What is more wonderful than the delight which the mind feels when it knows? . . . There may be also a divine purpose in this knowing, apart from the gratification of the creature.

—Last Pages From a Journal

I

MARK RUTHERFORD AND M’KAY are unable to offer the weary members of the Drury Lane room easy solutions for the omnipresent problems of evil, suffering, and death. Rutherford nevertheless argues that another side exists, that “compensation” may be found in the joy that springs from human relationships, from the world of nature, and from the creations of human thought and imagination. We have observed White’s progression from decadent Calvinism toward a reinterpretation of his inherited faith. He learned that while faith must be both personal and experiential, in the process one must grow out of self to that truth which is beyond self. Rutherford and M’Kay encourage their listeners to direct their attention toward the “universal and impersonal,” for in that direction health may be discovered (A, 232). “No man,” writes Rutherford, “can look up to the stars at night and reflect upon what lies behind them without feeling that the tyranny of
the senses is loosened, and the tyranny, too, of the conclusions of his logic” (A, 230).

White’s frequent use of the terms “universal” and “infinite” may require some clarification. In the most general sense, he uses these words to refer to any large idea, which, when fruitfully contemplated, serves to expand the mind. In particular, freedom from the tyranny of the senses may be pursued in a vital experiencing of the natural world: in the stars, clouds, wind, and sea. Through the power of wonder, White himself attained a new and enlarged perspective on his individual significance in the world. Similarly, in the works of Spinoza, which White came to know intimately through his translations, he encountered the pure “exercise of thought” that became another source of deliverance for him. Finally, the experience of divine and human love revealed to him the self-denying service in which he found the greatest freedom. In this chapter, I shall explore the first two paths toward freedom.

White’s constant advice is to shift attention away from the self as the center of concern. “Our aim,” declares Rutherford, “ought not so much to be the salvation of this poor petty self, but of that in me which alone makes it worth while to save me; . . . immortal truth” (A, 231). We have seen how in White’s own history the Calvinist emphasis on individual salvation had unfortunate and lasting consequences, how self-consciousness and self-concern blighted the glory of the external world and intensified his melancholia. His profound need for love conflicted with his self-hatred and made it difficult for him to transcend egotism and accept love when it was offered. Yet he learned, not as a lasting achievement but in moments that left a lasting impression, to conquer this self-centeredness. This gradual process was perhaps sparked by Wordsworth’s poetry, although as the Autobiography makes clear, White had loved the natural world from childhood. But his serious interest in one aspect of nature—the stars—did not begin until late in life.
In July 1889, White wrote excitedly to a friend about his recent purchase, an astronomical telescope (L, 44). In his journal, he explains why this instrument was an unfailing source of joy:

Almost every clear night I spent hours in simply looking, with never-failing wonder. When I went into the observatory on a winter’s night, when I shut the door, opened the roof, and set the driving-clock going, the world and its cares were forgotten. How could they be remembered in the presence of Perseus, as he slowly came into view, falling westward across the sky, mysterious, awful, beautiful, without hurry, rest, acceleration, or delay.

Later on I bought a spectroscope, and was able to see what is, perhaps, the most tremendous spectacle in the universe, flames of glowing gas shooting up thousands of miles from the body of the sun like volcanic explosions, reducing to absurdity the pretention and self-importance of man, convincing him of his almost entire irrelevance. There is another side: Thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast planted that in him which enables him to measure himself against Orion. (LP, 92–93)

Here the anxious impulse to control things is transformed. White is able (as he was with great literature) to surrender himself, to become pure sight. Through “simply looking” he is able to escape the tyranny not only of the senses and of his logic but of his powerful imagination. Contemplation of the heavens was also an activity with larger implications than the means of self-transcendence advocated by Mark Rutherford in the Autobiography—namely, the collecting of old coins, books, fossils, or butterflies. It is splendidly ironic that the impersonal laws of nature, the “forces which maintained the universe” (A, 110) that had replaced a loving God in White’s young mind, should in his maturity become a source of deliverance. He now perceived the predictability of the stars and the necessary motion of the planets as the meaningful and glorious manifestation of
those very laws. An alienating abstraction took concrete form and drew him back into the experience of the *mysterium tremendum* from which it had once ejected him. As he studied the stars, wonder overwhelmed anxiety. His intellect was catapulted out of the structures of partial logic. "The beyond and the beyond . . . is a constant, visible warning not to make our minds the measure of the universe" (A, 230).

