

History of Philosophy

38 Spinoza (continued), Leibniz

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Abstract:

This lecture by Dr. Arthur Holmes compares the metaphysical systems of **Spinoza**, **Descartes**, and **Leibniz**, focusing on their varying views regarding **substance**, **emotion**, and **determinism**. While Spinoza defines **emotions** as physical modifications that lead to **human bondage** unless governed by reason, he ultimately promotes a **pantheistic monism** where everything is a mode of one divine substance. In contrast, Leibniz rejects the **mechanistic physics** of his predecessors, arguing instead for a **pluralistic universe** composed of **monads**, which are immaterial units of force and energy. These monads exist in a **hierarchical structure** ranging from basic matter to the supreme consciousness of God, functioning through a **pre-established parallelism** rather than causal interaction. By reintroducing **teleology** and purposeful design, Leibniz seeks to reconcile the emerging conflicts between **scientific rationalism** and **religious faith**.

Briefing Document:

Analysis of Rationalist Philosophy: Spinoza on Emotion and the Metaphysics of Leibniz

Executive Summary

This briefing document synthesizes the philosophical frameworks of Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, focusing on their respective treatments of human emotion, the nature of substance, and the intersection of science and theology.

Spinoza's system is characterized by a deterministic, pantheistic monism. He defines emotions as physical modifications of the body that hold the human mind in

"bondage" when ideas are confused. Freedom, in his view, is achieved through the "rule of reason"—the transition to clear and distinct ideas and an intellectual acceptance of the causal necessity of nature, which he equates with an "intellectual love of God."

In contrast, Leibniz moves toward a quantitative pluralism, rejecting the mechanistic view of matter as mere "extension." He proposes that reality is composed of an infinite number of "monads"—non-extended units of force or energy. Leibniz's metaphysics reintroduces teleology (purpose) into the scientific worldview, arguing for a hierarchy of being ranging from "bare monads" to the "Supreme Monad" (God). He replaces Spinoza's determinism with a compatibilism that emphasizes "entelechy," or the inner drive of a substance to actualize its nature.

Part I: Spinoza on Reason and Emotion

Spinoza's ethical and psychological theory is rooted in his underlying determinism. He views the human condition as a struggle between the "bondage" of emotional passivity and the "freedom" of rational clarity.

The Nature of Emotion

Spinoza provides a strictly physical and causal definition of emotion:

- **Bodily Modification:** An emotion is a temporary mode of bodily existence that increases or decreases the body's "active power" (causal energy).
- **Physical Basis:** Emotions are physically caused; however, because thought and extension are dual attributes of the same substance, every bodily change has a corresponding state of consciousness (feeling).
- **Passions:** When the mind is "passive" and driven by external physical causes, these states are referred to as passions.
- **Conatus:** This is the underlying "driving energy" or appetite associated with willing, wanting, or desiring.

Human Bondage vs. Human Freedom

The distinction between bondage and freedom rests on the quality of an individual's ideas:

- **Human Bondage:** Arises when the mind possesses "inadequate ideas." These are confused thoughts woven into emotional feelings. In this state, the individual is driven by emotional impulses rather than clarity.
- **Human Freedom:** Achieved through "clear and distinct ideas." Clarity of thought dispels the passions. Freedom is not the ability to bypass causal necessity, but rather the rational understanding and acceptance of it.
- **Virtue as Reward:** Virtue is defined as a life ruled by reason. It is not practiced out of fear of evil (which is an emotion) but out of an understanding of consequences. For Spinoza, "virtue is its own reward," requiring no future or external compensation.

The Intellectual Love of God

Because Spinoza is a pantheist, he identifies God with the totality of the natural, ordered universe (*Deus sive Natura*).

- **Rational Acceptance:** Peace of mind comes from accepting the causal mechanisms of nature as unchangeable natural law.
- **Definition:** The highest state of virtue is the "intellectual love of God," which is the contemplative enjoyment of the magnificence and order of nature.
- **Divine Impersonality:** God possesses no passions and is not affected by human love or hate. Because humans are finite modes of God, when a human loves God, it is effectively God loving Himself through that human. There is no "reciprocal" or personalized affection from God.

Part II: Comparative Framework of Rationalism

The transition from Descartes to Spinoza and finally to Leibniz represents a significant shift in how substance, the mind-body relationship, and freedom are conceived.

Feature	René Descartes	Baruch Spinoza	Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz
Substance (The One and Many)	Theistic Dualism: Qualitative duality between mind (thinking) and body (extended).	Quantitative Monism: Only one substance exists; mind and body are attributes of that one being.	Quantitative Pluralism: Many substances (monads) exist, differing by degree.
Mind-Body Relationship	Causal Interaction: Mind and body physically influence one another.	Double Aspect: Mind and body are two sides of the same causal process.	Parallelism: Mind and body are pre-programmed to keep time perfectly without interaction.
Freedom vs. Determinism	Indeterminism: The will is free to affirm or deny.	Inner Determinism: All acts are causally determined by antecedent ideas/states.	Compatibilism: Freedom is the ability to pursue inner goals and actualize one's nature.

