



# Spinoza and the Radical Enlightenment

Week 2. 25<sup>th</sup> September 2017

The God of Spinoza



‘I believe in Spinoza’s God, who reveals Himself in the lawful harmony of the world, not in a God who concerns Himself with the fate and the doings of mankind...’ – Albert Einstein



Rembrandt, "Portrait of a Jewish Young Man", 1648

'After experience had taught me the hollowness and futility of everything that is ordinarily encountered in daily life, and I realised that all the things which were the source and object of my anxiety held nothing of good or evil in themselves save insofar as the mind was influenced by them, I resolved at length to enquire whether there existed a true good, one which was capable of communicating itself and could alone affect the mind to the exclusion of all else, whether, in fact, there was something whose discovery and acquisition would afford me a continuous and supreme joy to all eternity.'

- *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*

# Overview on key arguments

- Substance monism
- God or nature / naturalism
- Self-preservation and mutual utility (*Ethics*)
- Freedom of speech and religious toleration
- Denial of miracles and naturalisation of scripture
- Separation and restriction of church under state
- Democratic republicanism (*TTP*)

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# Spinoza's key works

- *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (1663)
- *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP, 1670)
- *Ethics* (1677)
- *Political Treatise* (1677)
- He also wrote a *Hebrew Grammar*, *Letters*, and two early works, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and *Short Treatise Concerning God, Man and his Well-being*



*Imp. 02a* B. D. S. *Kw. 366C4*  
**OPERA**  
POSTHUMA,

*Quorum series post Præfationem  
exhibetur.*



CICLO LXXVII.



*Amsterdam*

*De Nagelate*  
**SCHRIFTEN**

*van*  
B. D. S.

*Als*

ZEDEKUNST,  
STAATKUNDE,  
VERBETERING van 't Verstant,  
BRIEVEN en ANTWOORDEN.

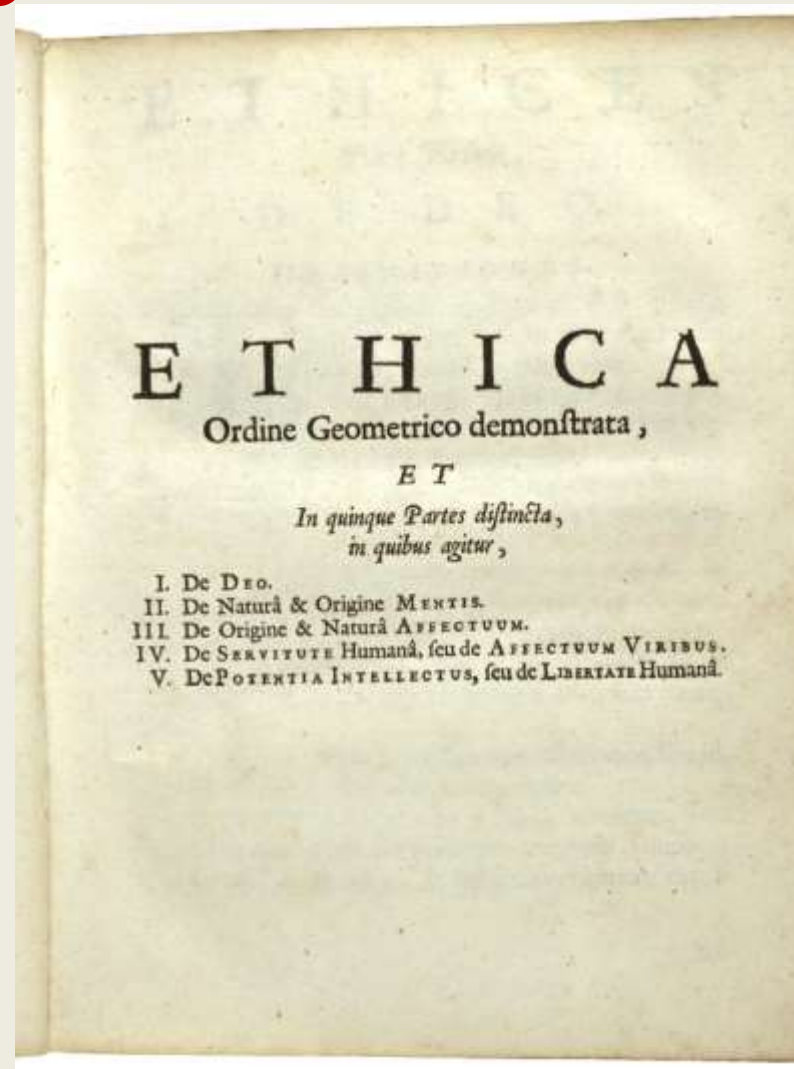
*Vit verscheide Talen in de Neder-  
landsche gebragt.*