White brought the same intellectual precision to his study of astronomy that he brought to all other areas of his thought. There is a good deal of evidence for the seriousness of his interest: his paper on sunspots for the Royal Society; his mathematical calculations, his precise descriptions of the planets and constellations throughout the novels, letters, and journals.¹ We must not, therefore, imagine him repairing to his observatory every evening merely to be stunned out of rational thought by a sensational heavenly performance. Mr. Armstrong, the discontented vicar of *Miriam’s Schooling*, explains White’s own fascination. Armstrong allows Miriam to observe the stars through his telescope not so she may gape in astonishment but that she may glimpse universal order: "If you can once from your own observation realise the way the stars revolve—why some near the pole never set—why some never rise, and why Venus is seen both before the sun and after it—you will have done yourselves more real good than if you were to dream for years of immeasurable distances, and what is beyond and beyond and beyond, and all that nonsense. The great beauty of astronomy is not what is incomprehensible in it, but its comprehensibility—its geometrical exactitude" (MS, 139–40). The "geometrical exactitude" is a great part of White’s delight. Miriam gradually learns to rejoice in astronomy for reasons that enticed White himself. The firmament, she discerns, “instead of being a mere muddle . . . had a plan in it” (MS, 142–43; my emphasis).

In the context of White’s religious background and his experience of "the Enemy," such remarks are especially
meaningful. In the scientific apprehension of intelligible order he found a security more rational and less egocentric than an arbitrary scheme of election and damnation could provide. Paradoxically, the natural laws that he could study and calculate served to relax self-consciousness and yet include him, for though the individual self was here displaced from the center of divine concern ("God was scheming to save me"), it also became a part of a larger and designed whole. In melancholia the external cosmos is felt as a surrounding world of "chaotic power," in which the individual self is helpless and paralyzed. By contrast, White's joy in astronomy arises from his growing awareness of directed energy in the universe. The self, instead of being trapped in chaos, is experienced as part of the intelligent process of the universe, part of the purposeful motion of life.

White's fascination with the stars and the freedom he discovered in observing them are explored at various points in his fiction. Baruch Cohen, the mathematical instrument-maker in *Clara Hopgood*, illustrates this attraction. While the highest of all truths may be incapable of demonstration, Cohen remarks, yet his belief in the infinite "is a conclusion which is forced upon me." His own work has supplied a foundation for his belief. Mathematics, Cohen argues, leads to "ideas which are inconsistent with the notion that the imagination is a measure of all things. Mind, I do not for a moment pretend that I have any theory which explains the universe. It is something, however, to know that the sky is as real as the earth" (CH, 276–78). Baruch's calm understatements emphasize the point that White's awe in the presence of beauty and mystery was deepened rather than limited by his understanding of rational order. Wonder that emerges from knowledge may direct the mind to proper self-evaluation. White is always quick to criticize writers whose admiration of nature is motivated by ignorant awe, or whose praise is general and abstract. "It is strange and sad," he writes, "that few persons nowadays can recognise the constellations and
the planets." According to White's analyses, Carlyle and Tennyson knew the constellations well, but Coleridge's descriptions of them in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* are erroneous—a circumstance that pained White greatly.

If Baruch Cohen's scientific perspective embodies several of White's mature conclusions about astronomy, Miriam Tacchi illustrates the gradual process of learning about the stars and their philosophical significance. Like White, she finds mere observation of the night sky comforting. Eventually, her increasing intellectual understanding of planetary motion frees her from preoccupation with her own unhappiness. At first she is unable to comprehend the process. The narrator remarks ironically that although Miriam could imagine "Verona and Romeo with such intense reality, . . . she could not perform such a simple feat as that of portraying to herself the revolution of an inclined sphere" (MS, 141). Her husband, a basket maker, constructs an orrery so Miriam may see and understand the "revolution of the heavens" (MS, 139). She also learns some trigonometry with his help. Before long, "she always thought of him when she looked at planets or stars, because he was so intimately connected with them in her mind" (MS, 147–48). Miriam's "schooling" includes a transformed perception of her place in the universe and a reevaluation of her husband's character.

In the same novel, Mr. Armstrong helps to extend his parishioners' understanding of the planets and constellations. They continue to connect the stars with heaven, but "Mr. Armstrong never undeceived them" (MS, 135). White himself, although better instructed than the poor laborers who constitute Armstrong's congregation, also felt that his nightly study of the constellations was in the largest sense a religious activity. Reflecting "on the great idea of God, and upon all that it involves, our animosities are softened, and our heat against our brother is cooled" (A, 204). Rutherford makes explicit the connection
between meditation on the idea of God and on the idea of the complex plan of the heavens. Following an event that makes him feel worthless and insignificant, he seeks "refuge in the idea of God, the God of a starry night with its incomprehensible distances." He is soon "at peace, content to be the meanest worm of all the millions that crawl on the earth" (A, 192). The effect upon the observer, however, is not merely a recognition of his or her own smallness in comparison with the immensity of the firmament or the great idea of God; a journal entry confirms another side of the perception: "On looking at any great natural object, a mountain, the sea, the stars, we are conscious of our own littleness and yet at the same moment of our greatness. . . . we are a part of what we worship" (LP, 294–95; my emphasis).

