# A History of Philosophy
# 36 Spinoza
# By Dr. Arthur Holmes of Wheaton College

All right, let's get to business then, shall we, for today. And this week we want to give our attention to Benedict Spinoza, a Spanish-Jewish thinker who, from childhood, lived in the Netherlands with his family because of the anti-Semitic environment in Spain, but he was never really accepted within the Jewish community because of his philosophical position. And as you read Spinoza, you will readily see that he is much more the pantheist than the theist, and consequently, he simply does not take Jewish beliefs literally concerning God, and that was the source of the problem.

But I want to focus first of all on the historical importance of Spinoza so that we can see why we want to spend as much time on him and how he fits into the overall picture. The last two weeks, we were talking about Descartes, René Descartes, and the first thing to notice about Spinoza historically is that he continues the method that Descartes employed. That is to say, the geometrical kind of method proceeds from definitions and axioms logically to prove theorems and conclusions.

That's geometry. And Descartes, as we've emphasized, adopted that in his meditations and other of his writings, and so indeed does Spinoza. In fact, the history books refer to the Cartesians, and I commented on some of them on Wednesday of last week, but Spinoza by any account is a Cartesian by virtue of this methodology.

His first philosophical publication in 1663, when he was just 30 years of age, had this interesting title: Parts 1 and 2 of Descartes' Principles of Philosophy Demonstrated in the Geometrical Manner, and what he did was to spell it out literally in the format of a geometry textbook with definitions, axioms, and theorems with proofs and so forth. And as perhaps you've noted, if you started reading Spinoza's Ethics, and I can't think of much you would rather do over a Thanksgiving weekend than read Spinoza's Ethics, he does precisely the same thing there. He starts with definitions and axioms and then proceeds to state and prove theorems, and after each one, he writes in true Euclidean fashion, QED, quod erat demonstratum.

I don't know where they have it in modern geometry textbooks, but they sure as they did in the high school geometry textbooks I used. So yeah, the Cartesian method was thoroughly followed through. You'll be interested in the way in which one writer, Stuart Hampshire, who did this Penguin book on Spinoza, the way in which he talks of the method.

Spinoza insists that his words, and particularly his words about God and his attributes, must never be understood in their vulgar, that is to say, their common and figurative sense, but only in the special sense given to them in his definitions.

Now keep that caution in mind. When you read Spinoza referring to substance or to mind or to God or to good, check his definitions, because he wants to use them strictly in that defined sense only and not in the common, ordinary language sense.

He considered almost everything that had been written and said about God and the creation of the universe meaningless, since unphilosophical people are incapable of conceiving God clearly. They are, by training, incapable of understanding what they cannot imagine, so tied to their senses. And subsequently, Descartes was a rationalist; his a priori knowledge, that's what they couldn't understand, and for this reason, he wrote both his early exposition of Descartes' philosophy and his own great definitive work, The Ethics, in this geometrical manner as a succession of propositions with supporting proofs, lemmas, and corollaries.

He thus eliminated from the presentation of his philosophy any concealed means of persuasion and of engaging the imagination of the reader, which are part of ordinary prose writing, no rhetoric, just plain logical form. He wanted the true philosophy to be presented as nearly as possible in an objective, impersonal, and free manner, free from appeals to the imagination, as was Euclid's Elements. Well, that is Spinoza with his method, and I think you have to see what he's doing in order to follow the thing through.

Remember that this is the age where there was a crisis of authority with regard to human knowledge, where scepticism had again reared its head, and where Bacon and Descartes had, in their separate ways, tried to establish certain bases on which we could build a truly scientific knowledge. And Spinoza is in that manner following Descartes in wanting knowledge to be built on axiomatic truth, as in the case of mathematics, which by the way is the one science carried over from the Middle Ages, which I think was not as subject to the sceptical doubt as the others. So that's the first note of historical importance, and Spinoza therefore transmits that method to those who come later, and we'll see something of the same thing when we look at Leibniz next time, although Leibniz by and large does not lay it out in the form of a geometry textbook, but he's the same kind of rationalist.

The second important thing to notice is that while he has a tremendous admiration for Descartes and adopts some of Descartes' particular positions, he modifies Descartes' overall point of view in very clear-cut ways. Descartes was a dualist in two senses: the duality of mind and body, and the duality of God and nature. Spinoza rejects both dualities.

