London, 1772] 6.514; cited by Popkin, 389 n. 11).

²⁷ On Aboab's Hebrew translations of Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la Divinidad* – "less translations than radical interpretations" – and their role in reception of Herrera's work, cf. K. Krabbenhoft, "Structure and Meaning of Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*," in *Studia Rosenthalia* 16 [1982] 1-20; 2: Krabbenhoft credits M. Roest and M. Kayserling with being the first to notice the discrepancy. Cf. G. Scholem, *Das Buch [Ša'ar haš-šamayim] oder die Pforte des Himmels in welchem die kabbalistischen Lehren philosophisch dargestellt und mit der Platonischen Philosophie verglichen werden*, von Rabbi Abraham cohen Herrera dem Portugiesen Aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt v. Fr. Häußermann. Mit einer Einl. v. G. Scholem (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1974). The most important discrepancies with regard to sources of Spinoza's Platonism are summed up by Krabbenhoft: "A comparison of the eight books of *Ša'ar ha-Shamayim* with the ten books of *Puerta del cielo* shows very clearly that Aboab paid insufficient attention to the major concerns of Herrera's cabala: namely, the logical and metaphysical implications of the emanation of Adam Kadmon and the use of 'theologia negativa,' to use

la divinidad. While it is unlikely that Aboab's version of Herrera's works would have aroused Spinoza's interest, insofar as it radically abridges Herrera's text and in the process controverts Herrera's original aim of providing a philosophical illumination of Lurianic kabbala, the inclusion of excerpts from Aboab's translation in the *Kabbalah denudata* highlights Herrera's importance as a source of kabbala and its interpretation in the first half of the 17th century.²⁸

H.A. Wolfson points to Hebrew and Latin literature as the main sources and to Hebrew literature as *the* primary source of Spinoza's knowledge of philosophy. As Wolfson notes, the Hebrew, Latin and Arabic sources available (in Hebrew and Latin) to Spinoza represented a common philosophical tradition, "based upon Greek philosophy, at the centre of which stood Aristotle":

[t]he same Greek terminology lay behind the Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin terminology, and the same scientific and philosophic conceptions formed the intellectual background for all those who philosophized in Arabic, Hebrew, or Latin. The three philosophic literatures were in fact one philosophy expressed in different languages, translatable almost literally into one another."²⁹

Wolfson sees it as "... quite certain that Hebrew literature" provided "the main stock upon which all the other philosophic knowledge which he later acquired was grafted." In Wolfson's estimate, Spinoza became "familiar with Hebrew philosophic literature before he began to read philosophy in Latin", Latin merely supplying him "with a new vocabulary for old ideas", whereas Hebrew sources comprised "the matrix in which the general outline of ideas was formed."³⁰ Wolfson is certainly correct in asserting that Jewish sources held a privileged position in Spinoza's philosophical development. His affirmation of Spinoza's near exclusive dependence on literature written in Hebrew seems exaggerated, however, in light of the fact that the Sephardic Jewish community in Amsterdam was founded and led by Jews educated at the Universities of Spain, for whom the language of letters was Latin or Spanish.³¹ It

Nicholas of Cusa's term, to describe the transcendent Deity." (ibid.) Knorr von Rosenroth's Latin translation of Aboab's Hebrew version further abridged and compromised the text, whereby "Most seriously prejudiced by these omissions are precisely the key points of Lurianic doctrine that Herrera was most anxious to reconcile with Platonic tradition" ibid. 2f. For a description in Hebrew of the translations cf. N. Yosha, *Myth and Metaphor: Abraham Cohen Herrera's Philosophic Interpretation of Lurianic Kabbalah*, (hebr.), Jerusalem 1994, S. 51ff. Cited in Necker, *Humanistische Kabbalah im Barock*, 10f., n. 41.

²⁸ Cf. Popkin 391, 392. Herrera aimed, as Popkin sees it, to formulate "the message of Lurianic Kabbalism in the Neoplatonic idiom".

²⁹ Wolfson I, 10.

³⁰ cf. ibid. 12, 13; cf. x, 8f.

³¹ Among these, Menasseh ben Israel, a teacher of Spinoza in the Sephardic Jewish community, who is thought to have studied Lurianic kabbalah under Abraham Cohen Herrera, figured prominently. Menasseh wrote most of his works in Latin or Spanish. "A gifted orator and well versed in secular knowledge and culture" and also a prominent Bible scholar, Menasseh became member of the Rabbinical council at the age of 18 at the synagogue where Spinoza received his early education. Cf. N. Middel, "Menasseh ben Israel", http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/111879/jewish/Menasseh-Ben-Israel.htm : "His fame as a scholar and as an expert on all matters of learning and science spread far beyond Holland. Some of the greatest scholars of the world sought his friendship and advice. The Queen of Sweden, Christina (the daughter of Gustaf Adolf), the painter Rembrandt and the statesman and philosopher Hugo Grotius, were among his non-Jewish correspondents and friends." Menasseh's wife was granddaughter of Isaac Abarbanel, father of Judah Abravanel (Leone Ebreo), author of the Platonist *Dialoghi d'amore*. Cf. On Menasseh ben Israel: Henry Méchoulan ; Gérard Nahon, eds., *Menasseh Ben Israel. The Hope of Israel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987. Cecil Roth, *A Life of Manasseh Ben Israel, Rabbi, Printer, and Diplomat* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America 1934). In the first half of the 17th century, marranos and conversos from educated circles of society in Madrid made their way to Amsterdam, where they became prominent members of the Sephardic community. Due to the composition of the Jewish community, "Spanish and Portuguese remained the official tongues of the community, and were everywhere heard about the streets. Books in those languages poured in an

should not be forgotten that Spinoza's mother tongue was Spanish, and that he, like most other members of the Sephardic community learned Hebrew as a second language. Sources like Herrera and Abravanel or works by Spinoza's teacher Menasseh ben Israel, would have been readily accessible to Spinoza in the Spanish original or (in was case with Abravanel) in Spanish translation.

Spinoza would have had access to sources like Herrera and Abravanel, as well as other indirect sources of Platonist philosophy, scholastic and Hebrew, through a variety of channels: through his teachers at the school of the Talmud Torah congregation in Amsterdam,³² later through his secular teacher and associate, former Jesuit Franciskus van den Enden, through friends and associates from the circles in which he moved as a young man before and after the pronouncement of the *cherem* excluding him from the synagogue and from association with the Jewish community in which he had been born and raised. Regardless of what lines of reception may be established, fundamental similarities between Spinoza and the philosophy of Platonism, among them, the "metaphysical" foundation of his method, point to a deep affinity with Platonist thought.³³

incessant stream out of the printing presses – literary, liturgical, historical, philosophical, ethical, scientific." Cf. C. Roth, *A History of the Marranos*. Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1932, 246-247; and Ch. IX "The Dutch Jerusalem", 236ff.

³² The Portuguese Jewish Talmud Torah congregation was established by merger of the three Amsterdam congregations: Beth Jacob, Neve Schalom and Beth Israel, in 1639. Rabbi Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, formerly of Beth Israel, was Spinoza's teacher in the four lower classes which were the only ones he attended. Rabbi Saul Levi Mortera (or Morteira), from Beth Jacob, became head rabbi of the Talmud Torah community and principal of the school; he "was required to preach three times a month and give advanced lessons to students" (55). Rabbi Mennaseh Ben Israel, from Neve Schalom, was required to preach on one Shabbat each month (55). The school itself grew out of the Talmud Torah society, established in 1616 by the Beth Jacob and Neve Schalom congregations (61; on the structure and levels of instruction in which Spinoza participated, which were conducted in Spanish and Hebrew, cf. 61-65). Contrary to former opinion, Spinoza attended only the four lower classes of the Talmud Torah school, and was never enrolled in the fifth and highest class of the Talmud Torah school or in the advanced grades of the Ets Chaim society, devoted to formation for the rabbinate. After his father Michael Spinoza's death in 1649 and until his excommunication in 1654, Baruch assumed joint responsibility with his brother Gabriel for the family's trading firm. As Nadler convincingly argues, Spinoza nevertheless in all probability for a time attended one of the *yeshivot* or advanced study groups conducted respectively by Morteira, Menasseh ben Israel and Aboab (cf. 89f., 93). Literary allusions in a text by the poet De Barrios suggest that Spinoza was a disciple of Morteira's and a participant in his *yeshiva*. The differing personalities and views of Aboab and Morteira may have each exerted their own formative influence on Spinoza. In the 1630's, Rabbi Aboab, then a *chacham* of the Beth Israel community and like Spinoza's family a *marrano*, with "a mystical bent...and a deep interest in the kabbala," and Mortera, an Ashkenazi Jew, "inclined toward a rationalistic and philosophical approach to religion," became involved in a conflict regarding the question of the ultimate reward and punishment which awaited the crypto-Jews and conversos still living in Spain and Portugal in the world-to-come. The dispute was decided in Mortera's favour after arbitration was requested from the preeminent Jewish community in Venice, whose leaders intervened directly with Aboab (ibid. 52, 53f). Mennaseh's written works may also have played a formative role in Spinoza's thought (99-100). On the *cherem* and the probable multiple reasons for it being pronounced against Spinoza by the *ma'amad*, on the nature of Spinoza's ties and the role played by his association with other "heretics" of the Amsterdam Jewish congregation like Juan de Prado and Daniel Ribera, with his secular teacher of Latin and letters, ex-Jesuit and radical democrat Franciskus Van den Enden, with the Amsterdam Collegiants; as well as the possible influence of figures like Uriel da Costa and Isaac La Peyrère on Spinoza's views, see Nadler's balanced account in: *Spinoza. A Life* (Cambridge Univ. Press 1999), 103-114, 155-6 (Van den Enden); 116-154; 66-74 (da Costa); 99 (La Peyrère); 135-6, 141-144 (Prado); 140-141 (Collegiants), 143-5 (Ribera).