This statement echoes one quoted above: "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast planted that in him which enables him to measure himself against Orion." The paradox recalls a dimension of White's religious thought which we have already examined. While the immensity and beauty of the universe ignites wonder in him, that wonder does not reduce him but rather brings him into proper relation with the infinite. Preoccupation with self blots out the glory of the world; enlarged vision precipitates harmonious reconciliation. "Seek him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion and turneth the shadow of death into morning," he reminds himself. "There are," he writes, "not grander words than these in the Bible." This enlarged vision is, as I noted earlier, central to White's essay on Job. Jehovah commands Job to look abroad over the universe. White also tries to follow this counsel. The "starry heavens above" could make the scales to fall from his eyes, too. "Now mine eye seeth Thee." As he apprehends the source of the vast design, he experiences his own uniqueness through and by means of relationship.

An event that White describes in More Pages From A Journal as "nothing less than a transformation of myself and the
world” (MP, 182) will serve to reinforce this point. He writes in “An Epoch” of a morning in which he stood looking at a great oak tree. Suddenly, “it seemed to be no longer a tree away from me and apart from me. The enclosing barriers of consciousness were removed and the text came into my mind, *Thou in me and I in thee*. The distinction of self and not-self was an illusion.” Although he “‘believed’ nothing new,” the veil was momentarily rent. He could feel both the rising sap of the tree, and in himself a sudden corresponding fountain of joy. The barriers of individual selfhood dissolve as the “tyranny of the senses” is loosened. The result is not loss of self but the truth of self found in the source that gives life to both the tree and its observer. This rare epiphany is emblematic of White’s quest for reconciliation. “Thou in me and I in thee” is here understood through the medium of nature. He experiences as a revelation both his own identity and the reality of his relationship to the universe. He is reconciled, and becomes truly a part of what he worships.

Frequent descriptions of natural phenomena in White’s novels, journals, and notebooks reveal his love not only for the stars but for all nature. The precision of both observation and expression bespeak a mind training itself to admire and wonder. “We do not sufficiently consider,” he writes, “that enjoyment of every kind is an art carefully to be learnt” (A, 263). His lucid descriptions of the sky, water, wind, and trees explain much about their author. First, the willed act of observation, of intense and absorbed seeing, is a conscious movement of a temperamentally melancholy individual toward health. In the process of looking, he momentarily transcends self-consciousness. Furthermore, acute perceptual involvement in the world of external nature frees him, momentarily, from the tyranny of time.

In his youth, Mark Rutherford says, he was “the victim of that illusion . . . which causes us, on the brightest morning in June, to think immediately of a brighter morning which is to come in July” (A,55). White felt that one of the great curses of
his life was his propensity to live in the past through memory and in the future by anticipation, thus often losing "today." "The greatest part, far the greatest part, of our lives," laments Rutherford, "is spent in dreaming over the morrow, and when it comes, it, too, is consumed in the anticipation of a brighter tomorrow, and so the cheat is prolonged, even to the grave" (A, 258).

White's careful, deliberate descriptions of nature are often a conscious attempt to halt this cheating of himself, an effort to school himself to present gladness and participation in the immediate processes of the world outside the self. His "set pieces" on the natural world are, then, attempts to remove the "film of custom" and experience the living creation. In these descriptions he is capturing both the uniqueness of the scene or object before him and his joy in beholding it. Time is thus held, for the moment, static.

White's attempt to capture the living moment in prose is parallel also to his active study of the heavens: in the latter he temporarily became a part of what he worshipped; in the former he became what he celebrated in language. In this contemplation and expression of the natural world, the life which he looks back on, "with not one solitary achievement, with nothing properly learned, with nothing properly done" (A, 286), and the future that holds the grave, both cease for the moment to have power over him. Through intense vision he is freed.

