

SPINOZA (1632-1677)

introduced a shockingly radical reinterpretation of God and his relation to the universe
equally shocking theory of our roles in the universe
an avid political reformer, particularly on the issue of religious tolerance

Spinoza's *Ethics* consists of 250 "theorems," each of which he attempted to derive by rigorous deductive logic from a set of eight basic definitions and seven self-evident axioms
Given these axioms and his definition of substance, Spinoza is able to prove:

1) that there are no multiple substances, as Descartes thought, but only one infinite substance: God—but Spinoza's God is not the personal Judaeo-Christian God, but is rather simply *basic substance*. Spinoza's God is simply the sum total of everything that exists. It is reality, nature.
Spinoza was not an atheist, but a pantheist: God is all

2) Because there is only one substance, thought and extension are not the attributes of two distinct substances, mind and matter, as Descartes had thought. They are simply different attributes of one basic substance—alternative ways of conceiving the one substance
a living person is not a composite of two different things, but is a single unit or "modification" of substance that can be conceived either as extension or as thought. "Body" is a unit of substance conceived as extension. "Mind" is a unit of substance conceived as thought. Thus there is no problem explaining how the mind interacts with the body, for they are one and the same thing

3) the infinite substance has infinite attributes, therefore thought and extension are not the only attributes of substance; they are just the only attributes that we know—they are the only ways of characterizing or conceiving the substance available to us. They are the only "languages" in terms of which we can speak about reality or substance

4) there is no personal immortality after death

5) free will is an illusion; whatever happens is caused by the nature of substance
material bodies are governed by the laws of physics, and what happens to them is completely determined by what happened before. Because the mental and the physical are one and the same, what happens in mind is as inevitable as what happens in bodies. Everything was, is, and will be exactly as it must be.

Neither Hobbes or Spinoza is faced with Descartes' problem of explaining how two realms, the mental and physical interact.

Hobbes is faced with the problem of *explaining away* the mental realm, of reducing the mental to the physical, of explaining everything in terms of bodies in motion. We are inclined to ask of Hobbes how and why does this illusory mental realm seem so clearly to be real when it is not.

For Spinoza the mental realm is real, and there is nothing to explain away.

Life

born into Spanish speaking Jewish family living in Amsterdam
family background: Sephardic Jews, forcefully converted to Catholicism
then emigrated to Amsterdam where they returned to Judaism
educated as orthodox Jew
rejected Jewish theology early

at age of 24 was expelled from the synagogue

lived rest of life outside Amsterdam, first at Leiden, then the Hague
perhaps earned living polishing lenses
died in 1677 of phthisis, due in part to inhalation of glass dust

Published Work

first published work was a rendering into geometrical form of Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*
showed influence of Descartes and the concern for geometrical rigor

published anonymously a theologico-political treatise *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*
this argued for a late dating, and a liberal interpretation of the books of the Old Testament
presented a political theory
starting from a pessimistic view of human beings in a state of nature
derived the necessity of democratic government, freedom of speech, and religious toleration

Ethics Demonstrated According to the Geometrical Order

simultaneously a study of ethics and metaphysics

Spinoza's method

structure modeled on geometry
starting with eight definitions and seven propositions
from which he deduces several metaphysical-ethical conclusions
Spinoza thought the philosopher should start by making plain his starting assumptions
then focus on the logical relationships or inferences that follow
Spinoza thought the logical connections are what holds the universe together

Spinoza is a rationalist in that he thinks he can gain knowledge about the essence of a thing by means of rational intuition

also a deductionist since, like Descartes, he starts with mathematics as an ideal for science
Descartes is mainly concerned with finding absolutely certain axioms
thus deduction itself is in the background

Spinoza starts with the axioms, and places the emphasis on the inferences, thus on the system
even if we question the validity of the inferences

there is no doubt the work represents a complete, unified philosophical system
behind the dry formality of the work

there are radical and stimulating ideas about the human condition
with suggestions on how to escape the anxiety and passion of a pointless, unenlightened life
towards a free, serene life where we may view life and the universe from the eternal perspective

thus knowing and recognizing the underlying laws of nature
gaining peace of mind and freedom by realizing their necessity
behind the mathematical form of Spinoza's reflections

we find a vision of man's place in the universe

Part I Of God

concerns the basic structure of the universe—metaphysics, what exists? What is?

there is only one substance

key to Spinoza's philosophy is his monism

the infinite divine substance is identical with Nature: *Deus sive Natura*

this identification of God and nature can be understood in two ways:

- 1) if 'God' is just a picturesque way of referring to the ordered system of the natural universe, then Spinoza will be seen as an atheist—as Hume later referred to him
- 2) if one takes him to be saying that when scientist talk of 'Nature' they are really talking about God, then he will appear, in Novalis' words, a 'God-intoxicated man'

starting point of Spinoza's philosophy is Descartes' definition of substance as "that which requires nothing but itself in order to exist"

Spinoza took seriously the Cartesian definition of substance and drew from it the logical consequence that there was only one substance, God

Mind and matter were not substances,

thought and extension are both attributes of God

because God is infinite he must have an infinite number of attributes

but thought and extension are the only two we know

Part II Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind

more on metaphysical doctrine of the universe and man

Spinoza's solution to the Cartesian mind/body riddle

if all of nature must be seen as an integrated element within this total complex

then human nature must be seen as integrated within this totality

the medieval-Christian attempt to distinguish man from the rest of nature

to elevate man above the rest of the animal kingdom

seen by Spinoza as not only an illusory metaphysical extravagance

but also as a system of faulty psychology

with serious moral consequences

the *Ethics* is, after all, a treatise that is concerned with human life and the right way to live

but in order to first write about ethics at all it is necessary to have an adequate understanding of nature in general, and human nature in particular

the medieval-Cartesian legacy goes all the way back to Plato: psychological dualism

from Plato to Descartes man is viewed as a composite of mental and physical substances

two substances of mind and matter radically distinct

thus the doctrine of the immortality of the soul

from this psychological dualism a moral dualism developed

the soul has the function of governing the body, ruling over the passions

that reason has the power and duty to exercise this role was a virtually unquestioned assumption from Plato to Descartes

Spinoza rejects the whole tradition

to see why consider Descartes' dualism which asserts the following:

1. Man consists of two radically different substances, mind and body
2. Although distinct in nature these two substances are united into one individual.
3. Again, despite their dissimilarities, mind and body interact.

4. Reason has the unlimited capacity to control and direct passion.

Spinoza rejects all these claims.

for Spinoza there is just the human being
who can be conceived either as a mode of extension, or as a mode of thought, a mind
in describing man under each of these attributes we commit ourselves to a distinct method of explanation
and analysis that if consistently and correctly employed will yield adequate knowledge
each model of analysis (as body or as mind) is autonomous and legitimate
both are needed to account for richness of human nature
Spinoza's metaphysics permits multiple possibilities for the description and explanation of human nature

Part III Concerning the Origin and Nature of the Emotions

concerns the doctrine of affects

the great obstacle that hinders us from reaching true happiness is the passions, or affects
we allow ourselves to be influenced by various external forces
mind loses its equilibrium, leading to actions that lead to unhappiness
the passions control and reduce us
turns us into slaves of the desire for wealth, honour, and pleasure

Part IV Of Human Bondage, or the Nature of the Emotions

Spinoza may have solved Cartesian mind/body riddle but a serious problem remains
if human reason is not a semi-independent, superior substance whose job it is to govern bodily passions,
as Descartes believed
then how are our emotions to be controlled?
Can they even be controlled?

Actually not clear how this problem can even be formulated within Spinoza's psychology
since he doesn't start with mind/body dualism
if mind and body are just two different ways of looking at the same thing, what sense does it make to ask
whether one can control the other?

Spinoza is quite aware of the underlying motivation for the question
man as a mode is a creature of passion
man's route to happiness is only by moderating and directing the passions
although he has produced a new psychology
he is concerned with traditional ethical problems

Spinoza believed his predecessors failed in dealing with these problems because
either they did not study the emotions scientifically
or they used the wrong science or did not complete the project

thus he lays down the metaphysical and psychological foundations in Parts I and II
then moves on to apply these insights to the questions of human emotion and how man is to deal with it
this furnishes Spinoza with the tools for an objective, neutral analysis of human passion
Psychology is thus natural science, subject to the same methods, norms, and goals as are the other
sciences
it is from and upon this naturalistic psychology that Spinoza builds his moral philosophy

Spinoza claims that man is capable of having both actions and passions which Spinoza calls “affects”
what we mean by emotions

passion: must take the word literally as connoting a process or event whereby the individual undergoes an experience that causes him to suffer
the individual is affected by a stimulus that produces an affect
crucial notion here is *passivity*

basic difference between actions and passions is not one between a mental state and a physical condition
as many of Spinoza’s predecessors like Descartes insisted
it is instead a difference between two levels of one and the same emotion

if an affect is understood clearly and distinctly
if, using Spinoza’s terminology, we have an “adequate idea” of the emotion
then it is an action
we are thus in a sense the cause of it
thus knowledge results in action

an emotion not adequately understood is a passion
in this situation we do not act but suffer
we are on the “receiving end”
we *react* instead of act
for Spinoza, what makes a person an agent is self-knowledge