Spinoza is a metaphysical monist, and we haven't met metaphysical monists for a long time because of the Judeo-Christian influence. We did meet Plotinus and of course Parmenides, and if we insert within metaphysical monists the kind of double-aspect monism which we found in the Stoics, double-aspect monism that we found in the Stoics, where there are two sides, two aspects to all things, there is the

rational intelligible order and there is the changing material ingredient, the fiery vapor, the intelligible order, logos, so you have logos and matter in the Stoics, and we'll find you have essentially the same in Spinoza. God and nature are two words referring to one and the same thing.

God stresses the intelligibility side, the logos side; nature stresses the matter in motion side, so you have that Stoic-like framework emerging. So instead of a theistic metaphysic, such as Descartes had, what Spinoza gives us is a pantheistic metaphysic, and because God is everything and everything is God, it follows that intelligible order and matter in motion are really two sides of one and the same thing. And instead of mind and body being separate substances with wholly different properties, mind and body are just names for two aspects or attributes of one and the same thing.

And so he has a double-aspect monism all the way through. Now, when we were talking last Wednesday to the faithful remnant of the class about Descartes' ethics, I tried to show that Descartes came out with a Stoic-type ethic, that is to say, an ethic in which reason, by virtue of its clear and distinct ideas, can dispel the passions, control the emotions, and reason over emotion. Now that Stoic-type ethic continues in Spinoza, so that one of the things that he seems to carry over from Descartes is this approach to ethics, only he does it much more explicitly.

He does it very systematically, whereas Descartes does nothing systematic about ethics. The thing is that Spinoza not only writes systematically about ethics, but he grounds his Stoic kind of ethics in a Stoic kind of metaphysic. Get it? He grounds a Stoic kind of ethic in a Stoic kind of metaphysic.

Now in saying Stoic-type of metaphysic, I mean a nature pantheism. Nature is divine. The Stoics spoke of nature as providence.

And in that fashion, Spinoza tends to transmit, he does transmit, to the 19th century. He is, remember, in the 17th century. But he's the link that transmits that monistic kind of approach, a pantheistic kind of approach, a nature pantheism, to the 19th-century Romanticists.

And when we get to the 19th century, we'll see how some of them, like Hegel and Schleiermacher, speak very favorably of Spinoza and what he had done. And if you're acquainted with 19th-century Romanticist literature, you may be aware of the way in which people like Coleridge, Goethe, and Matthew Arnold are very favorably inclined towards Spinoza. So he is the historical link in transmitting a nature pantheism to the 19th-century Romanticists.

Now, of course, they weren't rationalists like he is. Far from it. They didn't develop an ethic of reason controlling the emotions.

Far from it. But it's the nature pantheism which they transmit, which they continue. So that's the second kind of thing, modifications and continuities with regard to Descartes' own position and what he transmits to later on.

Now that immediately leads to a third kind of historical importance, the influence of his rationalistic critique of traditional religion. In his case, traditional Judaism. He's sometimes cited in courses on biblical criticism as one of the originators of historical criticism of the Old Testament literature.

He published in 1670 a work entitled the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus. A political theological tract, essay. Tractatus Theologico-Politicus.

In which, for instance, he denies that there is any specially revealed truth. Now, why would a rationalistic pantheist say that? Well, you see, if you have confidence in this mathematical kind of method, then it should be possible to infer the total body of accessible truth from given axioms by reason alone. So, the sufficiency of the method.

But for a pantheist, any special kind of divine act of self-revelation is meaningless. Because if there is no being outside of God, what would it mean for God to act to some being in a self-revealing way? What you get in a pantheistic scheme is what is often called an immanentistic theology. That is to say, if everything is God and God is everything, then everything that is ascribed to God is simply going on within God.

Not to the outside of God, but going on within God. And insofar as things are going on in nature, thanks to God, it's because God is in nature and nature is in God and the totality of the being. And so there can be no such thing as special divine revelation.

For a pantheist, it's both unnecessary and impossible. Religion, therefore, for Spinoza, reduces to right living. So his kind of Judaism would be analogous to what today is thought of as reformed Judaism.