Gedrukt in 't Jaar M. DC. LXXVII.

# Introducing the *Ethics*

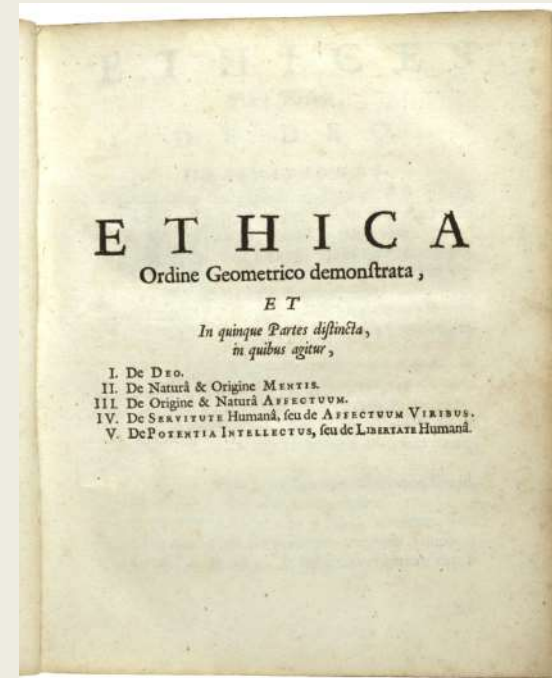
- Spinoza spent most of his life on *Ethics* and it reflects the fullest achievements of his thinking
- Published posthumously in 1677, probably finished two years prior
- Written in Latin, the *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order* lives up to its title
- In five parts it addresses God, the mind, the emotions, and human freedom





# *Ethics* – argument overview

- Develops a position of substance monism
- Equates God and Nature (*deus sive natura*)
- God is immanent, not transcendent
- Rejects free will
- Refocuses human nature on desire and emotions, not lofty reason
- Grounds ethics on reason, joy, generosity, courage and fortitude
- Our highest good is the intellectual love of God, resulting in state of contentment or blessedness



II/46 Exp.: I say absolutely infinite, not infinite in its own kind; for if something is only infinite in its own kind, we can deny infinite attributes of it [NS: (i.e., we can conceive infinite attributes which do not pertain to its nature)]; but if something is absolutely infinite, whatever expresses essence and involves no negation pertains to its essence.

D7: That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner.

D8: By eternity I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing.

Exp.: For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end.

## AXIOMS

A1: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another.

A2: What cannot be conceived through another, must be conceived through itself.

A3: From a given determinate cause the effect follows necessarily; and conversely, if there is no determinate cause, it is impossible for an effect to follow.

A4: The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause.

A5: Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.

II/47 A6: A true idea must agree with its object.

A7: If a thing can be conceived as not existing, its essence does not involve existence.

P1: A substance is prior in nature to its affections.

Dem.: This is evident from D3 and D5.

P2: Two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another.

Dem.: This is also evident from D3. For each must be in itself and be

conceived through itself, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.

P3: If things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other.

Dem.: If they have nothing in common with one another, then (by A5) they cannot be understood through one another, and so (by A4) one cannot be the cause of the other, q.e.d.

P4: Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections.

Dem.: Whatever is, is either in itself or in another (by A1), that is (by D3 and D5), outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections. Therefore, there is nothing outside the intellect through which a number of things can be distinguished from one another except substances, or what is the same (by D4), their attributes, and their affections, q.e.d. II/48

P5: In Nature there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute.