This passionless study of the passions does not entail a rejection of all affects or feelings
distinguishes between good and harmful effects
good feelings are those which increase our activity
harmful are those which make us go passive
when we are active, we act more from ourselves and are more free

thus the need for adequate knowledge of man
earlier philosophers tried to “supernaturalize” man
by doing so they made it impossible to understand ourselves
and to achieve human happiness

for Spinoza, knowledge is freedom
in Part I Spinoza had argued that only God is free
man can become “relatively free” by virtue of knowledge
to the extent that he has an adequate ideas of himself and his place within nature
to be free is thus to be active
to cause things to happen according to our understanding of the way things are and ought to be
we shall never be as free as God
but we are capable of knowledge, and to that extent we are free

Spinoza’s conception of freedom is one version of a theory currently viewed as
“soft-determinism,” or “compatibilism”
this kind of theory attempts to hold both a deterministic account of human behavior
and to the notion of free action

understands freedom as being free from external compulsion
only when we are compelled to do something that we are not free

another way of looking at Spinoza's conception of freedom
is to consider it as a form of self-determinism
a thing is free if and only if it acts according to its *own* nature
to act is to be a cause of things, not to be a mere recipient or reagent
we act to the extent what we have adequate knowledge,
especially of ourselves and our place within nature
Spinoza's freedom is thus a kind of Socratic self-knowledge
for Spinoza, freedom is power
conceives of man as an organism constantly striving to maximize his power to act, to be free
all emotions that contribute to this increase his freedom
those that decrease it subject man to external and internal forces of control
a freeman is a person of power, a person who determines himself

final phase of Spinoza's search for salvation
armed with proper understanding of human emotion and human freedom
now must confront the most serious obstacle to human happiness
the bondage of the emotions

Spinoza fully appreciates the force of the emotions
unlike many predecessors, he is neither blind to them
nor does he underestimate their power
most people live in "servitude to passion"
they are slaves to emotion because they are ignorant
they do not know what the world and man are like
self-knowledge leads to an understanding of one's nature
as an organism necessarily subject to emotions
but also teaches how this subjection to emotion can be weakened

activity is not understood as pursuit of business or frenetic action on the external level
aim is to free ourselves from arbitrary external influence
by allowing our spiritual power, our true essence, shape our actions and our lives
our true essence lies in an active, intellectual cognition
contributes to ending our isolation and allowing us to identify with nature (God)

Part V Of the Power of the Intellect, or of Human Freedom

sketches a kind of moral psychotherapy
by virtue of which we can liberate ourselves from the bondage of passion
this therapy comprises two levels of knowledge:
1) knowledge of how our emotions are related to external factors
2) knowledge of how we attain a certain kind of insight that is redemptive

the first leads to a psychological regimen whose purpose is to detach us from emotion
this is achieved by understanding the nature of the particular emotions
how they arise and to what extent they dominate us
with knowledge we can redirect emotional energy away from destructive patterns etc.,

Like Freud, Spinoza did not advocate asceticism, but moderation
like Freud he understood the emotions need to be understood and effectively controlled or channeled into
healthier directions

otherwise we suffer

the second level of knowledge has to do with our place within the whole of nature

or, in religious terms, our relationship to God

Spinoza claims that adequate self-knowledge is

the first step toward a manifestation of our love of God

to understand oneself, is to see oneself as a particular mode within Nature, or God

self-knowledge is then knowledge of God

love is for Spinoza an affect or emotion that involves knowledge

love is “joy accompanied by an idea of its cause”

to know is to love God

the more we know, the more we love God

it is this love that for Spinoza is the supreme good

that which makes for human happiness

Spinoza invents special term for this kind of knowledge

scientia intuitiva “intuitive knowledge”

epistemologically, this knowledge is superior to both sensation and inference

it is complete and systematic, unlike the fragmentary and partial character of sense-experience

it is synthetic and categorical, unlike the discursive and hypothetical nature of inference

intuitive knowledge enables one to see the whole of reality in a comprehensive grasp

everything is clear and distinct

this intuitive cognition results in an understanding of man and his place in the universe

life becomes not only intelligible, but livable

this intuitive knowledge gives the highest possible peace of mind

intuitive knowledge shows us why things happen in the ways they do

that they cannot be otherwise

it is an insight of and into eternity

the whole universe and everything in it are perceived “under a form of eternity”

eternity: one of the more famous and difficult notions in Spinoza

what does he mean?