³³ For a resumé of the complex and pervasive transmission of Platonic thought in Western Europe from ancient times to the late medieval period, which proceeded by manifold scholarly, literary, artistic and popular routes, cf. L. Siorvanes, *Proclus. Neoplatonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1996), 32f. : "Western Europe felt waves of different kinds of Platonism. There was the Latin Middle Platonism from Cicero, Calcidius and other commentators on Plato's *Timaeus*. Plotinian metaphysics influenced Augustine and through him

Wolfson gives only scant attention to Herrera. Notwithstanding, Herrera's works represent one of the most significant repositories of Platonist thought and references to Platonism available to Spinoza in the course of his philosophical development. After Johann Georg Wachter's, *Der Spinozismus im Judenthumb, oder die von dem heutigen Judenthumb und dessen Geheimen Kabbala Vergötterte Welt, an Mose Germano sonst Johann Peter Speeth, von Augspurg gebürtig, befunden und wiederleget* (Amsterdam 1699), among modern Spinoza scholars Dunin-Bukowski was the first to consider Herrera an important influence on Spinoza: "Zumal die fünf ersten Abhandlungen [der *Himmelspforte*] setzen einige Hauptpunkte des späteren Spinozismus so lichtvoll auseinander, daß nur blinde Voreingenommenheit diese Quelle Spinozas übersehen kann."³⁴ In the following, some evidence for reception by Spinoza of a concept of dialectic found in Herrera and his Platonist sources will be considered.

II. Herrera's Platonist concept of dialectic

Many attempts have been made to solve the riddle of the geometric method. Wolfson gives an overview of historical precedents.³⁵ Among these, Euclid's *Elements* figures prominently, at least insofar as "the external form of this literary method" is concerned. Wolfson describes this as consisting of the following elements:

Roman Catholic theology. Porphyry added his distinct evaluation of Aristotle, whom he harmonised within Neo-Platonism. In the sixth century, Boethius, a Roman consul at the time of the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy, wrote the *Consolation of Philosophy* while in prison awaiting his final sentence. Written both in prose and verse, the *Consolation* is full of Neo-Platonism. It became the most popular work on the human predicament in medieval Europe. King Alfred the Great, Chaucer and Robert Grosseteste wrote commentaries and translations of it. Boethius also composed Latin translations of the main texts of the NeoPlatonic curriculum, notably Porphyry's logic of the *Isagoge* (some argue that Boethius had also knowledge of Ammonius' texts) and treatises on the role of mathematics as a bridge between physics and metaphysics, which became the manuals of the medieval universities. The two other influential Neo-Platonic treatises in the Middle Ages were the pseudo-Dionysian corpus and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de Causis*. The *Liber* was rendered in Latin by Gerard of Cremona. From Duns Scotus to William of Ockham, debate on causality and being was fuelled by the Neo-Platonic compilation *Liber de Causis*. ... "The pseudo-Dionysian corpus, along with other Neo-Platonic material, was translated and popularised by John Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century. 'Dionysius' became a popular saint when, in the ninth century, the abbot of St. Denis promulgated his (mistaken) identification with the third-century St Denis of Paris. Thus the legend of Denis was revised, and spread rapidly through Europe and England. The Abbey of St. Denis ... originally founded by the Merovingian King Dagobert I (seventh century)" was rebuilt by the abbot Suger in the 11th century, "in a manner befitting its elevated status": "The result was the first Gothic cathedral, built according to the Neo-Platonic divine philosophy and mathematical proportions expounded by Eriugena." (47) "The 'Dionysian' corpus also became the main source of inspiration of

Christian mystics. The concept of a transcendent God and the procession from One to Three, and Many, had been central to Proclus' philosophy. With these insights before them, Christian luminaries such as Albert the Great, the 'Universal Doctor' (thirteenth century), Thomas Aquinas, Berenger of Tours, Bernard Clairvaux, John the Cross, Meister Eckhart and Thomas à Kempis sought to find the essence of God. In poetry, Dante's Divine Comedy follows the Neo-Platonic scheme of 'return', while its concluding vision of the Light Eternal is inspired by Neo-Platonism. Elsewhere, memories of the (Neo-)Platonic Ideal of love and beauty surfaced in the lyrics of the troubadours. Eriugena was largely responsible for the dissemination of the occult kind of Neo-Platonism. Mixed with Jewish Kabbalism, it diffused through Islamic Spain and reached all those who looked for direct links between man, nature and God, particularly the heretics. In the twelfth century, a focus of this Neo-Platonic and Hermetic stream was the Court of the German Emperor Frederick II at the cultural crossroads of Palermo in Italy." (33) "Grosseteste is also an example of the less recognised channel of Neo-Platonic influence: its Aristotelianism. The prime source was Porphyry's work on the *Categories*. ... Moreover, Neo-Platonists ... established the scholastic form of teaching, formal lectures by presentation in standard questions and answers and seminars with standard texts."

³⁴ S. Dunin-Borkowski, *Der junge De Spinoza*, 2d ed. (Münster: Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933) 188-189 (in Allison's view, "The classic study of the influences on Spinoza", Allison 228, n. 1).

³⁵ Wolfson I, 39ff.

First, the primary truths which form the premises in the demonstrati are grouped together and placed apart from the demonstrations as the first principles upon which the demonstrations rest, and...divided into definitions, postulates, and axioms or common notions. Second, that which is ...to be demonstrated, that is, the conclusion...is summarized apart from the demonstration in the form of a proposition. Third, the demonstration ...reasons from the known, that is, the first principles, to the unknown, that is, the conclusion. Fourth, supplementary deductions, explanations and propositions are given in the form of corollaries, scholia, and lemmas.³⁶

Wolfson goes on to provide examples of partial application of Euclid's geometrical method to philosophy by means of "reduction of philosophical views to the form of propositions", which may or may not be followed by demonstrations, among them Porphyry's *Sententiae ad Intelligibilia Ducentes* (*Ἀφορμαὶ πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ*) and Proclus' *Institutio Theologica* (*Στοιχείωσις θεολογική*). Similar application of geometric method is "to be found in almost every mediaeval compendium of philosophy", eg. in Duns Scotus' *Theoremata* and Burgersdijck's *Institutiones Logicae*, while an "imitation of this partial form of the geometrical method is also to be discerned in Bruno, when he summarizes the conclusions of his doctrine and simplicity of God's being in a series of propositions." Maimonides' *Moreh Nebukim*, by summing up Aristotle's physical and metaphysical principles in the form of twenty-six propositions at the beginning of Part II, Wolfson discerns as belonging "to the same type of literary composition", to which he reckons also the "hypothetic-disjunctive" use of syllogism in Averroes and Crescas, concluding with "the equivalent of the phrase *quod erat demonstrandum* with which Euclid concludes his geometrical demonstrations", a phrase "also used by Avicenna at the conclusion of some of his own syllogistic arguments." Averroes' restatement of Aristotle's arguments, "written in the form of geometrical demonstrations" "against the existence of a circularly moving infinite body in *De Caelo*, I, 5-7", represents a further "partial application of the geometric method to philosophy."³⁷ Other Euclidean imitations include the grouping together of first principles apart from demonstrations in the form of propositions, "sometimes even called by the Euclidian terms, definitions, postulates, and axioms or common notions" in Maimonides, Bahya Ibin Pakuda, Alanus de Insulus or Nicolaus of Amiens.³⁸

Thus, Wolfson notes, it is "not without precedent...that one of Descartes' objectors suggested to him to present his *Meditationes* in the geometrical form" and that "Descartes himself made an attempt at it". Nevertheless, he finds, "Mere imitation of his predecessors cannot...explain [Spinoza's] use of the geometrical method."³⁹ Many interpreters agree in regarding Spinoza's application of geometrical method, first partially attempted in the *Short Treatise* and later in full in the *Principia Philosophiae Cartesiana* and the *Ethics*, as "a logical consequence of his mathematical way of looking at things", but fail to determine more closely in what that manner of looking at things consists. Spinoza's earliest biographer P. Bayle believed that he had a "geometrical mind (*l'esprit géomètre*)". Freudenthal goes a step further when he asserts that Spinoza's decision to "style his ...*Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*" was determined by "the inner necessity of his thought (Freudenthal)."⁴⁰ In considering whether "the nature of Spinoza's philosophy demanded that it should be written in the geometrical form," Wolfson compares Spinoza with Descartes. Descartes, he finds, by his use of

³⁶ *ibid.* 39.

