

1 Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677)

Introduction

2 Terms, Names and Concepts

- Baruch Spinoza
- Ethics
- Rationalism
- Pantheism
- The Infinite

3 Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677)

- Baruch Spinoza was born in Amsterdam. He was the son of Jewish refugees from Portugal. Spinoza early on in his life came in conflict with his religious community and was finally excommunicated in 1656 at the age of twenty-three. Spinoza moved to the Hague where he made a modest living for himself by grinding and polishing lenses. His most influential writing is the Ethics and it was published after his death.

4 Ethics

- Spinoza's goal in writing the Ethics is to help others to live better lives. Spinoza believes that many people are ignorant of the truth and he wishes to enlighten those that are interested in following reason
 - Three ideas in Ethics are important for understanding the work as a whole
 - First – Moral Subjectivism - there are no intrinsically right or wrong actions and there are no properties that correspond to goodness and badness
 - Second - Ordinary (ignorant people) believe in absolute concepts of good and bad but they are mistaken
 - Third – Spinoza uses an approach to life that uncovers ignorance and uses reason to suggest a better life

5 The different parts of the Ethics

- Part one and two lay out the metaphysical foundations
 - Part one deals with God or nature
 - Part Two deals with the Human mind within this system
 - Part Three and Four sketches out the wrong way to live that is guided by irrational passions
 - Part Four and Five suggest a life of reason to overcome the bondage of the passions or emotions

6 Pantheism

- Spinoza in part one of the Ethics denies the coherency of a personal God. This denial is why many considered him to be an Atheist
- Spinoza advocates Pantheism. Pantheism identifies God with the whole of reality.
- Spinoza when referring to the ordinary world of our perceptions believes that all we perceive is divine.

7 Spinoza and God

- Spinoza felt that his idea of God made more sense and was actually superior to the idea of a personal God if you consider the traditional properties of God.
 - The properties Spinoza has in mind are being infinite, eternal and all powerful in the sense of not being acted upon by another. Spinoza's concept of the infinite is a metaphysical infinite.
- Spinoza believed that the ordinary person's concept of God was based on ignorance

and superstition.

8 Is Spinoza an Atheist?

- Many have considered Spinoza an Atheist because he rejects the concept of a personal God.
- The Atheist and Spinoza both agree on the idea that when it comes to reality you cannot divide it into God plus the rest of reality. But the Atheist maintains that none of Reality consists of God and Spinoza maintains that all of Reality is God.

9 Spinoza's Rationalism

- There are three features of Rationalism that play an important role in understanding Spinoza.
 - First – the more general notion is that reason is superior to the senses when it comes to arriving at knowledge
 - Second – A version of the principle of sufficient reason – there must be an explanation for why something happens as well as why something does not happen (adopting this principle denies the acceptance of brute facts)
 - Third – The identity of logical and causal justification. In other words, Spinoza believes that premise and conclusion have the same status as cause and effect. They are not different in kind.

10 Spinoza's critique of Descartes

- Spinoza was influenced by Descartes but felt that there were definite problems with the Cartesian division of the spiritual substance and the physical substance. Spinoza denies that there are two different kinds of substances. His denial is based on his belief that it doesn't make sense to say that a physical substance can cause an effect on a spiritual substance or the opposite causal connection.

11 Spinoza's style

- The Ethics is a little intimidating because of its style. Many of the modern philosophers were enamored by the certainty of Geometry and its method but Spinoza's text is written with propositions, axioms and definitions.

12 Websites of Interest

- [Life and General Introduction](#)
- [Pantheism](#)
- [Spinoza's Method](#)
- [A nice account of Spinoza and the one substance doctrine](#)