In the Deliverance, Rutherford expresses this momentary freedom from time through his experience of nature during the two holidays he takes before his death. In the first instance, Rutherford and his family reach Hastings early in the day. The beautiful weather, the stillness of the great ocean, the clouds, and the intensity of the sunlight all combine to elicit extraordinary delight: "It was perfect—perfect in its beauty—and perfect because, from the sun in the heavens down to the fly with burnished wings on the hot rock, there was nothing out
of harmony. Everything breathed one spirit . . . No reminiscences and no anticipations disturbed us; the present was sufficient, and occupied us totally” (A, 263). His final holiday occurs after his wife has recovered from a nearly fatal illness and shortly before Rutherford’s own death. One Sunday, the family leaves London for an autumn holiday to celebrate his wife’s recovery. Rutherford describes the glory of the day in detail, concluding: “We were all completely happy. We strained our eyes to see the furthest point before us, and we tried to find it on the map we had brought with us. The season of the year, which is usually supposed to make men pensive, had no such effect upon us. Everything in the future, even the winter in London, was painted by Hope, and the death of the summer brought no sadness. Rather did summer dying in such fashion fill our hearts with repose, and even more than repose—with actual joy” (A, 272). For brief moments, then, White realized freedom of being; he felt at home in the world and in harmonious relationship with it. Anxiety, self-consciousness, melancholia, all were swallowed up in such moments, and he was able not only to evade the “fore-feeling of the end of summer” (P, 21), but to experience “actual joy.”

II

Through the medium of nature, through acute observation and willed participation in the nonself, White could transcend the prison of self-consciousness and break through the barriers of time and space. While the appeal of mystery illuminated by intelligible order was enduring, equally salutary was the thorough “exercise of thought” that he found in the philosophy of Spinoza. White’s most intense scholarly work over a number of years was his translation and criticism of the philosopher. The major works were his translations of Spinoza’s Ethic (1883; revised 1894, 1899, 1910) and his edition of the Tractatus de


Intellectus Emendatione (1895). Essays, reviews of other critics' work on Spinoza, and frequent allusions to him in letters and notebooks all testify to White's continuing interest.

I have argued that we cannot trace the development of White's religious thought through clearly distinguishable stages that culminate in a grand finale. He tended not to discard old ideas and take up new ones, or to move from one philosopher or thinker to another. Rather, as we have already had occasion to see, he sometimes oscillated between ideas that were in conflict or were even mutually exclusive. Throughout his life he glimpsed and lost helpful truths and then struggled to recover them and relate them to other ideas that seemed to be part of the "facts." While he tried to cling to ideas and principles that he had earned, another part of his mind searched the intellectual horizon for new and positive material. Bunyan, Calvin, Luther, and Virgil expounded sober truths that satisfied one part of him. On the other side, Byron, Whitman, and Shakespeare affirmed the joy possible in life. In the nineteenth century, he believed, "we need Shakespeare as well as Bunyan, and oscillate between the Pilgrim's Progress and As You Like It. We cannot bring ourselves into a unity. The time is yet to come when we shall live by a faith which is a harmony of all our faculties" (B, 249–50). At times, White could hold these dual impulses in an exquisite tension that generated the energy necessary for spiritual progress. Although much in Spinoza seems contrary to White's temperament and instinctive Puritanism, we can still comprehend the vigorous appeal to him of both Spinoza's method and his ideas. I have mentioned that White's vision of human life was fundamentally tragic: it is no coincidence that Virgil was one of his favorite authors. Yet White also had an impulse toward joy, health, and salvation. Spinoza strengthened this impulse, for his method and comprehensive system enlarged White's consciousness.
It is not my purpose to review or evaluate Spinoza's philosophy but to show why and how that philosophy influenced and enlarged White's mental life. In his preface to the 1883 edition of the Ethic, White elucidates the major attraction. Spinoza's thought answers the question "wherein can it help me?" with ideas, with "an insight which removes the limits of the world in which we live and shows us something beyond." His thought possesses the energy of all great religions, for "it is of the very essence of a genuine religion that it should take the other side; that it should be the counterpoise, the perpetual affirmation against the perpetual negation which lies in the routine and vulgarity of existence." Moreover, "there is no writer probably who loosens more effectually the hard tyranny of time and circumstance and provides us with more of those thoughts which it is the office of a real and speculative religion to supply." This was the fundamental appeal of Spinoza: he presented the "other side" of affirmative joy through an enlarged idea of God and a renewed perspective on the individual's place in the universe. And he provided these things through reason, logic, and fact.