Part III: Leibniz and the Critique of Mechanism

Leibniz's philosophy emerged as a reaction against the "mechanistic science" of the late 17th century (Hobbes, Newton, and Descartes). He sought to reconcile the burgeoning scientific worldview with religious concepts of the soul and a purposeful Creator.

Rejection of Newtonian Ultimates

Leibniz challenged the four pillars of Newtonian physics:

1. **Matter:** Rejects the idea of matter as "extended stuff." He argues extension is a derivative property, not a primary one.
2. **Space:** Argues space is not an absolute "empty container" but merely an "order of coexistences." Without bodies, space is nothing.

3. **Time:** Argues time is not absolute but an "order of successive events."
4. **Motion:** Replaces simple motion with "Force" or "Energy" as the ultimate reality.

The Concept of the Monad

Leibniz proposes that the ultimate ingredients of reality are "Monads"—units of force that are non-extended and "soul-like" rather than "pellet-like."

- **Appetition:** The inner "push" or drive (similar to Spinoza's *conatus*) that moves a substance toward a goal. It involves both efficient and final (teleological) causation.
- **Apperception:** The degree of awareness or responsiveness to the environment. This ranges from unconscious "responsiveness" in inanimate matter to self-consciousness in humans.

Part IV: The Hierarchy of Being

Leibniz reintroduces a medieval-style "hierarchy of being," categorizing monads by their levels of clarity and consciousness.

- **Bare Monads:** Found in inanimate matter. They are described as "dazed" or "stunned." While they lack conscious awareness, they possess an organic-like responsiveness to their environment.
- **Soul Monads (Life Monads):** Found in animals. These possess conscious perception, memory, and the ability to form habits.
- **Spirit Monads:** The ruling element in human beings. These are capable of abstract thought, reasoning, and self-consciousness. They are the only monads that reflect on the meaning of life.
- **Supreme Monad (God):** A necessary being characterized by full consciousness (omniscience) and boundless appetite (sovereignty). God functions as the "pre-arranged" orchestrator of the universe.

Teleology and Entelechy

Unlike the "unconscious machine" of mechanistic science, Leibniz views the universe as a collection of "entelechies"—entities that have an internal purpose and a natural drive to outwork their own nature. This framework allows him to argue that the world is not merely a series of accidental collisions but a purposeful creation by a "Supreme Monad" who acts for specific reasons.

Study Guide:

A History of Philosophy: The Rationalism of Spinoza and Leibniz

This study guide provides a comprehensive overview of the philosophical developments regarding reason, emotion, and metaphysics in the thought of Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. It synthesizes the transition from Spinoza's deterministic monism to Leibniz's pluralistic monadology.

Part 1: Review Quiz

Instructions: Provide a short-answer response of 2–3 sentences for each question based on the source material.

1. **How does Spinoza define an "emotion" in a physical sense?** Spinoza defines an emotion as a "bodily modification" that either increases or decreases the body's active power. It is physically based, representing a temporary mode of bodily existence and the causal energy associated with transitioning between states.
2. **According to Spinoza, what is the relationship between inadequate ideas and "human bondage"?** Human bondage arises when the consciousness lacks clear and distinct ideas, resulting in confused ideas woven into emotional feelings. In this state, a person is driven by emotional passions rather than being ruled by reason.

3. **What constitutes "virtue" in Spinoza's ethical system?** Virtue is defined as a life ruled by reason rather than controlled by emotion. It involves gaining a clear understanding of the causal forces—both physical and emotional—that determine one's circumstances and accepting natural law as given.
4. **Explain Spinoza's concept of the "intellectual love of God."** The intellectual love of God is the highest state of virtue, consisting of the rational acceptance and contemplative enjoyment of the ordered magnificent of nature. Because God and nature are one in Spinoza's pantheism, loving the order of the universe is equivalent to loving God.
5. **How does Spinoza describe God's love for humanity?** Spinoza asserts that God has no passions and does not love humans in a personalized, reciprocal way. Instead, God loves himself through our love for him; because we are finite modes of the one substance, our intellectual love for the whole is simply an aspect of God's self-understanding.
6. **In Leibniz's view, why is mechanistic science insufficient as an ultimate explanation of reality?** Leibniz rejects mechanistic science as ultimate because it cannot explain basic properties like inertia and fails when matter disintegrates or motion ceases. He argues that the ultimate nature of reality is not matter or motion, but rather "force" or energy.
7. **What is a "monad" in Leibniz's metaphysics?** A monad is a non-extended, basic unit of reality that functions as a unit of force or energy. These monads are the ultimate ingredients of substance, and their various combinations and degrees of internal activity create the appearance of extended matter.
8. **Distinguish between "appetition" and "apperception" in the Monadology.** Appetition is the inner drive or "push-pull" force that moves a monad toward its goals, combining efficient and final causation. Apperception refers to the degrees of awareness, consciousness, or responsiveness that a monad has toward its environment.
9. **What are the primary differences between "Soul monads" and "Spirit monads"?** Soul monads possess life, memory, and conscious perception of a consecutive sort, as seen in animals. Spirit monads, characteristic of

humans, possess higher functions such as abstract thought, reasoning, and self-consciousness.