Which is a religious humanism valuing the values, the moral concerns of historic Judaism, without the supernaturalist theology of orthodox Judaism. Because of that, in turn, the role of religious symbols changes. Religious language and religious rites are no longer descriptive or reminders of a traditional God and his mighty acts.

They are simply symbols that tend to bind the community together. They have communitarian values. They bind the community together and provide imaginative language, the language of story, the language of heritage, which unites the community around certain moral ideals.

And that is a theme which is getting a lot of emphasis in our own day. Narrative theology, for instance, has some connections with this. If you're interested in pursuing this kind of influence in 19th-century theology, we'll see more about it in the second semester.

But there is a very worthwhile book by C.C.J. Webb. A book entitled A Study of Religious Thought in England from 1850. A Study of Religious Thought in England from 1850.

And all I'll say about that at this stage is that it will give you some contact with the kinds of religious thought that are influenced by Spinoza's rationalist critique of traditional religion. Well, those three things about historical importance. Any comments, questions? Reruns? Places where you blinked and want to be filled in? Yeah, Bob? I was wondering, are you saying that Spinoza is a strict champion? Yeah, I think that's so.

Does that raise a problem? It didn't seem like you were completely saying that. Oh, okay, maybe I was being too gracious. Maybe I said he tended towards rather than he is outright.

Okay, well, he is quite explicit. I think that'll become very plain as we go ahead. Janelle? Well, again, I'm inclined to say wait and see for a few moments until we get down there.

Now, the few moments may be Friday, so don't hold your breath too long. David? Okay, yeah. Let me see if I can reconstruct briefly, for the benefit of the not-so-faithful remnant, what we did with Descartes last Wednesday.

The way I summed it up was this. We were talking about Descartes' theory of the passions. Now, I don't want to go back into that now, but check what Stumpf has to say about Descartes on the emotions and passions.

His theory of the passions is such that they mislead us by virtue of a lack of clarity, which accompanies emotion. Consequently, when the mind achieves clarity and distinctness of thought, clear and distinct ideas, you see, that confusion that goes with emotion is dispelled, and the power of the passion is broken. So it's clarity of mind.

Now, before you dismiss that, ask yourself what it is that the psychological counsellor, perhaps the analyst, does in trying to get you to remember something, or to think more clearly about the circumstances in which such and such happened. You see, trying to dispel the emotion by means of clarity of thought. So that's the sort of thing which he sees.

Now, at the same time, pull into that his discussion of will and intellect, Descartes' discussion of will and intellect. Because what he says in that regard about error, he says with regard to a will that jumps the gun ahead of the intellect, but a will that needs to be restrained from making judgments about what it knows. Now, error is a cognitive kind of evil.

So how then are we going to restrain ourselves from evil, but by restraining the will, for Descartes, restraining the will within the limits of what we know with clarity and distinctness to be good. And so you have the same sort of thing. Similarly, with regard to mind and body, inasmuch as the mind is a separate substance from the body, and passions are physically caused, the fact that the mind is separate means that it need not be subject to deterministic kinds of causation from bodily passions.

But the mind, by its clarity and distinctness, can assert its independence and gain the same conclusion results. And then the fourth thing I noted was that in his discourse on method, as he is about to launch into this attempt to overcome scepticism, he lays down what he calls a provisional morality that he will follow while he's living in such uncertainty. And the provisional morality is essentially this same kind of thing.

He will restrain judgment, he will restrain action until such time as he knows, and so on and so forth. So it's this picture of reason controlling emotion, reason controlling, guiding the will all the way through. The only thing that confuses me is that you said that's stimulated by the mind.

No, there is a consciousness of them in the mind. Because in the mind-body interaction, just as the decisions of the will which occur in the mind produce bodily changes, bodily actions, so the passions which are stirrings of the movements of the animal spirits in the body have their conscious by-products in the mind. And those conscious by-products are ideas, yes, but confused ideas.

Adventitious ideas. And they must not dominate the mind and cause trouble. So in that sense, it's a rationalistic kind of ethic.

We're ruled by reason. We should be, not by emotion. Spinoans are likewise.

The big difference in Spinoza we'll see is that Spinoza cannot assert the freedom of the will. He's a determinist. And that makes quite a difference.