³⁷ *ibid.* 40, 41, 42.

³⁸ *ibid.* 42f.

³⁹ *ibid.* 44.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 44f.

geometric method intended "nothing but what Aristotle would call a scientific demonstration." Similarly, he sees Spinoza's "insistence that truth can be attained only by premises which are self-evidently true and by deduction" as "nothing but a repetition of Aristotle's theory that demonstrative reasoning as expressed in any syllogism must start with premises which are 'true, primary, immediate, more known than, prior to, and the cause of the conclusion.'"⁴¹

While Spinoza would certainly have agreed with the necessity of logical consistency and reasoning from self-evident premisses for purposes of scientific demonstration, Wolfson fails to account for the specific character of geometric method in Spinoza, which includes but also transcends the Aristotelian standpoint. If Spinoza's geometric method is not to be reduced to an external literary device or cloak for generally applicable principles of argumentation, if it is to be shown, rather, to be an articulation of the "inner necessity" and specific self-conception of Spinoza's thought, something more is needed. Adequate understanding of geometric method in Spinoza, it is argued here, requires a more complete and profound understanding of its historical precedents, in particular the concept of dialectic in the philosophy of Platonism and in Renaissance humanism. A more complete understanding of Spinoza's idea of geometric method with regard to its Platonic sources, will contribute to a more profound understanding of Spinoza's philosophy as a whole, insofar as it may be shown to be an ontologically grounded corollary of his metaphysics, psychology and ethics, and therewith, of his complete system of thought.

Spinoza's implementation in his *Ethics* of a method which he calls *geometric* has its paradigm ultimately, I believe, in Plato's Analogy of the Line and the understanding of the principle of *analogy* from which the Line proceeds.⁴² The division of the Line and the law of proportion from which the Line derives form the basis for understanding of *dialectic* as *the* method of philosophizing in Plato and his successors in the philosophy of Platonism. The division of the stages of knowledge originally depicted in the Line and the concept of analogy or proportion on which it is based were accessible to Spinoza through a variety of sources, the precise filiation of whose reception by Spinoza will nevertheless remain difficult or impossible to determine with certainty. Abraham Cohen Herrera's works, with their interpretation of Lurianic Kabbala "in a Platonic key"⁴³, their explicit reference to and extensive use of

⁴¹ *ibid.* 46f. and *Analytica Posteriora* I, 2, 71b., 21-22.

⁴² On Spinoza's reception of the Platonic division, and the proportion on which it is based, cf. M.-E. Zovko, "Naturalism and Intellectualism," 37ff.

⁴³ In his article "Lurianic Caballa in a Platonic Key: Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*", A. Altmann depicts "the manner in which Abraham Cohen Herrera tried to reconcile, at varying levels, Lurianic Kabbala with Italian Renaissance Platonism." Herrera "recognized both the possibilities and severe limitations of harmonizing Kabbala in its highly developed form with the *philosophia perennis*," succeeding "best in the relatively simple coordination of the basic structure of the Lurianic system (à la Vital) and the neoplatonic ontology, " whereas "[h]e is less sure and hence inclined toward a variety of options when it comes to specifics such as the triadic pattern of the supernal world above the Sefirot, and especially so when confronting the often bewildering features of the Lurianic cosmogony." Herrera nevertheless "manages to find surprising analogies even for such outspoken mythological elements as the death of the primordial kings, restitution and rebirth." "[C]ompletely missing," on the other hand, "is the messianic orientation and a sense of salvation being imminent" characteristic of Lurianism. Herrera even makes an "effort to impart a neoplatonic significance to Luria's innovative and daring theory of *zimzum*." He "considered Kabbala a divinely revealed and esoterically transmitted body of truths that was independent of rational verification, yet could be comprehended, in large measure, by human understanding," a standpoint Spinoza, who takes self-evidency and adequacy of ideas as the ultimate standard of truth and knowledge of reality, would have rejected. Cf. A. Altmann, "Lurianic Kabbala in a Platonic Key: Abraham Cohen Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo*. *HUCA* 53, 317-355; in: *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung: Studien zur jüdischen Geistesgeschichte*, (TSMJ 2) Tübingen: JCB Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1987, 172-205. N. Yosha, whose 1994 dissertation Necker calls a "milestone in the history of Herrera

Renaissance and earlier Platonist sources, and their humanistic and Platonic understanding of dialectic, represent one proximate source whose influence on Spinoza's thought has yet to be studied in adequate detail.⁴⁴ Proclus, Plotinus, and Porphyry are sources named by Herrera. These and other sources which depend on them may have provided Spinoza with a model for his conception of geometric method.

The works of Judah Abravanel and Abraham Cohen Herrera are a repository and compendium of major themes from Neoplatonic philosophy, composed in or (in the case of Abravanel's *Dialoghi d'Amore*, translated into) Spinoza's native Spanish and forming a part of the legacy of converso and marrano Jews forced, like Spinoza's family, to flee before the Spanish inquisition. Herrera's works, rooted on the one hand in the *Zohar* and Isaac Luria's version of the kabbalah, and in the Neoplatonism of the Italian Renaissance, above all Marsilio Ficinus, with its legacy of Plotinian, Proclean and Iamblichean thought on the other,⁴⁵ comprise an attempt to interpret and explain the enigmatic though "sovereign contemplations of kabbalistic and theological mysticism" using the "humble arguments of human philosophical thought."⁴⁶ The need for the kind of explanation of the kabbalah provided by Herrera in *Gate of Heaven* and *House of Divinity*, is attributed by Herrera partly to the "exalted nature and difficulty of teachings that surpass normal minds little given to abstraction, and are not in agreement with many opinions commonly held today",⁴⁷ in part to the fact that "those of my nation are lacking in the philosophical art...and also deprived of the knowledge of the scholastic theologians who...accurately substantiated and corroborated the truths and mysteries that have been revealed to us." Because the "men of our nation...have no knowledge (or a very confused and superficial one) of the true Hebrew theology and mystical

research", compares Herrera's metaphoric interpretation of Lurianic with the efforts of Renaissance philosophers Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola to employ pagan myths in the service of Christian theology (Necker *Humanistische Kabbala* 12,13).

⁴⁴ An exception is Saccaro di Buffa's study *Alle origine del panteismo* (cf. above n. 5), which attempts a reconstruction of the earliest "sketch" of the *Ethics* from indications in Spinoza's letters, as well as its phases of development to the *Ethics* itself, particularly as regards Spinoza's "reelaboration and development" (11) of his concept of substance and its relationship to the attributes. Cf. ch. 13 "La fonte neoplatonico-cabbalistica degli attributi-sostanze spinoziani", 367-410, with comparison of precedents in Herrera's *Puerta del Cielo* for Spinoza's conception of substance, its unity and infinity, perfection, causality, aseity, eternity, as well as the ontological hierarchy and intermediaries between the ungenerated cause and its products. In contrast to the position argued here, Saccaro di Buffa opposes Spinoza's "pantheistic" concepts of the substance and its attributes to Neoplatonic concepts of the One. As mentioned above, Saccaro di Buffa's detailed comparison and study of the sources suffers from the outset from its characterisation of Spinoza's philosophy as pantheistic, based on what I believe to be a mistaken conception of the immanence and transcendence of substance, i.e. on the relation of the first principle to entirety of being and individual beings of which it is the source and cause. In a similar vein, Saccaro di Buffa emphasizes the importance of humanistic dialectic for Spinoza's concept of geometric method, but sees it in opposition to Euclid. Cf. *ibid.* 12. Though the "rhetorized" form of dialectic propagated by Valla and Agricola appears to have little to do with Euclid, the relationship of Herrera's idea of dialectic and Platonic dialectic remains to be determined. Cf. L. Jardine, "Lorenzo Valla and the Intellectual Origins of Humanist Dialectic" *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 15, nr. 2 (Apr. 1977), 143-164.

⁴⁵ Scholem, 9. Herrera's work "Gate of Heaven", belongs, as Scholem put it, to the tradition of works, "in der die kabbalistische Theosophie mit den Mitteln des Neuplatonismus philosophisch unterbaut oder mindestens verständlich zu machen gesucht wird." (8)

⁴⁶ *Casa de la divinidad* Bk. V, Ch. 9; quote in Krabbenhoft, Intro. to *Gate of Heaven*, xviii, cf. n. 13 stems from N. Yosha, *Mitos u met' aforah: ha-paršanut ha-filosofi šel R. Abraham Cohen Herrera le qabbalat ha-'Ari*. Jerusalem: Y.L. Magnes-Hebrew University, 1994, 109, n. 99. On the existing manuscripts cf. Krabbenhoft, *Gate of Heaven*, xxi ff.