Spinoza became a powerful gospel and a new source of inspirational energy for other Victorians besides White, in part because of his unique and spiritually uplifting synthesis. In the midst of chaos here was form. Spinoza provided not merely a substitute system for the Christian scheme of sin and redemption: he offered, instead, a method. Twenty years after White had begun his study of the philosopher, he wrote in his essay "Spinoza": "Much in him remains obscure, but there is enough which is sufficiently clear to give a direction to thought and to modify action. . . . Spinoza's object was not to make a scheme of the universe. He felt that the things on which men usually set their hearts give no permanent satisfaction, and he cast about for some means by which to secure 'a joy continuous and supreme to all eternity.'" (P, 32-33; my emphasis) Spinoza's
thinking power, his logical progression toward inevitable conclusions, was psychologically beneficial to a mind which saw both sides of a question so clearly that it could neither choose nor progress: "Spinoza, in his consecutiveness, his advance from position to position in complete connection and in perfect order, remains exemplary to us. The power to go from one ascertained point to another point, and so on and on, is what makes the strength of the human mind. It is this which creates for us principles, or at least the only principles worth the name." 

Spinoza’s emphasis upon thought and idea was of major importance to White. He clarified Spinoza’s distinction between idea and image early in the preface to the Ethic (1883): “If we deny what we cannot image, and if we consider it to be a sufficient objection to a religious or philosophical statement, ‘I cannot imagine it to be true,’ it is not worthwhile to have anything to do with Spinoza.”

The active, thinking mind may not be able to imagine God, but it can nevertheless form a true conception and hence understanding of Him. Such an emancipation from the necessity of imagining divine essence is clearly invigorating for White. He remarks (on Ethic, part II, proposition 47) that “the human mind possesses an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God,” and that Spinoza’s demonstration of this proposition is initially unsatisfactory because “we look for one which shall enable us to form an image of God like that which we can form of a triangle.” But:

“To your question,” says Spinoza to Boxel, “whether I have as clear an idea of God as I have of a triangle? I answer, Yes. But if you ask me whether I have as clear an image of God as I have of a triangle I shall say, No; for we cannot imagine God, but we can in a measure understand Him. Here also, it is to be observed that I do not say that I altogether know God, but that I understand some of His attributes—not all, nor the greatest part, and it is clear
that my ignorance of very many does not prevent my knowledge of certain others." (P, 36–37)

This clear distinction between imagination and reason, picture and concept, is crucial in Spinoza's thought. He postulates that through knowledge of "adequate ideas" the human mind expands. It becomes more perfect as the process of thought develops in thoroughness—that is, in truth. Thus when action is the necessary consequence of sufficient knowledge, the actor is free; he acts in accordance with his own nature. He is inevitably drawn toward appropriate action, since with knowledge of adequate ideas man cannot be externally compelled. The first step, then, toward freedom of being is thorough knowledge of any thing, for one suffers and is enslaved by confounding imagination and understanding. "Spinoza makes the remark that one frequent cause of error is the conjunction of what we imagine confusedly with what we really understand. We thoroughly comprehend some one particular thing: then we join to it a half-understood thing, the result being complete untruth." Thus "confusion and error are due to imperfect apprehension." As the mind increases in understanding, the power of the imaginative fancy decreases. We see how this conclusion was attractive to Hale White: increased understanding of nature leads to increased knowledge of one's own mind; with greater understanding of one's own mental powers and essence, one acts from that essence:

The distinction between action and passion is one which is vital throughout the whole of the Ethic. "I say that we act," Spinoza observes in the second definition of the third part, "when anything is done, either within us or without us, of which we are the adequate cause, that is to say (by the preceding definition) when from our nature anything follows, either within us or without us, which by that nature alone can be clearly and distinctly understood. On the other hand, I say that we suffer
when anything is done within us, or when anything follows from our nature, of which we are not the cause excepting partially.”

White states here that Spinoza’s comments about action and passion are “specially and practically serviceable.” The mind can control passion, and thus destructive and paralyzing melancholia, through adequate thought. An affect, according to Spinoza (Ethic, part V, proposition 3), ceases to be a passion when we form a clear idea of it. The mind can think of a passion as it thinks of a triangle. To illustrate this point, White offers the example of a man who becomes for the time a victim of passion, one who only suffers: “A stream of images passes before him, over which he exercises no authority. But it is possible to break that series of images—to reflect, to put the insult from him, to consider it as if it were an effect of gravitation or electricity, to place himself outside it, to look at it as God looks at it. That is to refer it to God’s idea, or to have an adequate idea of it.”