In Spinoza, you begin to pick up a rather familiar paradigm of what follows from a pantheistic point of view. We met this in Plotinus, the Neoplatonist. With pantheism, you're going to have determinism.

You won't have any separateness and the kind of freedom that goes with separateness, such that an individual has initiative. It's self-ruled. And then problems arise about making any clear distinction between good and evil.

Because what status is there for evil if everything is one? The distinction gets blurred. The way in which Plotinus tried to handle it was with his theory of emanations, then degrees of so forth. Incidentally, pantheism is not just a matter nowadays of Eastern religion.

Inasmuch as Eastern influences have reasserted themselves in the West. Well, at least in the western part of this country. New Age movements are essentially pantheistic.

All the writings of the New Age are not systematic, not spelled out carefully, but there's enough there, I think, to help us see that it's a kind of pantheism. A more romanticised kind of pantheism, closer to the 19th century than it is to Spinoza. But the same sorts of paradigms occur.

OK, let's move then from his historical importance to what I've called general features. In fact, those general features are already beginning to show. And the first general feature, of course, is this view that God and nature are one and the same.

God and nature are one and the same. Now, you'll find he gets into that by virtue of his concept of substance. Now, he doesn't start with a methodological doubt, no.

He starts with definitions. He starts with a definition of substance, among other things. And the way he defines substance leads him to the conclusion that God and nature are one and the same thing.

Now, if God and nature are one and the same thing, then you find two aspects of things. That is to say, in God, there is both thought and extension. God is infinite.

Extension. As if God is the whole arena of space. But God, at the same time, is infinite in thought.

And you get echoes here of the Platonic tradition. Or perhaps of the Stoic Logos concept. Thought and extension.

These are two attributes of God. One God and two known attributes. There may be other attributes we don't know.

But these are two that are manifest in us and in our experience. In fact, these two attributes are evident in both infinite and finite modes. The infinite mode of thought is God.

The mind of God. The infinite mode of extension is nature. In it all, its vastness.

But finite modes of thought are yours and mine. And finite modes of extension are yours and mine. Bodies, as we call them.

But these are not substances. Mind is not a substance separate from a body. The body is not a substance separate from the mind.

Your and my bodies are not substances separate from God. We are simply finite modes of the being of God. You see? In that sense, you do think God's thoughts after him.

How else could you? Your thoughts are part of God's self-consciousness. So there is no notion of separate substances in Descartes' sense. There are distinguishable attributes.

Distinguishable modes. You can distinguish your body from the body sitting next to you. You can distinguish your thoughts from somebody else's.

But that's not a distinction of substances. It's a distinction of modes. One finite mode from another finite mode.

Now, you can see in this distinction between the finite and the infinite, if you like, you can see echoes of Plato's divided line. The eternal and the temporal, the infinite and the finite. No, it's only echoes.

Because Plato would turn over in his grave to think of nature as eternal. You see? Although his one certainly was. But nature? No.

Nature in any physical sense. So the Platonic echo is there. But what he's talking about is not two different realms, forms, and particulars.

No. What he's talking about are finite and infinite modes of one and the same realm. Finite and infinite modes of God, which are nature.

Now, it's this then that poses the perennial problems and the perennial topics. So that in a few moments we'll be seeing how this double aspect monism of his is worked out on this whole range of dualities. Where none of them represent two separate things.

God and nature are not separate things. Thought and extension are not separate things. Freedom and determinism are not separate things.

Good and evil are not separate things. Reason and emotion are not separate things. They're aspects of one and the same thing.

Two sides of one phenomenon. All the way through. So, what you need to get a hold of in terms of general features are the terms substance, attribute, and mode.

Okay? Substance, attributes, and modes. Now that's the overall. Make sure you're clear about that.

There is only one substance. But one substance has at least two attributes. And those two attributes are identifiable in the infinite mode, but also in finite modes.

You are not a being. You're a finite mode of being. Your thinking is simply the finite mode of the attribute of thinking of the one.

All-inclusive being. You're thinking your present ideas about a finite modification of the infinite thinking of God. Substance, attribute, mode.

Does that come across clearly enough? Okay. The diagram helps to catch the terminology. So that if you wanted to extend the divided line you see all the way down, then what you would have would be our thoughts, our bodies.

