

**Philosophy 203**  
***History of Modern Western Philosophy***

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**Hamilton College**  
**Spring 2014**



**Class #8 - Monism and Parallelism in  
Spinoza's *Ethics***

# Business

- Please pass your papers forward.
- Paper Assignment #2
- Panel Presentation #1 - March 4
  - Sarah, Casey, Jackson K, Mei Lin
- Panel Presentation #2 - March 6
  - Mercy, Henry, Andy, Jesse

# That Last Slide from Tuesday...

- *The Ethics* is difficult, written in the synthetic method; take your time.
- Focus on the propositions and the scholia.
  - “The deductive apparatus masks Spinoza’s philosophy. For certain of his deepest and most central doctrines he offers ‘demonstrations’ that are unsalvageably invalid and of *no philosophical use or interest*; it is not credible that he accepts those doctrines because he thinks they follow from the premisses of those arguments” (Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, vol. 1: 113, emphasis added).
- Nietzsche on Spinoza:
  - Not to speak of that hocus-pocus of mathematical form in which, as if in iron, Spinoza encased and masked his philosophy...so as to strike terror into the heart of any assailant who should happen to glance at that invincible maiden and Pallas Athene - how much personal timidity and vulnerability this masquerade of a sick recluse betrays (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §5).
- The appendix to Part I, AW 160-4, is worth reading, even if you have to skim some of the later propositions in Part I to get to it.

# More Nietzsche on Spinoza

I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted. I have a *predecessor*, and what a predecessor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just *now* was inspired by “instinct.” Not only is his overall tendency like mine -making knowledge the *most powerful* affect -but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world order, the unegoistic, and evil. Even though the divergences are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the differences in time, culture, and science. *In summa*: my solitude, which, as on very high mountains, often made it hard for me to breathe and made my blood rush out, is at least a dualitude (Letter to Franz Overbeck, 30 July 1881).

# Three Aspects of Spinoza's Philosophy

1. Monist metaphysics;
2. The relationship between mind and body; and
3. Freedom of the will and the problem of error.
  - ▶ “His parallelism debars him from treating any aspect of the mental as ‘occult’ or ‘queer’... and his naturalism debars him from treating anything as occult or inexplicable “(Bennett 196).
  - ▶ Isaac Bashevis Singer, “The Spinoza of Market Street”

# Monism - An Overview

- There is just one thing: the most real being.
- Mostly, he calls this thing God, though one also can call it nature, or Nature.
- 'Deus sive Natura': God, in other words Nature.
- Individual bodies and minds are attributes of this single substance.
- We, and all the things around us, are ways of God/Nature to be.



# A Spinozistic Argument for Metaphysical Monism

From Jonathan Bennett

- “If there are two Gods, then either God A knows about God B or he does not. If he does not, he is not omniscient and so is not a God (in the Christian sense). If he does, then he is partly passive - acted upon - because he is in a state of knowledge of God B which must be caused in him by God B - and so again he is not a Christian God” (Bennett).
- One can replace ‘God B’ in this argument with anything.
- The argument rules out not only another God, but also any reality other than God.
- If we think of ourselves as individuals separate from God, we are limiting an infinite God.
  - God would not be omnipresent.
- God just is the world, and we are not individuals separate from God.
- We are part of God, modes or attributes of God, ways for God to be.
- Atheism? Pantheism? Panentheism?

# Monism - The Dirty Work

Adapted from Tlumak

Three steps:

• **Substance exists (E).**

It is infinite (I).

It is unique (U).



# Substance Exists

E1. Substance is independent.

E2. Whatever has an external cause can not be independent.

E3. So, substance has no external cause, and must be its own cause.

E4. Anything which is its own cause must exist.

EC. So substance exists.

# E1

E1. Substance is independent.  
E2. Whatever has an external cause can not be independent.  
E3. So, substance has no external cause, and must be its own cause.  
E4. Anything which is its own cause must exist.  
EC. So substance exists.

- E1 follows from Spinoza's definitions, most saliently:
  - ▶ “By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed” (*Ethics* 1D3, AW 144).
- Distinguish between objects and properties.
  - ▶ Another term for ‘object’ is ‘substance’.
  - ▶ Other terms for ‘property’ are ‘mode’, ‘attribute’, and ‘affection’.
- Properties depend on objects in a way that objects do not depend on properties.
  - ▶ For redness to exist, there must exist red things.
  - ▶ Properties need to be properties of something.
  - ▶ Things need to have properties.
  - ▶ But they do not depend on particular properties.
  - ▶ The red car can be painted yellow without ceasing to be what it is.

## E2 and E3

E1. Substance is independent.  
E2. Whatever has an external cause can not be independent.  
E3. So, substance has no external cause, and must be its own cause.  
E4. Anything which is its own cause must exist.  
EC. So substance exists.

- Spinoza would have seen E2 as definitional.
- E3 follows from E1 and E2 directly.
  - by modus tollens

# E4

E1. Substance is independent.  
E2. Whatever has an external cause can not be independent.  
E3. So, substance has no external cause, and must be its own cause.  
E4. Anything which is its own cause must exist.  
EC. So substance exists.