10. **How does Leibniz's view of space and time differ from Newton's?** Leibniz rejects Newton's view of absolute, infinite space and time, arguing instead that they are relative. He defines space as an "order of coexistences" and time as an "order of successive events," neither of which has any reality without the presence of bodies or events.

Part 2: Quiz Answer Key

1. **Emotion definition:** A bodily modification increasing or decreasing active power; physically based and temporary.
2. **Bondage:** Caused by confused/inadequate ideas; emotions drive the mind instead of clear thought.
3. **Virtue:** The rule of reason over emotion; understanding the causal mechanisms of nature and accepting them.
4. **Intellectual love of God:** The contemplation of nature's order; an intellectual acceptance of the totality of the one substance.
5. **God's love:** Non-reciprocal and non-personalized; God loves himself through the finite modes of our ideas.
6. **Mechanism insufficiency:** It deals only with phenomenal levels; fails to account for inertia or the underlying force/energy.
7. **Monad:** Units of force/energy; the non-extended, primary constituents of all substances.
8. **Appetition/Apperception:** Appetition is the internal drive (teleology); apperception is the degree of consciousness or awareness.
9. **Soul vs. Spirit:** Soul monads have memory and habit (animals); Spirit monads have self-consciousness and abstract reasoning (humans).
10. **Space and Time:** Relative orders of relation; space is coexistence, time is succession; they do not exist as empty "containers."

Part 3: Essay Questions

1. **The Stoic Influence in Spinoza's Ethics:** Discuss how Spinoza's emphasis on the "acceptance of natural law" and the "acquiescence of spirit" reflects a Stoic ethical framework. How does this acceptance lead to "human freedom" within a deterministic system?
2. **The Shift from Mechanism to Energism:** Analyze Leibniz's critique of the Newtonian and Cartesian concepts of material substance. How does his introduction of "force" and "monads" attempt to reconcile the conflicts between science and religion?
3. **Comparative Metaphysics:** Compare and contrast the "quantitative" and "qualitative" approaches to substance in the works of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. How does each philosopher resolve the "one and the many" problem?
4. **The Nature of Mind-Body Relation:** Evaluate the three primary solutions to the mind-body problem presented in the text: Cartesian Causal Interaction, Spinozistic Double-Aspect Theory, and Leibnizian Parallelism. Which system provides the most coherent account of human experience according to the source?
5. **Teleology and Modernity:** Examine how Leibniz reintroduces the "hierarchy of being" and "entelechy" into a post-Cartesian world. In what ways does his "Monadology" function as a "quasi-scientific hypothesis" while maintaining a theological foundation?

Part 4: Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apperception:** The degree of awareness, consciousness, or responsiveness to the environment exhibited by a monad.
- **Appetition:** The inner drive or conative force within a monad that directs it toward a goal or actualization.

- **Bare Monads:** The lowest level of monads; they lack distinct consciousness and are described as "dazed" or "stunned," forming the basis of inanimate matter.
- **Conatus:** The driving energy associated with willing, wanting, or desiring; the "active power" that underlies emotional and physical states in Spinoza's thought.
- **Determinism (Inner):** Spinoza's view that all acts of will and bodily movements are caused by a stream of antecedent ideas and physical states within the one substance.
- **Double Aspect Theory:** Spinoza's view that thought and extension are two attributes of the same substance; therefore, every bodily change has a corresponding mental state.
- **Entelechy:** The inner nature or "actualization" of a substance that directs its development and behavior toward an end (teleology).
- **Inadequate Ideas:** Confused or unclear thoughts that lead to "human bondage" and the dominance of the passions.
- **Monad:** A simple, non-extended substance; a unit of force or energy that serves as the building block of reality in Leibniz's system.
- **Parallelism (Pre-established Harmony):** Leibniz's theory that mind and body do not interact causally but are "pre-programmed" by God to keep time and correspond perfectly.
- **Qualitative Dualism:** A distinction between types of substance (e.g., mental vs. physical) based on their properties.
- **Quantitative Monism:** The metaphysical view (Spinoza) that there is numerically only one substance (God or Nature).
- **Quantitative Pluralism:** The metaphysical view (Leibniz) that there are an indefinite number of individual substances (monads).
- **Supreme Monad:** The highest monad (God), characterized by omniscience, full clarity of thought, and boundless appetition.