Okay. These would be in the realm of particulars. Is Spinoza a realist about universals or just a conceptualist? Well, I'm inclined to say just a conceptualist.

That is to say, we do really think in universal terms, in abstract terms. We do. Yeah, he's no nominalist.

But if a realist means that there are universal principles which are separable in some way from particulars? No. No. So closer to a conceptualist, I think.

And again, the stoic picture is the one that guides. Okay. So that's the first general feature to watch.

Substance, attributes, modes. Sam. The second general feature has to do with his epistemology.

His epistemology. I've been saying that he's a rationalist. And he distinguishes three kinds of knowledge.

Three kinds of knowledge. Which is one opinion. Two, reasoning.

And three, intuition. And this again sounds very much like Descartes. He makes this threefold distinction in a little work of his own called The Improvement of the Understanding.

On the improvement of the understanding. I ran across a paperback copy of it in an airport bookstore not very long ago. Entitled How to Improve Your Mind by Benedict Spinoza.

Translated into a how to do it thing. I suspect that anybody who was beguiled by that into buying it had a shock and wondered what they'd spent money on. But the distinction was still there.

We have the distinction, however, in another place in his ethics. And if you have the anthology with you, take a look at it will you on page 127. Page 127.

Where in a note, note 2, appended to proposition 40 of part 2 of his Ethics. In note 2 on page 127, first column. He distinguishes different kinds of knowledge.

Halfway down the column, there is knowledge of the first kind. Italicized. Opinion or imagination.

And those two refer to the one and two immediately above. Opinion has to do with fragmentary awareness of particulars. And two has to do with the ideas that symbols, words, arouse in the imagination.

Okay. So opinion or imagination is number one. Number two, reason or knowledge of the second kind.

Because we have, as he puts it, notions common to all men. Adequate ideas of the properties of things. In other words, universal truths that are commonly known.

Universal truths are commonly known. And then there is a third kind of knowledge, which we call intuition. Intuition, which proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of attributes of God.

To have adequate knowledge of the essence of things. Now obviously he's talking here in intuition of something which is absolutely certain. Which is completely indubitable.

You'll find he speaks of this in terms of clear and distinct ideas. Descartes. And he uses the phrase adequate ideas most often.

When he wants to refer to what is intuitively certain. Remember the way in which Descartes used clear and distinct was to say so clear and distinct as to be beyond all doubt. Now that's what makes it adequate.

It's beyond all doubt. So clear and distinct as to be beyond all doubt, intuitively certain. Adequate ideas.

Now watch for that. That notion of adequate ideas. He obviously is not going to give much credence to opinion and imagination.

The knowledge you have that way is fragmentary. It's confused. It's empirical.

It deals only with contingent matters. It's involved with the illicit associations of language due to customary usages. That's the way religious language is, he says.

So his rationalistic critique of religion and religious language is really in terms of a critique of the kinds of language used in talking about religious matters. Traditionally, it's been called the language of analogy. But analogy is not the kind of literal definition that Euclid wanted.

It's not the kind of explicitness of mathematical reasoning, you see. And so he has no patience with that kind of language, knowledge. So his concern then is going to be to gain knowledge that is intuitively certain, that is, self-evident, that is, in that sense, adequate.

And you'll find that he sees error as due, obviously, to lack of clarity and distinctness. When you give your assent to what lacks clarity and distinctness, that's when the problem arises. Which sounds like Descartes.

Well then, to start his geometrical pursuit, his method, he's going to have to start, obviously, with some adequate ideas. Because nothing else has the intuitive certainty that is required for axioms with which to begin a whole deductive system. And what he wants to do is to proceed from adequate ideas to adequate ideas to adequate ideas all the way through the chain of reasoning.

He'd like to think that every proposition he lists and numbers in the ethics, hundreds of them, is logically certain. You start with what's intuitively certain and work to things that are demonstrably certain. And as in a geometrical system, you'll see he refers back in working his proofs to a definition, or to an axiom, or to a previous proposition that's been proven, or to the corollary which has been explicitly drawn, the corollary of a previous proposition that's been proven.