Tells us explicitly that he does not mean infinite duration, as Aristotle thought

more that God, or Nature, is *timeless*

given his definition of freedom, it turns out that the being that is free is eternal

that which exists and acts necessarily in complete conformity to its own nature

is both free and eternal

for Spinoza, only God, or Nature, satisfies totally this condition

in this sense God is not subject to time

a being that falls within time is one that is not self-sufficient and perfect

redemption is reached

the wise person's insight into the necessary essence of the universe and the obliteration of the distinction between self and the rest of the universe.

through our intellect,
through the active intellectual cognition of the connection of everything with God
we become free because our identity now embraces the All
no longer a narrow ego frustrated by that which perishes and changes in isolated events
we recognize the inevitable and constant character of reality as it is
we arrive at supreme happiness through the intellectual love of God

this human love of God is also caused by God
the intellectual love of God is therefore not only our love of God, but also a love *from* God
our love of God is God's own love

some see Spinoza's "intellectual love of God" in comparison to Stoic and Mainomindean notions
Spinoza is not a stoic because he does not believe that man is capable of complete self-mastery
that our emotions and behavior are totally under the control of reason
the Stoic and Christian vision of man exercising complete control over his emotional life is false
rests upon totally inadequate psychology
which is based on faulty metaphysics

Spinoza rejects the Stoic notions of passivity, withdrawal, and asceticism
freedom consists in activity, power, and joy
Spinoza's free spirit says "yes" to life
happiness consists not in suppressing or repressing the emotions
but in transforming them into adequate ideas
so that one can be free and joyful

Spinoza's intellectual love of God
also not identical with medieval doctrine of union with God through knowledge
this notion of union rests on dualistic metaphysics
Spinoza's monistic metaphysics makes prophecy and incarnation both unnecessary and incoherent
the fact that most people have not achieved human happiness
not attributed to some sin from Adam
but simply to ignorance and superstition

Notion of Substance

Spinoza took seriously the Cartesian definition of substance and drew from it the logical consequence that there was only one substance, God

What is *Substance*?

Aristotle: substance is that which exists independently
for Aristotle, this was particular things, like the brown doors and the round towers in opposition to properties like brown and round
these properties have only relative existence
as they exist only as properties of particular things

Spinoza's conception of substance is a kind of absolutization of the Aristotelian definition

“Substance is that which exists by itself *alone*, absolutely alone, and that which is understood by itself *alone*, absolutely alone.”

this is to say that substance is that which exists totally independently
this suspends the concept of substance as a concept of particular things

the brown door is not a substance
as it does not exist completely independent of everything else
cannot be understood without understanding something else that is not a door

particular things must be delimited from other particular things
this delimitation already implies that particular things cannot be understood completely independently of everything else
this means that no particular thing that in one way or another is delimited from something else can be conceived of as substance
but then, on this definition, what is substance?

Substance is *one* and *infinite* since all delimitation is excluded by the definition of substance
substance is *one* because there cannot be more than one substance in the world
if there were another substance there would be delimitation
substance is *infinite* because limits in time would also be a delimitation
nor can anything else be the cause of substance
since this other thing would have to be included if we are to comprehend substance fully
thus, substance can only be understood through itself alone
substance is *causa sui* (‘cause of itself’)

If there is a God, God cannot be something different from substance
substance is God
substance also cannot be distinguished from nature
substance is *nature*
Spinoza’s doctrine is thus a *monism*:
everything is one, and everything is understood on the basis of this one
Since God and nature are both substance, we end up with *pantheism*:
God and nature are one
since substance is not created, and nature is substance
we cannot say that God is the creator of nature
rejects the entire Judaeo-Christian conception of God

what then is substance?
If we are asking for a definition that we can *imagine*
then we are asking the wrong question
there is much that we can think about that we cannot imagine,
in the sense of making a mental image of it

if substance cannot be imagined in this sense
we cannot ascribe to God such attributes as we can imagine
but we can think about substance, and have a concept of substance
substance appears to us in two ways: as thought or as extension
substance has infinite ways of appearing

but these two ways are ways that it appears to us
the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension
for Spinoza two equally valid forms of appearance for the one, underlying substance

we do not have direct access to substance
what we are immediately in contact with are the different *modi* of the two attributes of substance

particular phenomena, including the individual, are thus more or less complex *modi* within two attributes of substance

ultimately everything is connected in substance
everything (except substance) has a relative or limited existence in relation to substance
extension and thought are thus not two independent basic elements as with Descartes
the two attributes, extension and thought, represent two aspects of the same substance