⁴⁷ *Gate of Heaven*, Bk. VII, Ch. 8

tradition," Herrera makes it his aim "to add a philosophical explanation to the kabbalistic one, which would reveal some of the sovereign mysteries in a rational, scientific way."⁴⁸

In Krabbenhoft's view the "key to understanding why Herrera's work made an impact on thinkers like Spinoza, Leibniz, the Cambridge Platonists, and the German Idealists" is to be found in his syncretistic blending of "the rich tradition of Jewish mysticism and the double current of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics."⁴⁹ Necker sees Herrera's approach as a "sophisticated transmission of Jewish culture in the spirit of humanism with particular consideration of the kabbalah."⁵⁰ Herrera's work reflects his familiarity and self-conscious association with the anti-scholastic conception of humanistic dialectic, as well as with "the entire wealth" of Renaissance literature and its sources, including pagan, Christian, Islamic and Jewish philosophers.⁵¹ Among the authorities Herrera lists in Book IV of the *Puerta del cielo*, "in whose line of transmission he places himself", Plato and both ancient and Renaissance Platonists figure prominently.⁵²

The affinity between Herrera and Spinoza is, however, not limited to isolated, individual concepts. While Spinoza would certainly disagree with Herrera's concessions to the authority of the Kabbalah – in spite of, or even on account of, Herrera's attempt to harmonize that tradition with the philosophy of his Platonic/Neoplatonic sources,⁵³ the similarities of the structure of exposition, genealogy of concepts, thematic development of central

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, xix. Quote from Yosha, *Mitos*, 44.

⁴⁹ Krabbenhoft, *Gate of Heaven*, xxiii. Herrera "stood at the crossroads of two specifically early-modern traditions: the metaphorical esoteric system developed by Isaac Luria in the early- to mid-sixteenth century, and the early-modern philosophical syncretism, that is, the process of reconciliation of Dominican, Franciscan and Augustinian theology with pagan, Jewish, and Islamic thought that culminated in the fifteenth century with Ficino and Pico and was carried on in the Counter Reformation humanism of Francesco Patrizi, Giulio Camillo, the Ferrarisenis, and Francisco Suarez, among others" (*ibid.*).

⁵⁰ Cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, 23. The "intellectual current... meant by the concept of humanism in the cultural and historical period of the Renaissance", is descended from the idea of the *studia humanitatis*, the "study and teaching of the classical canon". The original concept of *humanitas* stems from Cicero, and *studia humanitatis* from Renaissance humanist Leonardo Bruni's biography *Cicero novus*. The widening of the concept of humanism from a designation for a cultural and historical period to that of an intellectual movement Necker attributes to J. Burckhardt's book *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (Wien: Phaidon-Verlag 1900) and G. Voigt's *Die Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums oder das erste Jahrhundert des Humanismus* (Berlin 1859), who used the concept humanism to designate "the renewal of ancient culture and the rejection of scholastic instruction". Cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, 28f. and n. 116. Cf. W. Schadewaldt, "Humanitas Romana" (in: H. Temporini and W. Haase, editors, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* I.4, 1973, 47); H. Baron (ed.), *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe* (Leipzig, 1938); *ibid.*, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (London, 1968).

⁵¹ cf. *ibid.* 42f. and n. 187; Cf. G. Saccaro Battisti, "La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano nella *Puerta del Cielo* di Abraham Cohen Herrera", *Italia Judaica. Gli ebrei in Italia tra Rinascimento ed età barocca*, Proceedings of the Conference, Genova 10-15 June 19cf. 84 (Rome 1986) and N. Yosha, "The Impact of Renaissance Writings on 17th Century Kabbalist Herrera", *Academia* 3 (2001).

⁵² Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, 43 and *Gate of Heaven* IV, 112f.

⁵³ Herrera quotes and "finds arguments for kabbalistic truth accurately reflected in" (xii) the works of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Proclus, the *Liber de causis*, *Corpus Hermeticum*, *Poimandres* and "other Neoplatonic texts attributed in Herrera's time to the 'prisci theologi'". Herrera names as his mentor in this conciliatory effort Moses Cordovero, who, as he explains at the beginning of *Gate of Heaven*: "takes from and develops philosophical arguments from Avicenna, R. Moses of Egypt [Maimonides] and his followers, in order persuasively to present and elaborate the kabbalistic truth which teaches as I have done"; and he makes use "of the statements and arguments of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and other theologians and philosophers without debating their efficacy, so that they enjoy the esteem that the most learned and pious men will grant them and, founded on the infallible Truths of the kabbalah or divine reception, embrace another, greater one, the better to illustrate and state them" (Bk. IV, Ch. 6).

philosophical problems, and manner and order of argumentation in the *Ethics* to Herrera's *Gate of Heaven* are striking.⁵⁴

A case in point is Herrera's *Epitome y compendio de la logica o dialectica*, which may have contributed to Spinoza's understanding of geometric method as a "metaphysically grounded method", analogous to what Platonist philosophers and humanists like Herrera understood by the term *dialectic*. Herrera, while not rejecting scholastic and Aristotelian logic, opposes them by equating dialectic with the whole of logic, a characteristic of anti-scholastic currents of medieval and Renaissance humanism.⁵⁵ Herrera saw knowledge of logic/dialectic as indispensable for comprehension of his works *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la divinidad*. Like these, the two logical treatises *Epitome y compendio de la logica o dialectica* and *Libro de diffiniciones*, the only works of Herrera to be published during his lifetime, which appeared together in a single volume, were written in Spanish.⁵⁶ The *Epitome* is an introduction on method. Its aim was to enable Herrera's contemporaries – who, though they have "sufficient understanding and comprehension, lack the art, with which philosophers represent their views on Mathematics, Morality, natural and divine objects, as well as [knowledge of] the Greek and Latin languages, in which they expressed themselves" – needed to penetrate the truths written about in the *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la Divinidad*.⁵⁷ Logic or dialectic is able to represent the "image of divinity...upon which alone our happiness and our blessedness are founded."⁵⁸ This view of logic or dialectic and its bearing on human happiness is remarkably similar to Spinoza's aim of demonstrating the knowledge necessary for the attainment of human happiness *ordine geometrico*. Like Spinoza, Herrera sees the goal of method as attainment of *understanding* (i.e. of truths about reality and its procession from the first principle), and *understanding* as the main condition of human happiness and *blessedness*:

⁵⁴ Herrera's *Gate of Heaven*, and his system as a whole, is structured in the spirit of Neoplatonic cosmology according to a tripartite division. Herrera begins with 1) a consideration of the uncaused and transcendent cause, its "nature and activity", the 'Ein Sof' of the Kabbala, (corresponding in Plato to the idea of the Good, in Plotinus and Proclus to the Good or the One); continues to consideration of 2) the "procession," i.e. "emanation" or "creation" (Hebrew *hitpaštut*, Grk. *prohodos*), and the Lurianic doctrine of *simsum*; proceeding to treatment of 3) the "reversion" and restoration of creation (Heb. *histalqut*, Grk. *epistrophe*). – "including the Lurianic doctrines of *šebirah ha-kelim* (the "shattering of the vessels") and the *tiqqun ha parsufim* ("restoration of the faces")." Like his Platonist predecessors, and like Spinoza, Herrera takes the transcendent cause to be "uncaused, utterly simple, undivided and indivisible, self-consistent and self-sufficient." The possibility of procession is explained by the Lurianic concept of *simsum* as self-limitation or shrinking of the 'Ein Sof to create something like a vacuum or space into which the first plurality can emerge. This first effect, corresponding to the anthropomorphic figure of 'Adam Qadmon, is "what the Platonic philosophers call the mental world, Son of God, and first mind...in which they locate the causative representational unities and ideas to which the supreme unity and unmoving mind correspond in man" (Bk. VIII, Ch. 14) In the second stage of procession 'Adam Qadmon brings forth "further effects out of nothing", the *sefirot* of the kabbalah which Herrera sees as "analogous to Plato's forms or Ideas, and, with some differences, to Aristotle's universals", being "also more or less identical in nature and activity to Proclus's henads" (Krabbenhof, Intro. to *Gate of Heaven* xxiv ff., and n. 26).

⁵⁵ cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, 116ff.; cf. above n. 3, and A. Perreiah, "Humanistic Critiques of Scholastic Dialectic," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Autumn, 1982), 3-22.

⁵⁶ cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala im Barock* 116 and n. 85. In Necker's view, Herrera intended his works to be read in Spanish. The Spanish manuscripts of *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la Divinidad* remained unpublished during Herreras lifetime. Necker considers possible reasons for this and for Herrera's decision, recorded in his will, to have *Puerta del Cielo* and *Casa de la Divinidad* translated into Hebrew (eg. resistance against the promulgation of cabbalistic teachings in a language accessible to non-Jews).