And so the whole thing has that kind of mathematical rigor, at least in his intention. Now, I suppose it follows from that that if you don't like his conclusions, there are two things you can do. One is to question his definitions and axioms.

Are the axioms axiomatic? Really? Are the definitions arbitrary? Defensible? How do you define definition? Is a definition something we choose in the sense that we decide how this word is going to be used, like in Alice in Wonderland? If that's the way I say I'm using the word, then that's the way I say I'm using the word. Mad Hatter or not, rather crucial. The philosophy of language begins to emerge in the 17th century as crucial.

We came across it in Hobbes with his nominalism. I mentioned to you that I was working on Hobbes currently, and even since we did Hobbes two weeks ago, I've discovered places where Hobbes says that the problems that arise with other views is because of the way people have given meanings to words. Thinking begins with definitions.

And for a nominalist, wouldn't you expect that? You think? Not with ideas, but with words is where thinking begins. Any questions or comments before we dive right into it? Those two general features. The first one has to do with substance, attributes, and modes.

The second one has to do with the leftovers, namely opinion, reason, and intuition. Let's turn our attention then, shall we, to some of these double aspects. That's what's going to have to occupy us for the rest of Spinoza.

God and nature. Turn to page 110 in the anthology and look at the definitions. Obviously, to do Spinoza justice, we'd have to weigh all of these definitions and all the axioms and work all of the proofs again.

Though Coffman has omitted a lot. This is a selection after all. But I just want to catch one or two of the proofs that stand out as being very significant.

The first definition shouldn't surprise you. By that which is self-caused, I mean that of which the essence involves existence. That of which the nature is only conceivable as existent.

Now, that's the scholastic way of talking about God, whose essence involves existence. That was the basis for Descartes' argument for the existence of God in Meditation 5. His ontological argument from the concept of God as one whose essence involves existence. Then look down at definition 3. By substance, I mean that which is in itself and is conceived in itself.

Has an identity of its own. It is in itself. It is conceived through itself.

You can think of it in isolation from anything else. Now that was Descartes' way of talking about substance. It's pretty well a Cartesian definition that far.

But notice how he understands that in the second clause. Now he's going to put the definition in other words. By substance, I mean that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception.

He's not simply saying you can think of it isolated from other things. But you can form a conception independently of anything else. There are no implications, logical implications dangling towards other things.

There are no logical assumptions about other things involved. So he seems to have defined substance as that which in no sense is dependent on other substances. Or has other substances dependent on it.

Now that's why I think he's defined substance in such a way that there can only be one. That definition is crucial. Now get those two definitions, 1 and 3, together.

And it seems to me that definition 6, his definition of God, follows. By God, I mean a being absolutely infinite. That is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.

Now God is a substance of infinite attributes. Now with infinite attributes, you see, what you're saying is that God is an independent being that is all-inclusive. Each attribute expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.

Yes, whose essence is to exist, that's why he's a being. Necessary being. So you can see the implications of these definitions standing out right away.

They are definitions that clearly now we can see are anticipating what comes later. And look at proposition number one. Proposition number one.

Substance is by nature prior to its modifications. This is clear from your definitions of substance and mode. Proposition two.

Two substances whose attributes are different have nothing in common. That's evident from definition three. For each must exist in itself, be conceived through itself.

The conception of one doesn't imply the conception of another. Proposition three. Things which have nothing in common cannot be one cause of another.

Sorry, Descartes, that was the trouble with the mind-body problem, wasn't it? Things that have nothing in common cannot be the cause of one another. You see? Then proposition five. There cannot exist in the universe two or more substances having the same nature or attribute.

Proposition six. One substance cannot be produced by another substance. And let's see.

By the time you get to proposition six, that means that God and nature cannot be two separate substances. Proposition seven says substance is self-existent. Proposition eight, that every substance is a necessary being, self-existent.

Proposition eleven says that God or substance consists of infinite attributes of which each is essential. That God necessarily exists. And finally, proposition fourteen draws the conclusion.

Besides God, no substance can be granted or conceived. And proposition fifteen, to cap it, whatever is, is in God. And without God, nothing can be or be conceived.

And so there is only one God, only one substance, God or nature. Okay? So God and nature turn out to be God or nature. The phrase that he used, Deus ewei natura, God or else exists.