what Spinoza does is to represent the relationship between God and creatures not in the physical terms of cause and effect, but in logical terms of subject and predicate
any apparent statement about a finite substance is in reality a predication about God
adjectives, not nouns, are the proper ways of referring to creatures like us

since ‘substance’ has such a profound significance for Spinoza, it is not an obvious assumption that there is such a thing as substance at all
nor does Spinoza take it for granted—it is not one of the axioms
the first propositions of the *Ethics* are devoted to proving that there is at most one substance
we are not told that there is at least one substance until prop XI where Spinoza offers to prove that God exists

thus the proof of the existence of substance is Spinoza’s version of the ontological argument for the existence of God:
a substance *A* cannot be brought into existence by some other thing *B*; for if it could, the notion of *B* would be essential to the conception of *A*
therefore, *A* would not satisfy the definition of substance
thus, any substance must be its own cause and contain its own explanation, existence must be part of its essence
suppose that God does not exist
then his essence does not involve his existence
thus he is not a substance
but that is absurd because God is a substance by definition
thus, by *reductio ad absurdum*, God must exist

weakest point of the argument seems to be the claim that if *B* is the cause of *A*
then the concept *B* must be part of the concept *A*
this is an unwarranted identification of causal relationships and logical relationships
It is not possible to know what lung cancer is without knowing what a lung is
but is it not possible to know what lung cancer is without knowing what the cause of lung cancer is?

Necessity and Freedom

the relationship between substance and attribute is not a causal relationship
not that something first takes place in substance
and then causes corresponding events in each of the two attributes

what happens, happens in the substance
but reveals itself in two aspects, thought and extension

the relationship between substance and attributes has a strictly necessary character
since the attributes represent the two manifestations of substance
not really correct to talk about a relationship between substance and attribute
the attributes are only the manner of appearance of the substance
what takes place in thought and in the extended field
cannot be the result of coercion by the substance
since everything that takes place in thought and extension is merely
the form of appearance of what takes place in substance

this view also embraces political conditions
human beings appear as *modi* of the two attributes, as both extended body and thinking soul
no mind/body problem in that there is no need to explain the interaction
what takes place in the soul and body are always coordinated without there being any influence of one on
the other
since both are but expressions of the same event in substance
also what we do and think

is necessarily determined by substance,
without there being any form of coercion, since we are but aspects of substance

thus the question of freedom is determined by how we understand human nature
since a human being is fundamentally one with substance
it is meaningless to say a human being is free of substance or that a human being is coerced by substance
if the words *freedom* and *coercion* presuppose a relationship between two relatively independent
phenomena

Spinoza accepts the mechanistic perspective in regard to the attribute of extension
what happens in the extended field is causally determined
but human beings are not causally determined by substance

if everything in the two attributes follows God's infinite nature just as necessarily as it follows from the
nature of a triangle that the sum of the angles is always 180 degrees
what is God's, or substance's, infinite nature?
Substance is one with the laws of nature
Spinoza seems to view the laws of nature in the light of geometry rather than physics
what takes place within substance, that which truly takes place at all
is conceived in terms of logical and timeless structures
the universe, or substance, is a timeless and static whole
which rests on its own logical structure

does Spinoza deny that individuals exist?
does he deny that the individual may more or less be free?
the individual is only a *modus* of the substance
but, relatively, particular people have their own existence and their own freedom
to whatever degree they can act on the basis of their own nature
to understand our own nature, is to understand our relation to the whole

understanding ourselves is to understand more than ourselves in a narrow sense

in social terms, this means we must understand ourselves as being determined by the community
internally determined in identity, in essence
through socialization and interaction with a given society
the more we are able to see ourselves
as determined by a comprehensive social and physical reality the freer we become

this is so because whenever we are able to widen and deepen our self-understanding
whatever happens is conceived as being necessary
must personally recognize the truth of our inner connection to 'all that is'

thus, for Spinoza, the truth will make one free
as in Socrates and Stoicism
in Christianity
in the philosophy of the Enlightenment
in Freud and the modern critique of ideology
but just what truth is and how it can liberate is the point of difference

for Spinoza, the liberating and redeeming truth is something that arises out of the recognition of our
connection with totality, a recognition that it entails an expansion of our identity in relation to substance

the point is that we cannot understand anything
not even ourselves,
without seeing it in relation to the whole
to understand what it means to be human is to understand how we fit into nature

ethics, along with the liberating self-understanding that shapes our identity,
thus points toward an understanding of the totality, or of substance
ethics is thus necessarily metaphysics