Dem.: If there were two or more distinct substances, they would have to be distinguished from one another either by a difference in their attributes, or by a difference in their affections (by P4). If only by a difference in their attributes, then it will be conceded that there is only one of the same attribute. But if by a difference in their affections, then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by P1), if the affections are put to one side and [the substance] is considered in itself, that is (by D3 and A6), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, that is (by P4), there cannot be many, but only one [of the same nature or attribute], q.e.d.

P6: One substance cannot be produced by another substance.

Dem.: In Nature there cannot be two substances of the same attribute (by P5), that is (by P2), which have something in common with each other. Therefore (by P3) one cannot be the cause of the other, or cannot be produced by the other, q.e.d.

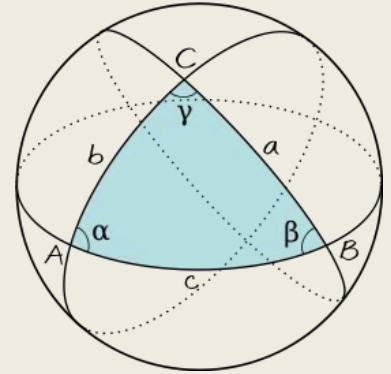
Cor.: From this it follows that a substance cannot be produced by anything else. For in Nature there is nothing except substances and their affections, as is evident from A1, D3, and D5. But it cannot be produced by a substance (by P6). Therefore, substance absolutely cannot be produced by anything else, q.e.d.

Alternatively: This is demonstrated even more easily from the absurdity of its contradictory. For if a substance could be produced by

# Geometric method

‘I shall consider human actions and appetites as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies’. (E 3 Preface)

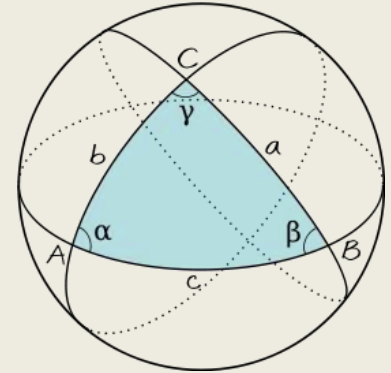
‘The universe is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles and other geometrical figures’. (Galileo, *The Assayer*)



# Geometric method

‘in order to enquire into matters relevant to this branch of knowledge in the same unfettered spirit as is habitually shown in mathematical studies, I have taken great care not to mock, lament, or curse human actions, but to understand them. So I have regarded human emotions such as love, hatred, anger, envy, pride, pity, and other agitations in the same way as heat, cold, storm, thunder, and such pertain to the atmosphere.’

- (*Political Treatise*, 1.4)



# Ontology and epistemology

Ontology: the nature of being

Epistemology: the nature of knowledge



I, Descartes, am a  
thinking thing



Substance is by nature  
prior to its affections



# Reacting to Descartes



- Descartes' famous cogito argument, *I think, therefore I am*, sets out to demonstrate God and the world from what he can first claim to know...
- But in its own time, many found it circular
- Spinoza instead wants to conclusively demonstrate that his philosophically logically follows from previous, established propositions
- He borrows Euclid's method, presenting arguments using axioms, definitions, numbered propositions, proofs, and scholiums, which expand on his views
- It is a truly unique method, never attempted in philosophy before or since...



# What is Spinoza arguing?

- Before we explore the particular features of Spinoza's God, let's turn to the Appendix to Part One of *Ethics*
- Though this section comes at the end, it indicates in a concise and fiery way Spinoza's differences from Descartes and orthodox religious thinking of the day
- Spinoza identifies 'prejudices' in human thinking which make us liable to believe in free will and a human-like God...

# What is Spinoza arguing?

- With your neighbour or in a small group, please re-read the extract and then discuss these questions:
- Why does Spinoza argue that our ordinary views about free will are mistaken?
- How does our prejudiced view that God is a human being like us naturally arise?
- How persuasive do you find Spinoza's attack on common religious views about 'the will of God' as an 'sanctuary of ignorance'?