White obviously does not approach Spinoza idly or with detachment: he seeks practical aid. Here the possibility of objectifying through the reason the “stream of images” of the idée fixe which haunts and diminishes his personhood in melancholia becomes a goal worth pursuing. The passive imagination or the confusion of idea and image destroys rational control or “authority” over one’s own being. Conversely, the greater the number of adequate ideas in the mind, the less tyrannical the fancy. In melancholia, the victim can only passively suffer. Spinoza’s “objection to passion,” White says, “is that it chokes thought.” The graphic verb “chokes” is characteristic, suggesting as it does suffocation, drowning, the abyss. “Everybody,” continues White, “who tries to lead a life from the intellect knows what a calamity is that incessant apparition of the object of a passion. It pursues the victim like a Fury.” He who can be affected by “the common properties of things, or God” (adequate ideas) can be cured. Spinoza
affirms the power of the reason over the fancy, the power of love over sin, the power of God over the suffering creature. This affirmation becomes for White indeed a "joy continuous and supreme to all eternity." We know that White was not always capable of realizing and effecting his desired goal. Spinoza nevertheless provided a true direction, a potentially viable way out of spiritual anguish. Thorough "exercise of thought," "adequate ideas," and increased mental energy offered a possible deliverance from that great sorrow of life, "the rigidity of the material universe in which we are placed" (P, 33).

Spinoza helps White even further. In his preface to the second edition of the *Ethic* (1894), he remarks that Spinoza's main achievements are "the enlargement of the idea of God: the removal of God from the provincial and petty position He had formerly occupied, and the introduction of unity into our conceptions of man and nature." Expansion and unity offer another means of deliverance. I noted earlier that Spinoza appealed to many in part because of the quality and comprehensiveness of his synthesis. In his essay on Spinoza in *Pages From a Journal*, White summarizes this synthesis and demonstrates how it is effected. Substance, which Spinoza posits and later identifies with the idea of God, is defined by him as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; in other words, that, the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing from which it must be formed." Further, "By God, I understand Being absolutely infinite, that is to say, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each one of which expresses eternal and infinite essence." Two of these infinite attributes are revealed to man, namely thought and extension. White sees that here Spinoza escapes the difficulty of having to reconcile a material universe with a Creator who is pure Spirit. Rather than contemplating duality, the opposition of mind and body, we may consider that "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body." As thought and
extension are the same thing "viewed in different ways, inside and outside of the same reality" (P, 35), so are body and mind one, considered in different aspects. Thus all individuals are modes of God's attributes: the intellect of God is the cause of things, and God is "one and infinite; . . . all being, without which nothing exists." 25

This enlarged definition and conception of God, added to the belief that mind and body are one, though considered "at one time under the attribute of thought and at another under that of extension," leads to the conclusion that "the order and connection of things is . . . one, whether viewed under this or that attribute, and consequently the order of the actions or passions of the body is the same as that of the actions or passions of the mind." 26 In Spinoza, White finds the "true unchangeableness of God" 27 and a way of logically positing a form of immortality. This is not, of course, the personal and individual immortality of the soul projected in Christian theology but still an immortality of a rational and credible kind. In the preface to the first edition of the Ethic (1883), White elaborates on the idea of immortality in Spinoza's thought. We know that White's own fear of death and concern with immortality occupied him considerably. In his discussion of this question in Spinoza, we can discern the tension within White himself. He feels that Spinoza's ideas about immortality go as far as one can rationally proceed, yet they are not altogether sufficient or satisfactory. White notices that Spinoza, like all other men, cannot neglect the subject; yet when we attempt to pin down exactly what he believes about immortality, we "find ourselves in difficulties." 28

Much in Spinoza remains obscure, White comments, but through careful investigation of the various propositions relating to the eternal nature of the mind, certain conclusions emerge. I have not the space in this discussion to follow White's progress through the various propositions of Spinoza. For our purposes,
it is sufficient to note two central conclusions. In part II, proposition 23, we learn that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal." Immortality that extends to duration of imagination and memory, or of the body, Spinoza cannot conceive. What remains eternal is the reason, the intellect, that part of the mind which, through knowledge and consequently greater love of God, has become perfect. Second, as White remarks, "Spinoza affirms an immortality of degrees; the soul which is most of a soul being least under the dominion of death." This is important to White, for immortality of the intellect can be earned. The greater the mind and the more it acts in accordance with its own laws and from its own essence (which is part of the eternal intellect of God), the larger the hope of eternal life. Here White is careful to recognize that by eternality Spinoza does not mean "indefinite prolongation of time," but rather "existence itself, so far as it is conceived necessarily to follow from the definition alone of an eternal thing." White's own struggle toward wholeness, toward that freedom of being which in Spinoza's thinking is intellectual love of God, is apparent here. The mind that approaches the greatest perfection suffers less and acts more; the more it acts the more perfect it is. Proposition 39 of part V states that he who can "cause all the affections of the body to be related to God's idea, . . . [may] attain a love to God which must occupy or form the greatest part of the mind. He has a mind therefore, the greatest part of which is eternal."