⁵⁷ *Epitome y Compendio de la Logica o Dialectica*, fol. 6v-7r [p. 12]f., and Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala* 117.

⁵⁸ Saccaro del Buffa, ed. *Epitome*, Prologo, fol. 6r. and 6v. [p. 11f.]: "es la ymagen de la divinidad...en quien solamente consiste nuestra felicidad y bienauêturança." Cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, 116f. and n. 86.

Es concorde sentencia de los mas eminentes y famosos Theologos y Philosophos que la felicidad y bienaventurança de las almas intelectuales e inteligencias apartadas (que entre todas las creaturas solamente son capaces de alcançalla) consiste en las operaciones del entendimento [It is the unanimous opinion of the most eminent and famous theologians and philosophers that happiness and blessedness of the intellectual souls and separate intelligences (which alone among all creatures are capable of attaining it) consists in the activity of the understanding].⁵⁹

Herrera's aims in his *Epitome* to provide the instrument by which to access the sources of truth. His approach is rooted in an understanding of logic or dialectic as manifestation of the structural principle and motive force behind the generation of reality. Logic is a reflection of the original creative activity of the Godhead and repeats or reproduces its original aim in kind:

Logic imitates the divinity, strives toward understanding, searches for the essence, attains to truth, recognizes and concerns itself with the good, resolves multiplicity into unity and divides and distributes the unity into multiplicity...illuminates the understanding, enkindles the will, improves the senses, moderates the passions, enlivens the intelligence, leads wisdom, guides toward science, rules the kingdoms and republics, the families and their houses, and brings human beings finally to politics, economy, as well as to (ethical and intellectual) perfection.⁶⁰

As Necker elaborates, Herrera, referring to Plato and Ficino, Plato's "faithful interpreter", describes „la Dialectica ó Logica“ as imitating the „principio universal de todo“, "the highest Godhead", in three ways: first, in the manner in which the divine principle relates to its effects; second, in the manner in which the effects relate to their principle, and third, in the manner in which they relate to themselves.⁶¹ Dialectic thus corresponds to the production of manifold effects by the divine principle, providing conversely knowledge of the divine essence and efficaciousness („divina virtud y eficacia propagada“), by which the one is distributed to many („assi casi *diuide y destrebuye*, el que es puro uno, en muchos“). The manifold effects, on the other hand, strive by the understanding afforded by dialectic to return to their infinite source and be reunited in the simple and unitary source of their being.⁶²

Spinoza shares with Herrera characteristic traits of ancient, medieval and Renaissance humanism, such as interest in ancient literature, belief in the central role of human beings in nature, an optimistic view of the ability of the human intellect to gain knowledge and understanding of nature and God, and a Ciceronian and Stoic orientation with regard to rhetoric and moral philosophy.⁶³ On the basis of these shared humanist traits, it is not unreasonable to expect that their works may exhibit similarities of content and method as well. While it is uncertain whether Spinoza had access to the Spanish manuscripts of

⁵⁹ *Epitome y Compendio de la Logica o Dialectica*, Prologo fol. 6v-7r, S. [12]f.; cited in Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala* IX.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* [10]f., following Ficino, cf. Necker 120 n. 98 and *Commentaria Marsilii Fincini Florentini in Philebo* Liber II, 433-435.

⁶¹ Necker *Humanistische Kabbala* 121 and n. 105.

⁶² *ibid.* 120f. Necker follows Saccaro del Buffa in attributing this understanding of logic to developments since the Renaissance (*ibid.* 119 and n. 95). In fact, the understanding of logic as having an "ethical and ontological perspective" which "teaches not only the differentiation between true and false, but also understanding of the hierarchy of being" (*ibid.* 119), has its roots in the Platonic understanding of dialectic as the method of philosophy. Cf. *Epitome*, Prologo, [8]f., fol. 4v, 5r.

⁶³ cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala* 29f.

Herrera's main philosophical works, two of his teachers did, and it cannot be excluded that Spinoza may also have been directly or indirectly acquainted with them.⁶⁴

III. Proclus' hypothetical dialectic as model for the geometric method

Whatever the direct sources may have been, Spinoza's classification of the stages of knowledge clearly reflects the division of stages of knowledge first outlined in Plato's Analogy of the Line, and corresponds in its essential points to the division of types of knowledge elaborated by Aristotle and successors in the Platonic tradition. This division provides the foundation for the Platonist understanding of dialectic as the method of philosophy and path to the vision of truth and to union with the highest principle. That the division of Plato's Line represents an analogy, or more precisely, a geometric proportion, and that proper understanding of the law of proportion and its application to the content of the Line is fundamental to its interpretation, I have attempted to show elsewhere.⁶⁵ The Line represents perhaps the first use of the word "analogy" in its proper sense as a comparison of analogues or members of a proportion, each of whose subordinate terms describes a repetition of the original ratio on which the proportion is based. In the Line, each progressive division of the Line is carried out *ana ton logon*, according to the original "cut" or ratio dividing the Line into two unequal parts, reflecting the reproduction in each successively emerging context of the original relationship of *doxa* and *episteme*, sensible and intelligible as it proceeds from the unconditional source of thought and being. The analogy of the Line is thus more than a literary figure; it is an ontologically and epistemologically generated division, and as such forms the basis for the *analogia entis* and its implementation of analogy as "structural and motive principle of the world." The Line establishes the ontological derivation of dialectic as based on the analogical relationships of the stages of being and knowledge as *the* method of philosophical thought⁶⁶, a tradition transmitted by Platonist and Platonist-influenced sources from Ancient and Hellenistic times to the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

The close affinity between Spinoza's references to the law of proportion and Plato's construction of the proportion of the Line has also been discussed elsewhere.⁶⁷ That affinity extends to the broader implications of Spinoza's division of the stages of knowledge, as discussed in Part II of the *Ethics* and illustrated in both the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics* by the law of proportion, for interpretation of Spinoza's system of philosophy as a whole. Plato's understanding of dialectic as *the* method of philosophy, itself intimately tied to his division of the stages of knowledge, and the role of the so-called method of hypothesis as discussed in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, are revealed thereby as an essential point of reference for interpretation of Spinoza's geometric method.

⁶⁴As Necker notes, a quotation from Herrera's *Puerta del cielo* in Menasseh Ben Israel's *Conciliador o de la conveniencia de los Lugares de la S. Escritura que repugnantes entre si parecen*, published in Amsterdam in 1632, suggests that not only Menasseh, but also his readers, whom he refers to Herrera's work, were familiar with *Puerta del cielo*. Cf. Necker, *Humanistische Kabbala*, 213f. and n. 320. The manuscripts were bequeathed by Herrera to Spinoza's teacher Isaac Aboab de Fonseca.

⁶⁵cf. M.-E. Zovko, "The Way Up and the Way Back is the Same"; M.E. Zovko, "The Metaphysical Character of Philosophy", op. cit. above n. 15, "Excursus" 16ff.

⁶⁶On analogy as structural principle and foundation of dialectic cf. W. Beierwaltes, *Proklos. Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Frankfurt a. M.: V. Klostermann, 1979) 65, 73, 153-158, 329-341, as well as the sources dealing with the history of the concept and problem of analogy listed on p. 154 n. 138.

⁶⁷Cf. M.-E. Zovko, "Naturalism and Intellectualism in Plato and Spinoza", op. cit. (cf. above n. 6) 33ff.

Spinoza's epistemology and methodology are grounded, namely, in his division and ordering of our intellectual capacities.⁶⁸ That division in turn is based on a fundamental proportion whose structure and articulation are determined by the original ratio between the order of nature and the order of intellect. The original "ratio" of nature and intellect and the "rule" by which it is articulated form the basis for Spinoza's theory of virtue, freedom, and happiness, and as such the only reliable basis for interpretation of the *Ethics* as a whole.⁶⁹ Spinoza's geometric method, like Platonic dialectic, is grounded in the division of the stages of knowledge, and applies an understanding of the method of hypothesis which parallels that of Plato and its interpretation in Proclus.