‘all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, that they all have a desire to seek their own advantage, a desire of which they are conscious. From this it follows, firstly, that men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they do not think, not even dream about, because they are ignorant of them.’

‘they asserted that the gods direct everything for man's use so that they may bind men to them and be held in the highest honour by them. So it came about that every individual devised different methods of worshipping God as he thought fit in order that God should love him beyond others and direct the whole of Nature so as to serve his blind cupidity and insatiable greed’

‘And so they will go on and on asking the causes of causes, until you take refuge in the will of God - that is, the asylum of ignorance.’





# What is substance monism?

- Reality is made up of only one substance or basis
- Whereas Descartes claimed that minds/souls and bodies were two separate substances (dualism), which in human beings interacted in the pineal gland, Spinoza simplifies the picture in a radical way
- Substance is one underlying reality, which can take the form of an attribute, *extension* or *thought*

# Substance, attributes, modes

- Substance:
  - reality, God
- Attribute:
  - a form that reality exists in
- Mode:
  - a quality or dependent entity of substance, that takes form through an attribute

Substance = infinity of attributes

???

???

Extension

Thought

Attributes

a ball

a dog

a body

a mind

justice

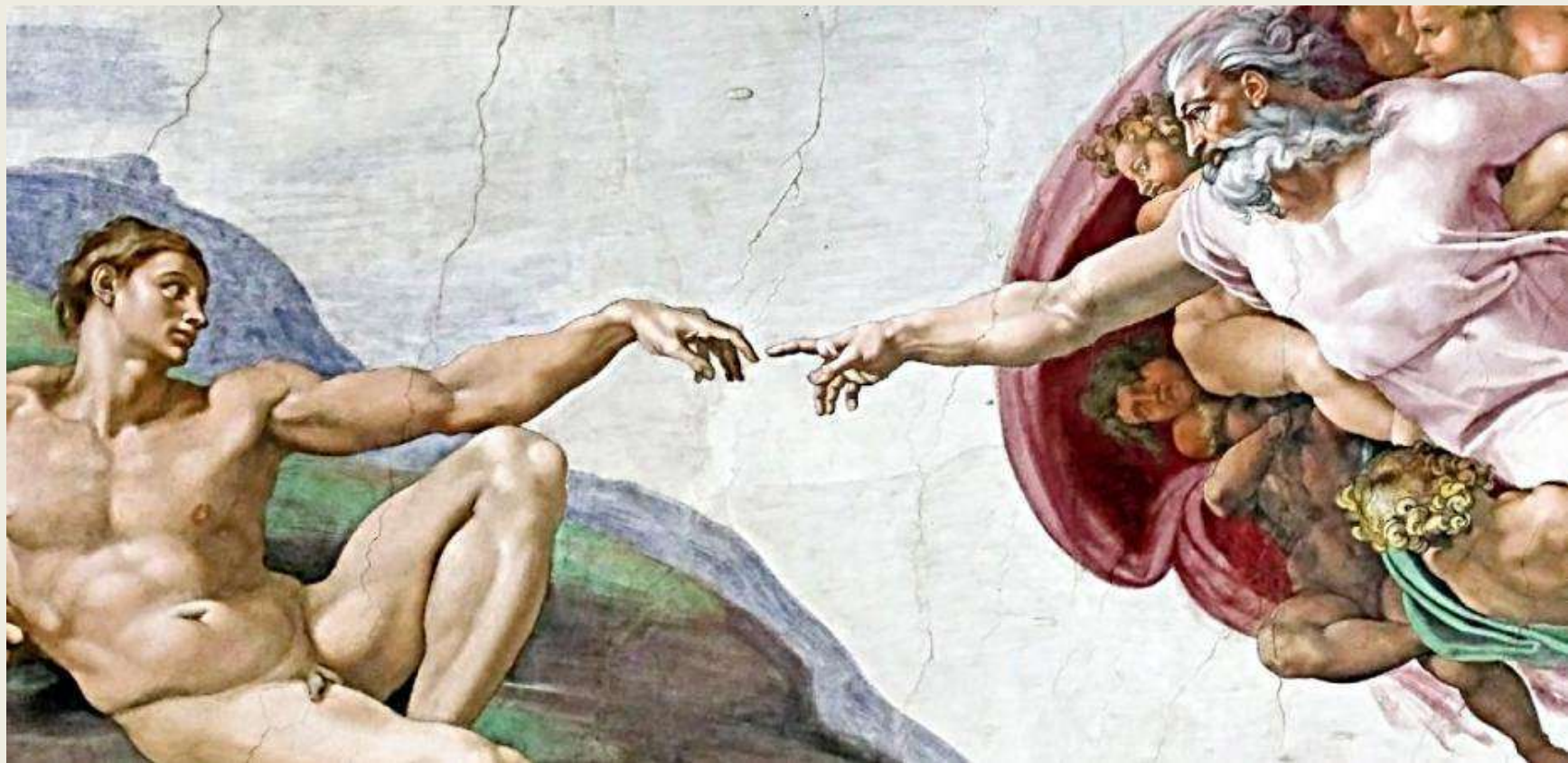
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Modes