Spinoza's conception of immortality thus offers White a goal. One struggles toward increase of knowledge and expansion of mind in order to participate eternally in that divine essence which is the source of our own: "Every adequate idea gained, every victory achieved by the intellectual part of us, is the addition of something permanent to us. Surely no nobler incentive to the highest aims and the most strenuous exertion
has ever been offered to the world. Every deed of self-denial done in secret, every conviction wrought in secret, laboriously strengthened and sharpened into distinct definition by diligent practice, is recorded in a Book for ever with no possibility of mistake or erasure.”

White found here, as did so many other Victorian admirers of Spinoza, a reason for being virtuous that was uncontaminated by the egocentric hope of reward and fear of punishment (in this world or the next) and that yet preserved the idea of immortality. In a clearly personal tone, White explains: “The majority of mankind, . . . even the best and wisest, cannot reconcile themselves to the thought of a blank hereafter, and derive from their hope the strongest stimulus to work and to patience. It is not so much happiness in the ordinary sense of the word which is coveted, but continued life, continued thought, and continued progress through that great and gradual revelation which unfolds itself to us from birth to death, and is gradually unfolding itself to the world.”

In the preceding chapter I discussed White’s attraction to dualism. “Philosophy,” declares Mark Rutherford, “proclaims the unity of our nature. To philosophy every passion is as natural as every act of saintlike negation.” But such a philosophy cannot redeem the world. Christianity can: “It laid awful stress on the duality in us, and the stress laid on that duality is the world’s salvation” (A, 234). We may well ask how a man who believed this statement, who emphatically remarked that “if mankind is not to be lost, the ancient antagonism” between good and evil must be maintained, can embrace a philosophy whose central premise is the oneness of the universe? Wilfred Stone argues that White never became a “Spinozist,” that Spinoza defined for White “a mood rather than a metaphysic, an attitude rather than a system.” It is certainly true that White was ambivalent about some parts of Spinoza’s philosophy. But, as I have suggested, White did not tend to progress intellectually from belief to belief, shedding, along the path of truth, those that were superseded.
He attempted, rather, to assimilate new, liberating ideas to those he had already won. He felt, along with Zachariah Coleman, that a "perfectly consistent, unassailable creed . . . is impossible" (RTL, 85). Moreover, though he may not actually have believed in a diabolic force abroad in the world, he often felt that he had to act as if such a power existed. But the desire to conceive of a unity underlying his personal experience of brokenness and duality was also fundamental to him. White's daily experience of sin—of melancholia and self-love and duality and exile—is the natural "fact" against which he exerts himself in an act of faith. His lifelong efforts to return "home" to a dimly sensed unity, to mutuality, reconciliation, and relationship constitute that act of faith. We have seen in this study his need to break down the barriers and be reunited to a living community of the faithful, to the perfect friend, to the beloved, to his work, to nature, and to God.

I believe that Stone underestimates the significance both of this impulse in White and of the moments of epiphany ("Thou in me and I in Thee") in which he felt he had transcended selfhood and its duality. Spinoza's ideas concerning the unity of God and man appealed to White precisely because they went beyond a simple monism: "Let a man once believe in that God of infinite attributes of which thought and extension are those by which He manifests Himself to us; let him see that the opposition between thought and matter is fictitious; that his mind 'is a part of the infinite intellect of God'; that he is not a mere transient, outside interpreter of the universe, but himself the soul or law, which is the universe, and he will feel a relationship with infinity which will emancipate him" (P, 38-39; my emphasis). This passage suggests what drew White to Spinoza: the possibility he opened up for freedom, relationship, reconciliation. Spinoza's philosophy offered more to White than a "mood"; it suggested a rational way of approaching the mystery of divine and human relationship.
Nevertheless, White found significant limitations in Spinoza’s work. The weakest link in its chain of thought he believed to be in the treatment of the problem of evil and pain. His response to Spinoza’s exploration of human suffering is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, he felt that the philosopher’s lack of emphasis on sin was positive, for thus the ability of human beings actively to pursue the good, without becoming paralyzed by a sense of depravity too awful to overcome, was affirmed. On the other hand, the conception of suffering as “lack of adequate ideas,” of evil regarded as mere privation of the good, seemed an insufficient response to the problem of pain. White’s various commentaries on Spinoza contain several indictments of the limitations of his philosophy on this topic. Referring to Spinoza’s answer to the question of why God did not create all men in such a manner that they might be guided by reason alone, White quotes Spinoza’s response and adds a critical comment:

“Because to Him material was not wanting for the creation of everything, from the highest down to the lowest grade of perfection; or, to speak more properly, because the laws of His nature were so ample they sufficed for the production of everything which can be conceived by an infinite intellect.” Nevertheless of pain we have no explanation. Pain is not lessened by understanding it, nor is its mystery penetrated if we see that to God material could not have been wanting for the creation of men and animals who have to endure it all their lives. (P, 52; my emphasis)\(^\text{36}\)

White's sense of justice, however, demands that he remind readers that not only Spinoza but all religions and philosophies are essentially “silent in the presence of pain.” Silence, he observes, is also the only conclusion to the Book of Job; we never learn why “suffering is apportioned so unequally or why it exists” (P, 52, 53).
The intriguing "Supplementary Note on the Devil" which White appended to the essay on Spinoza further clarifies the nature of his difficulties with the philosopher's treatment of evil. White remarks here that Spinoza denies the existence of the Devil, and that he argues that "if he is the mere opposite of God and has nothing from God, he is simply the Nothing" (P, 58). White allows that this doctrine may be "true" but finds it unhelpful: like nineteenth-century Calvinism, ironically, such a belief is useless in the face of practical problems. White then describes Bunyan's depiction of evil in *The Holy War* and elevates Bunyan's Devil—in which White himself did not believe—over Spinoza's abstraction. The testimony of melancholia proves stronger than the conclusions of his logic: "Consciousness seems to testify to the presence of two mortal foes within us—one Divine and the other diabolic" (P, 59). The evidence for this conflict lies in the "picturing and . . . mental processes which are almost entirely beyond our control." Then "we cry out with St. Paul against the law warring with the law of our minds." White instinctively returns, in this essay, to the Christian doctrine of sin: the law of God—love—wars with self-love, anger, covetousness, envy (Galatians 5). White senses that Paul offers something Spinoza cannot and returns to the tradition that comprehends temptation, sin, and spiritual anguish.

Nevertheless, the major contribution Spinoza made to White's religious thought is related to the question of evil. Spinoza never champions the law but constantly strives for love. Both men recognize the danger of adhering to rules merely out of fear of punishment as opposed to pursuing virtue for its own sake. White's innate magnanimity and his desire for what Matthew Arnold calls a "joy whose grounds are true" find reinforcement in Spinoza's philosophy: "Spinoza believed in the affirmative. His creed was not *This thou shalt not do under penalty*, but rather *This thou shalt do and rejoice therein*, and he knew that the reformation of fear is no reformation, and that
the good is really nothing to men unless they take pleasure in it. . . . Life for him is not a penitentiary, a school in which we are to be thrashed into obedience to external law, but it is pleasure, the highest pleasure." In Spinoza's thought, genuine human freedom consists in being motivated toward the good. Faith is the knowledge of God that leads inevitably to obedience, and worship is "to do what is just and to love our neighbour." Therefore faith and obedience are "submission unhesitatingly to the precepts of justice and love." Spinoza's emphasis on the intellectual love of God, the worship of whom and obedience to whom meant "love to one's neighbour," is a compelling doctrine for White, answering both to his Calvinist background and to his own attempts to give and receive affection. Spinoza, White claims, provides the "truly human religion" he sought all his life.

In his essay, White dwells on Spinoza's definitions of love and joy, and sees in them a key to relationship between the human and the divine: "But it is possible for the word 'love' to be applied to the relationship between man and God. He who has a clear and adequate perception passes to greater perfection, and therefore rejoices. Joy, accompanied with the idea of a cause, is love" (P, 49). White perceives the intellectual love of God to be the highest fulfillment of rational human nature. It is joy eternal and supreme, and is the logical and inevitable consequence of adequate knowledge. Love of man to God is "heaven," in Spinoza's view. "Heaven," White explains, "is not a hereafter of reward: it is the here and hereafter of the intellectual love of God. In so far as the mind is capable of intellectual love, it is not only eternal but a part of God Himself." In this concept White discovers freedom and truth; one is impelled toward the good through neither egotism nor fear of punishment, for the "reward" which follows the active pursuit of the good is the perfection of individual selfhood realized through relationship.
Spinoza's philosophy gave White genuine and practical help in his continuing quest for inner freedom. Spinoza's ideas implied a religion of hope and were positive and life-affirming where other creeds were fixed in negativism and rooted in the fear of death. Spinoza enlarged the idea of God and opened a way toward a relationship to the universal through the exercise of thought. He provided a clear direction for human activity and extended the potential of life beyond its immediate, commonplace boundaries. But while in Spinoza's thought "the whole of God is fact" (P, 38), White needed still more; he desired the emphasis on human love that is missing in Spinoza. The greatest freedom and individual fulfillment White found in divine love informing the human sphere—in the "indwelling Christ" of Protestant Christianity.