Dialectic was for Plato *the* method of philosophy, though a precise determination of that method remains a challenge for Plato interpretation today.⁷⁰ Robinson's study concerns itself with Socratic *elenchus* and definition in the earlier dialogues and Plato's theory of *dialectic* in the middle dialogues, in particular, with the notion of hypothesis, whereas it leaves aside consideration of the methods of synthesis and division, as belonging primarily to the later dialogues. Robinson sees Plato's demand for "categorically certain knowledge", which requires "a Cartesian method or Aristotelian apodictic starting from infallible intuitions", as in conflict with his hypothetical method. Robinson's study focuses on exposure of this and other "incoherences" in Plato's method, in particular on what Robinson sees as the incoherence of Plato's espoused method of hypothesis and its actual application in the middle dialogues, especially as regards Plato's preferred use of analogy and metaphor.⁷¹ In fact, Plato's understanding and implementation of analogy is entirely consistent with his elucidation of the proportion of the Line and the division of the stages of knowledge which it entails. The analogy or proportion which forms the basis for the division of the Line reflects the ontological derivation of the stages of knowledge, i.e. the individual cognitive functions in their relationship to one another and to the individual aspects of reality they convey, as grounded in their highest principle, the "unconditional beginning" or the idea of the Good. As such, proper understanding of the proportion of the Line may also provide the key to proper

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.* The "beauty" of the proportion and its significance for comparison of Platonic concept of *eros* and Spinoza's concept of *conatus* as motivating force in the ascent of knowledge is discussed in M.E. Zovko, "Impassioned by Passion: Knowledge and Eros in Plato and Spinoza", presented at the the Intl. Plato Society X Symposium Platonicum on Plato's *Symposium* (printed version in: *Proceedings of the Intl. Plato Society Symposium Platonicum*, Pisa 2013).

⁶⁹ That this is the case is confirmed by Andrew Youpa's insightful interpretative approach in "Spinoza's Theory of Motivation". Youpa comes close to resolving the enigma of the *Ethics* by intuitively applying the method of analogy and the proportionate use of the levels of knowledge it implies to his interpretation of the *Ethics*. Cf. "Spinoza's Theory of Motivation", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 88 (2007) 375–390; Cf. *ibid* and also: A. Youpa, "Spinoza's Model of Human Nature," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48 (1) 2010 : 61-76.

⁷⁰ cf. F.J. González, *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press 1998); R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press 1941, Oxford: Clarendon 1953)

⁷¹ Robinson. 214. As González notes, Robinson "treats dialectic as a purely formal method of constructing arguments", believing "that he can define dialectic in total abstraction from the *content* of Plato's philosophy." Robinson neglects to relate his "more technical descriptions of dialectic in the dialogues...to dialectic as actually *practiced*...in the dialogues", providing only "detailed analyses of passages taken out of context" and "no interpretations of whole dialogues", although in González' view Plato's dialogues should be seen as "a dramatic portrayal of dialectic at work". González is correct in asserting that "in abstracting from the content of dialectic Robinson distorts its nature", answering "incorrectly the important questions: what kind of knowledge does dialectic provide and *how* does it do so?" (González 2). This standpoint may be applied to interpretation of dialectic in the Platonist/Neoplatonist tradition as a whole and its successors in Renaissance humanistic dialectic, as well as to Spinoza's implementation of geometric method in the *Ethics*.

understanding of the meaning of dialectic in Plato's philosophy as a whole and to its application in the individual dialogues and stages of his philosophical production.⁷²

While Herrera's Platonic and humanistic concept of dialectic may not have provided the precise model Spinoza's choice of method, it may have been a source of inspiration, and familiarity with Herrera's works would have pointed Spinoza in the direction of other Platonic sources of a metaphysically grounded concept of dialectic. Comparison with some of the most significant sources of Herrera's conception of dialectic, in particular with Proclus, confirms the affinity of Spinoza's *ordo geometrica* with Platonic and Platonist dialectic as a method grounded in the division of the stages of knowledge and proportion of being and intellect illustrated by the Line. Dialectic in this philosophical tradition is not an externally applied methodology. Its character is not merely epistemological, but also metaphysical and ethical, the path to knowledge of reality serving as a type of spiritual exercise leading to our greater perfection and happiness. As in Plato's Line, the ascent of knowledge proceeds not by means of an incremental increase in "objective" knowledge – the analogy which illustrates the ascent is not based on an arithmetic progression, but on a complex geometrical proportion grounded in the nature of reality itself. Its aim is attainment of self-knowledge through knowledge of reality, and knowledge of reality through self-knowledge, and by this means realisation of the virtue proper to human beings and therewith of human freedom and happiness.

A survey of the precedents named by Wolfson points to Proclus' *Στοιχείωσις θεολογική* as closely related in substance and form to Spinoza's exposition of his metaphysical views in the *Ethics*, although the epistemological considerations, theory of the emotions, and specifically ethical considerations characteristic of the *Ethics* lie beyond the scope of the *Elements*. Proclus' method in the *Elements of Theology*, taking Euclid's *Elements* as its model, is decidedly Platonic in inspiration. As Dodds noted,

Proclus ... adopted, at least in appearance, the method of pure *a priori* deduction known to the ancient mathematicians as synthesis and familiar to us from Euclid and Spinoza. It is substantially, as Professor Taylor points out, the Platonic method of hypothesis; and Proclus found a model for it in the hypothetical argumentations put into the mouth of Parmenides in Plato's dialogue of that name.⁷³

Important statements regarding Proclus' understanding of the Platonic method of hypothesis and the related concept of dialectic may be found throughout Proclus' works, particularly in the *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* and the *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*.⁷⁴

⁷²Demonstration of this assertion exceeds the bounds of this essay and must be reserved for a future study. For an elucidation of the meaning of dialectic and the method of hypothesis as connected with the division of the Line cf. Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, part III "Dialektik", the section "Hypothetische Dialektik" 253-260, with a summary of previous discussion of the problem of hypothesis, 256 n. 9.

⁷³E.R. Dodds, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford 1963), xi.

⁷⁴Cf. Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, tr., w. intro. by G. R. Morrow (Princeton Univ. Press 1970). The Platonic descent of Euclidian geometry itself provides an additional argument for consideration of Platonic influences in Spinoza's understanding of geometric method. A work or works by Euclid were present in Spinoza's library (cf. Offenburg, "Spinoza's Library" 321). Proclus' *Commentary* elaborates a Platonic view of the role of mathematics and geometry in theology, first philosophy and science (cf. 20.10-25.13).

It is in Proclus' application of a "hypothetical dialectic"⁷⁵, as based on his understanding of Platonic dialectic, that reexamination of the significance of geometric method in Spinoza ought to begin. In Beierwaltes' estimate, "[T]he method of dialectic is comprehensively developed and perfected in its essence in Neoplatonic philosophy, in particular in Plotinus and Proclus, whereby the Platonic beginnings are speculatively thought through and justified."⁷⁶ While it is not possible within the bounds of the present account to explore in detail the entire range of parallels and similarities between Proclus' method of dialectic and Spinoza's geometrical method, some important points of comparison may be noted.

Beierwaltes characterizes Proclus' "metaphysically structured method" briefly as follows:

Method in the philosophy of Proclus is the path of thought, whose beginning is self-knowledge as all-pervading ground (ἡ ἐαυτοῦ γνῶσις).⁷⁷

Insofar as the "ethical relevance of self-knowledge" only becomes effective "in the knowledge of the universal ground", "knowledge of the universal ground" reveals itself – in Proclus, as in Spinoza⁷⁸ – as the real "beginning" and principle of the path and method of thought: "the reliable beginning ... of philosophical and methodical thought is namely not to be understood as posited temporally and singularly, but as the timelessly enduring ground of thought, on the basis of which we achieve our own perfection."⁷⁹ The "systematic nature of being as explication of the One itself, prefigures the path of method, which thought in its progression has to follow, by returning to the Ground of this systematic."⁸⁰ The "goal of the path" is thus "present in anticipation in an individual manner, becoming ... the initiating moment of the methodical return of thought to itself and to its origin."

Spinoza's geometric method shares this systematic and metaphysical aspect. "System" means for him as for Proclus not a mere "schematic classification of thoughts", but the structuring of thought and method as grounded in the procession and articulation of reality from the highest principle of being and knowledge (the Idea of the Good, the One itself, the *substantia infinita*). As in Proclus, Plotinus and Plato, Spinoza's geometric method is tied to the proportion or analogy which governs the ascent of knowledge through its individual stages. The origin and end of the path of thought, from which effects and their causes proceed, is the ontological foundation of knowledge and reasoning whose task is to understand and explain that procession. The metaphysical origin of thought precedes and is present in the knower and the known, as well as in each level, stage, faculty or type of knowledge as their ground, as "initiating moment" and "all-pervading principle" of the being of knowledge and the knowledge of being. The ascent is thus at the same time a "practical exercise" of thought leading to vision of the true causes of things and the manner of their procession from the first principle – and hence to our freedom and blessedness in union with the origin and goal of being and thought. The presence of the "goal of the path" in the individual stages of the

⁷⁵Cf. n. 72 above.

⁷⁶ *Proklos* 241.

⁷⁷ *Proklos*, 15, cf. 19 (English translations are my own).

⁷⁸ For "the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect." (2P7) „The power of the mind" which constitutes its *virtue*, and therewith human beings' true freedom and happiness, is "defined solely by knowledge; its lack of power is measured, however, solely from the privation of knowledge, or passion, that is solely by that through which ideas are called inadequate" (5p20). For the attainment of human virtue and the perfection of human nature, a specific path of knowledge is required: Adequate knowledge begins with knowledge of things, advances to self-knowledge, and thence to knowledge of God (cf. *Ethics* 4App.IV).