# What is substance monism?

- That which is in itself and conceived through itself (Id3)
- It is singular (P5-6, P14)
- It necessarily exists (P7, P11)
- It consists of an infinity of attributes, each expressing essence (Id6, P11)
- It is God, an absolutely infinite being (Id6)
- Infinite and indivisible, perfect (P13-P14)
- God is an efficient, immanent, first cause (P16)





# Can modes be separate from God?

1. **IA1:** Everything that exists is either a substance or a mode
2. **ID5:** Modes only exist 'in'/can't be conceived without substance
3. **IP14:** God is the only substance
4. **Therefore IP15:** Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God  
= monism (and transcendence impossible)

# More like God or nature?

Consider Propositions 17 and 18...



# God or Nature? (*Deus sive natura*)

- Everything is within God (P18)
- God is not a creator or intervener (transitive)
- God is instead *immanent*. Reality is the existence and essence of God, and everything is 'in God'
- God's power and mind cannot be grasped in human equivalents (P17) – it would be as absurd as comparing a dog to *Canis Major*
- 'All things emanate necessarily from God's nature and that the universe is God' - Letter 43, Spinoza to Jacob Ostens

# God or Nature?

- Is God then merely 'material'...?
- Or purely an 'idea', as Descartes argues?
- Is Spinoza's God even sincere?

# Spinoza's 'God' – summary

1. Spinoza's God is infinite and unlimited.
2. Spinoza's God is perfectly good and without defect.
3. God is identical with the universe and not outside it, unlike the prime mover of Aristotle
4. Indeed God is the only truly 'free' thing in the universe – everything else depends – and expresses – God's power (as *natura naturata*)
5. That's why free will is absurd – but does that rule out freedom altogether?



# Spinoza vs Descartes

1. Spinoza's *Ethics* sets out to demonstrate an ethical way of life from rationally deductible, first principles
2. Hence he starts with substance or God, not something subjective (or phenomenological) like the cogito
3. But Spinoza's God is also demonstrated not with reference to experience, but through its intrinsic self-evidence, relying on *a priori* first principles
4. Remember the Ontological Argument...?

# Spinoza vs Descartes

- God by essence is an infinite and absolutely perfect being, and the perfection necessarily involves existence
- For Spinoza, nothing can exist except as part of an absolute and infinite being, and that being is... substance, God, Nature, the universe...



‘I believe in Spinoza’s God, who reveals Himself in the lawful harmony of the world, not in a God who concerns Himself with the fate and the doings of mankind...’ – Albert Einstein

## Next week...

- We will turn to human nature and knowledge!
- We'll explore how Spinoza's *parallelism* applies to human beings, understood as a mind and a body
- We will focus on Part Two, preface, propositions 1-13 and 40 (the 'three kinds of knowledge'), so please read the excerpt before class
- *Please also aim to read the remainder of Part One and the beginning of Part Two as well. It may be confusing, but does get easier soon...*

# Moodle login

Username: firstnamelastname

Password: FirstNameInitial (capitals)

E.g. Donald Trump

Username: donaldtrump

Password: DONALDT