⁷⁹ in *Alc.* 1,4. Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 15, 16.

⁸⁰ Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 16.

ascent is furthermore the basis for the two-fold understanding and application of the method of hypothesis which forms the backbone of Platonic dialectic.⁸¹ The principle or rule which governs the articulation of the ground of being and thought in the procession of knowledge and reality is that of *analogy*.

What Beierwaltes has to say about the "systematics of being" in Proclus might equally well be applied to Spinoza:

This systematic of being, which is grounded in the One itself, founds also as principle of method its reliability, determines the regularity of the path by which method is freed from arbitrariness and chance in searching, and makes its discovery true, that is, it [the systematic of being] brings it [method] with itself and its object into agreement.⁸²

For Proclus and his antecedents and successors in the tradition of Neoplatonism, "system" is thus an expression of the aim and desire of thought "to advance from what is grounded to the ground, from the particular to the general, from the accidental to the essence, from the manifold to the one as the source of the whole."⁸³ Method in this sense is not formal or formalistic in nature, not merely an external procedure which achieves only an external unification of multiplicity, not a means indifferent to the thing which is known. It is rather "the process of *theoria* itself", which is "necessarily of this character, in order that its content might be necessarily and completely comprehended as it truly is according to its being."⁸⁴

The "structural moments" of Proclean method – trias, circle, dialectic – are to be understood, accordingly, neither as "Weltanschauungsbilder" in a Diltheyan sense, nor as "psychologically established forms of thought", but as constitutive moments of the "essence of being itself", which as such are structurally and formally determinative of the processes of thought.⁸⁵ The triad and cycle are complementary moments of the procession and structure of being, as well as of dialectic method. In Proclus and Plotinus, knowledge in its individual stages follows the procession of hierarchical levels of being from their source according according to the triadic scheme of *mone-proodos-epistrophe* through the evolution of the multiplicity and totality of individual beings, and their turning back towards and reflection upon their origin and their own procession. This triadic scheme is of particular relevance to the understanding of Proclus' "metaphysical method" and might also prove fruitful as an interpretative scheme when applied to the foundational relationship of the *substantia infinita* to its attributes, *cogitatio* and *extensio*, and its articulation in the structure and content of Spinoza's *Ethics*.⁸⁶⁸⁷

⁸¹ The distinction of an axiomatic use of hypotheses, which posits these as unquestioned and self-evident starting points from which, at the level of discursive thought, a conclusion may be derived analytically – from a "proper" use of hypotheses, which takes these as "in a true sense" as hypotheses, that is, as proposition or model to be tested and modified for the purpose of "climbing up" to the unconditional beginning of the hypothetical method itself, is discussed in Plato's analogy of the Line (*Rep.* 511b; cf. 533 c-d) and in Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 256f. n. 9.

⁸² Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 256f.

⁸³ *ibid.* 17.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* 18.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* 19.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* 24f. Cf. *Theol. Plat.* IV 16; 209, 23-26. αἱ μὲν οὖν νοηταὶ καὶ νοεραὶ τριάδες τριαδικῶς τελειοῦσι τὰ πράγματα καὶ συνέχουσιν αἰεὶ καὶ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἑνωσιν. The "actual groundedness" ("Sachbegründetheit") of Proclus' method means that the σχῆμα τριαδικόν, like the other structural moments of Proclus' thought, is "not a classification-scheme which is external to being and thought, or has only formal significance, but a constitutive element of the movement of thought and of every thing." It is grounded in the "unfolding of the One itself",

Dialectic, in Proclus the "fundamental act of philosophizing"⁸⁸, is the crowning moment of the three structural principles of Proclus' metaphysics.⁸⁹ Dialectic articulates and grounds the relationship of archetype and cause to that of which it serves as paradigm and principle.⁹⁰ It proceeds by tracing the procession of reality on the basis of ideas which ground the being and cognoscibility of individuals and their relationships (to themselves, each other, the whole) by means of the four moments of analysis, division, definition and demonstration.⁹¹ As such it is the "cornice" (θριγκός) or band (σύνδεσμος) of the sciences, which grounds, encompasses and perfects them. The practice of dialectic is a propaedeutic for the vision of truth and reality, leading ultimately to knowledge of and union with the origin and source of thought and being.⁹²

Of all the sciences, mathematics is, after philosophy itself, as propaedeutic of philosophy, the most dialectic, and dialectic makes mathematics the true and philosophically grounded science.⁹³ The level of intelligence which may be properly called mathematical Proclus, following Plato's division of the Line, calls *dianoia* or discursive thought.⁹⁴ *Dianoia* has an intermediary function between the direct apprehension of truth and reality characteristic of *nous* and *noesis* and the fragmentary and unstable apprehension of reality provided by sense-perception, which leads only to opinion, *doxa*.⁹⁵ *Dianoia* unfolds the content of pure ideas which it receives from *noesis* by means of our *image-making* capacity, in order to elucidate the simple, indivisible and unextended ideas in the variety and complexity of their physical expression by "picturing" (Kant "constructing") their common characteristics for sense intuition.

"which allows νοῦς and ψυχή to come into being and which penetrates them, differentiates and articulates these developments and binds them together as κόσμος νοητός to a whole and to a 'hierarchical' system" of intelligible and intellectual triads which "perfect things and hold them together always and lead them unification." The triadic structure of being grounds the articulation of thought according to the individual triads. Cf. Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 19, 20, and the list of triads: πέρας – ἄπειρον – μικτόν, οὐσία – ἐτερότης – ταυτότης, ἀρχή – μέσον – τέλος, νοητόν – νοητὸν ἅμα καὶ νοερόν – νοερόν, οὐσία – ζώή – νοῦς, μονή – πρόοδος – ἐπιστροφή, *ibid.* 25-29. The triad is significant for the "ontological grounding of geometry, since it grounds the being of surface, by encompassing duality and unity in itself and thereby limiting and separating at the same time." As Proclus notes in his commentary to Euclid's *Elements*, the triad grounds thereby the "first figure and form", similar in this respect to "to triadic nature, which originally limits all being, but also to duality which separates these." (*ibid.* 30; cf. *in Eucl.* 99, 4-8 sq.) In Herrera, the "analogy between logic and divinity" is also presented as a triad, consisting of three fundamental concepts, "distribution", the pair "analysis"/"synthesis", and "definition". A triad which according to Necker is "not by mere chance related to the Neoplatonic triad 'procession, change, return.'" (*Humanistische Kabbala* 12).

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⁸⁸ Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 240.

⁸⁹ cf. *ibid.* 240ff.

⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.* 240f. Whereas the Triad and the Circle mediate an understanding of atemporal structural principles of being and thought, the "dialectical aspect of method has as its object the unfolding of thought as enmeshed in time and as path to the pure origin, the One as it is in itself."

⁹¹ *ibid.* 245, 246.

⁹² *ibid.* 242.

⁹³ *ibid.* 247 and *in Eucl.* 44, 13f.

⁹⁴ The objects of *dianoia* or discursive thought according to the Line are the *mathematika*, things which may be derived axiomatically from *hypotheses* which are not *hypothetical* in an experimental sense, but act rather as self-evident principles which are not themselves subject to proof. Plato saw *dianoia* as dependent on knowledge of the ideas as immediately apprehended by the higher level of intellection called *noesis*, but also as leading to these by a method of definition and abstraction from the objects of sense perception and opinion. *Noesis* never exists without *dianoia* in the human intellect, just as discursive use of hypotheses is always conjoined to what is described as the use of hypotheses in a genuine sense, where these are conceived not as unquestioned starting-points from which to descend deductively to what follows necessarily, but as spring-boards, or steps by which to ascend to the unconditioned beginning. These two uses of hypothesis

⁹⁵ Cf. *in Eucl.* 3, 14-4, 14

Hypothesis "belongs together with ἀξίωμα and αἴτημα to the 'beginnings' of geometry, from whence thought progresses by means of deduction and synthesis to inferences or conclusions."⁹⁶ Here Proclus, following Aristotle, determines *axiom* to be a self-evident proposition. Hypothesis, however, in the sense of a "geometrical sentence or definition" is not taken to be self-evident to the hearer, but rather as a point of departure for its development through deliberation, whereby the reflection either returns to the demonstrated truth of the proposition or to its rescinding and modification, in order to "establish what is sought from the beginning."⁹⁷ αἴτημα finally is the designation for a *postulate* whose truth is unknown and not assumed, but nevertheless accepted as a rule of thought. These beginnings establish a twofold "living" methodic movement, that proceeds from them or returns to them as point of departure and aim of the demonstration by synthesis or analysis. "Mathematical thought is thus the unfolding in the multiplicity as descent and collection into its "own groundings" as ascent, insofar as it proves these true" – it moves "from the known to what is sought and again from what is sought to what precedes according to knowledge."⁹⁸ In this "is grounded the twofold unity of mathematical method: the beginning of the one is the end of the other and vice versa...Συναγωγή and διαίρεσις have for this reason each in its own way ...the same goal: that which is sought (ζητούμενον)." Hypothetical dialectic, both the part which proceeds from self-evident propositions to what can be derived from them and the part that proceeds from provisionally posited hypotheses by means of a process or discovery and their consequent adaptation to ever more adequate knowledge of the causes of things, grounds in the "dialectic of the unconditional" as "unhypothetical" or "first science."⁹⁹

The real "band" in Proclus' method, in his predecessors in the philosophy of Platonism, and also in Spinoza is, however, *analogy*: "band understood as that, through which also that which is in the middle *is*. By means of this, namely, the analogy joins together the extremes."¹⁰⁰ Diversity and unity are possible in Proclus through the principle according to which "everything is in everything but in a manner appropriate to each" (*panta en pasin, all' oikeios en hekastoi*). This is possible only because everything that exists "is everywhere existing in proportion" (*panta pantachou ana logon esti*). As Siorvanes remarked, "this has been rightly called the 'golden rule' of Neo-Platonism, for it is the main method for explanation and analysis"¹⁰¹ According to this rule, objects of knowledge are not all known in the same way, but "appropriately", according to their ontological status and each aspect by which it is manifested:

for... a white thing is known by sense-perception and by opinion (*doxa*), and by our intellect, but not in the same way; for sense-perception cannot comprehend its proper objects of knowledge in the same way that the intellect does; for intellect knows also the cause (*aitian*: also explanation), while opinion knows only the fact (*to hoti*); it is

⁹⁶ Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 261.

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 261-2 and *in Eucl.* 255, 11 sq.

⁹⁸ Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 262.

⁹⁹ Cf. Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 263-265 and *in Eucl.* 31, 11-19; 1, 9f., 18. Proclus' differentiation of hypothetical and unconditional science originates in his interpretation of Plato's Line; he differs, however, from Plato in interpreting the concept of *hypothesis* in purely mathematical terms, and attributing its use exclusively to the level of discursive thought, although the method of hypotheses provides the transition to *noetic* thought. Beierwaltes sees in this respect a certain ambiguity in Proclus' interpretation of the Line. Cf., *Proklos*, 264, 267. ¹⁰⁰ *In Tim.* II 22, 24-26, cf. Beierwaltes *Proklos* 65, 72, and *Tim* 31 c 1-31 a7: "of all bands the most beautiful, which makes itself and what is bound one in the highest measure... If, namely, of three numbers or measures or forces the middle one relates to the last as the first to itself, and in the same way again the last to the middle as the middle to the first, if then the middle becomes first and last, the last and first, however, both middle ones, then everything will become necessarily the same..."

¹⁰¹ Siorvanes, *Proclus*, 51; cf. 66, 110 f. n. 1.

by virtue of this, indeed, that we say that correct opinion differs from knowledge, the former knowing only the fact of the thing and being weak for this reason, the latter comprehending the object of knowledge along with its cause (or explanation) and thus able to comprehend it more strongly ... So then, knowledge varies according to the nature of the knowing agent. It is not the case that it is according to the nature of the known object that it is known by everything, but is known in a superior way by superior agents, in an inferior by more inadequate ones ... For indeed hearing perceives the objects of hearing in one way ... reason perceives in a different way both these things and all other things of which there is no sense-perception.¹⁰²

The rule 'All in all but appropriately' permits Proclus thus to "formulate a general law for the plurality and diversity of beings and phenomena, causes and effects, qualities and meanings, while retaining their speciality." According to this "rule", as with the proportion of Plato's Line, "the same thing can be conceived as existing on many different levels, each with its own distinct character." Because of the proportionate interrelationships of the levels of being and intellection which forms the basis for dialectic

A thing is not an opaque indivisible, but composed of a bundle of levels and modes. The same thing, be it a metaphysical entity, a piece of knowledge, a moral definition or a literary text, may possess diverse properties or have different meanings. It all depends on the level of analysis.¹⁰³

The apophthegmata *panta in pasin, panta esti panta kai ouden estin en ouden* are to be understood on as expression of the dialectical mediation of the principle through unity of multiplicity, multiplicity in unity, made possible by their participation of otherness in sameness, by which, according to Beierwaltes, a "dynamic-ontological identity as opposed to a static-logical or tautological identity" is implied.¹⁰⁴ This is also the ontological basis of the efficacy of *analogy*, i.e. the "rule" or proportion by which the stages of knowledge and reality proceed from and return to their source. It is a similarity in dissimilarity, a sameness in otherness, since the identity of any finite thing depends not only on its presence in but on its differentiation with respect to other finite things and to its source and vice versa. Dialectic thus proceeds through analogy and negation, arriving finally by "ascent through abstraction, as purification of thought, through becoming like the source, divinisation of our humanity" at its own self-annihilation – and simultaneous preservation ("Selbstaufhebung") – in the *negatio negationis* in union with the One.¹⁰⁵

The affinities between Proclus' hypothetical dialectic and Spinoza's geometric method provide abundant evidence for a philosophically significant relationship between Spinoza's idea of geometric method and the Platonist concept of dialectic, which was influential in the works of Abraham Cohen Herrera and other indirect sources available to Spinoza. It remains to explore these affinities in detail.¹⁰⁶ In particular, Proclus' metaphysically grounded concept

¹⁰² Proclus, *In Parm.* 956.35-957.32; quoted in Siorvanes, *Proclus* 52f.

¹⁰³ Siorvanes 55.

¹⁰⁴ Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 34.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* 241.

¹⁰⁶ The elements of Platonic and Platonist dialectic: definition (ὁρισμός), demonstration (ἀποδείξις), division (διαίρεσις) and analysis (ἀνάλυσις), as well as the central concepts of proposition (πρότασις) and hypothesis (ὑπόθεσις) – will likely prove to be of fundamental significance for clearer understanding of Spinoza's geometric method. Cf. eg. the relationship of demonstration and definition. Definitions according to Proclus are "nobler" and "more original" than the demonstration, providing the beginnings (ἀρχαί) for determinative thought, Cf.: ἀρχὴ τῆς ἀποδείξεως ὁ ὁρισμός (Cf. Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 249, 250). By means of its constitutive elements, dialectic traces the path by which "the manifold proceeds from the more simple, and again returns to

of dialectic offers fundamental points of comparison which may help clarify the meaning of geometric method in Spinoza. The central position afforded to the law of proportion in Spinoza's exposition of the stages of knowledge requires that *analogy* itself, as structural and metaphysical principle, be taken into account in any interpretation Spinoza's geometric method and his system of philosophy as a whole.¹⁰⁷ The *purpose* of dialectic in Proclus – the "practice of the vision of truth"¹⁰⁸ as preparation for the experience of union with the One itself¹⁰⁹ – is also the purpose of Spinoza's application of geometric method. Its goal of "vision" of reality and truth and union with the source of knowledge and being is an aim shared by Spinoza, as confirmed by his explanation of the stages of knowledge in Part II of the *Ethics* and by the confluence of the concepts of *scientia intuitiva* and *Amor Dei intellectualis* as realization of the goal of human striving in Part V.¹¹⁰

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it." in *Eucl.* 57, 24-26: ἵνα καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπλουστέρων τὰ ποικιλώτερα δεικνύη προϊόντα καὶ ἐπ' αὐτὰ πάλιν ἀναστρέφοντα. Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 251.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 153ff., "Analogie als Struktur- und Bewegungsprinzip von Welt." in *Eucl.* 57, 24-26: ἵνα καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπλουστέρων τὰ ποικιλώτερα δεικνύη προϊόντα καὶ ἐπ' αὐτὰ πάλιν ἀναστρέφοντα. Beierwaltes, *Proklos* 251

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* 241: "Einübung in die Schau der Wahrheit", cf. n. 3 and in *Parm.* 1015, 38: γυμνάσιον πρὸς ἐκείνην τὴν (scil. τῆς ἀληθείας) θέαν.

¹⁰⁹ An understanding of method whose paradigm is to be found in Plotinus. Cf. Beierwaltes, *Proklos*, 249 and n. 9. Cf. J. Trouillard, "La méthode de Plotin," *Actes du XIème Congrès International de Philosophie, tom. XII* (Amsterdam 1953), 128-132.

¹¹⁰ The significance of *eros*, and related uses of *conatus*, as motivating force and ultimate goal of the ascent of knowledge, for a comparison of the method of Platonic dialectic and Spinoza's understanding of geometric method cannot be neglected. The role of *conatus* in the ascent of knowledge parallels that of *ἔρως* in Plato and the philosophy of Platonism. This is the topic of a paper presented by the author at the Intl. Plato Society X Symposium Platonicum on Plato's *Symposium* with the title "Impassioned by Passion: Knowledge and Eros in Plato and Spinoza", in: *Proceedings of the Intl. Plato Society Symposium Platonicum* (Pisa 2013).