- Consider the uncaused, or self-caused, cause (*causa sui*).
  - “By that which is self-caused I mean that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature can be conceived only as existing” (*Ethics* 1D1, AW 144).
  - The very notion of an uncaused cause is pretty much unintelligible, now.
    - Causation = efficient causation
    - A cause must be temporally prior to its effect.
- Spinoza’s notion of ‘cause’ is related to explanation.
  - A cause of something explains its existence.
  - If you ask why I am tired, I can explain that it is because I did not get much sleep last night.
- An unexplained cause, or an unexplained explanation, or a phenomenon which explains itself, is not so repugnant.
- ‘God is an unexplained cause’ becomes ‘God’s existence needs no explanation’ becomes ‘something which is self-caused could not be conceived of as not existing’.
- That last claim is E4.
- E4 and E3 entail EC, that substance exists.
- Notice the slightness of the conclusion which depends on the contentious E4.

# Monism - The Dirty Work

Adapted from Tlumak

Three steps:

✓ Substance exists (E).

☛ **It is infinite (I).**

It is unique (U).

# The Infinitude of Substance

- I1. Substance exists and is its own cause.
- I2. No finite thing is its own cause.
- I3. An infinite substance must have all attributes.
- IC. So, substance must be infinite, and have all attributes
  - I1 comes directly from the prior argument, E.
    - Remember, you can think of this argument as saying that there is something and it needs no explanation

# I2

- I1. Substance exists and is its own cause.
- I2. No finite thing is its own cause.
- I3. An infinite substance must have all attributes.
- IC. So, substance must be infinite, and have all attributes.

- Consider Spinoza's definition of finite.
- "A thing is said to be finite in its own kind when it can be limited by another thing of the same nature. For example, a body is said to be finite because we can always conceive of another body greater than it "(1D2, AW 144).
- If a thing is finite, then there are other things that limit it.
- Explanations about the first thing are going to appeal to its relations to other things.
- If we want to explain why I am typing, we have to appeal to the keyboard, the computer, my students, parents, my family, and more.
- Since explanations about any finite thing will depend on other things, finite things can not be their own causes.

# An Aside

Can *substance itself* be limited by another thing of the same nature?

- “In the universe there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature or attribute” (*Ethics* 1P5, AW 145).
- Attributes are how substances are individuated: different properties, different substance.
- If there were two or more substances with the same attributes (or nature) those things would be indistinguishable.
- Leibniz invokes a principle of sufficient reason:
  - God would have no reason to create two substances with the same attributes.
  - Spinoza does not appeal to that claim.
- Take any two things; there must be some difference between them.
  - Even if they were the same internally, they would have to differ in spatio-temporal location.
  - That’s all that 1P5 says, properly speaking.
- Two bodies might limit each other (1D2), but that only shows that bodies are not substances.

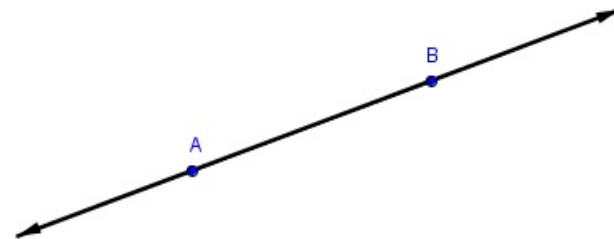




# I3

- I1. Substance exists and is its own cause.
- I2. No finite thing is its own cause.
- I3. An infinite substance must have all attributes.
- IC. So, substance must be infinite, and have all attributes

- I3 is implausible, on the surface.
- Some infinite collections omit some things.
- A line can travel in one direction without containing all points.
- Spinoza thinks of God as not just infinite, but as encompassing everything.
- This conception is part of his rejection of Descartes's common, anthropomorphic conception.



# Monism - The Dirty Work

Adapted from Tlumak

Three steps:

- ✓ Substance exists (E).
- ✓ It is infinite (I).
- ☛ **It is unique (U).**

# The Uniqueness of Substance

U1. Substance is infinite, and has all attributes

U2. There can not be two substances with the same attribute.

U3. So, at most one substance exists.

U4. Substance exists.

UC. So, there is exactly one substance; we can call it God, or Nature.

- ▶ We have seen both U1 and U2 in the argument I; U3 follows from them.
- ▶ And U4 is the conclusion of the first argument E; UC follows from it.

# The Order of Things

- Some interpreters of Spinoza's work argue that we limit ourselves by thinking of substance as an individual thing.
- They suggest that we think of it as the *order* of things, or the *realm* of nature.
- That approach might be useful, psychologically, but it does not do justice to Spinoza's actual words.

# Explanatory Rationalism

everything is explicable

- Spinoza does seem to assume that there are explanations/causes.
- God could not be separate and isolated from the world.
  - ▶ That would limit God's power.
  - ▶ Explanation would cease to be possible.
  - ▶ If God interacted with the world, we would have to impute will and desire to God.
    - Will and desire are properties of finite beings.
    - They are only anthropomorphically ascribed to God.
- One should not think of God in the image of a human being.
  - ▶ "He who loves God will not try to get God to love him back" (*Ethics* 5P19).

# The Sanctuary of Ignorance

- Appeal to God's will cedes explanatory force.
- “If a stone falls from a roof on to some one's head and kills him, [those who make God separate from the world] will demonstrate...that the stone fell in order to kill the man; for, if it had not by God's will fallen with that purpose, how could so many circumstances (and there are often many concurrent circumstances) have all happened together by chance? Perhaps you will answer that the event is due to the facts that the wind was blowing, and the man was walking that way. “But why,” they will insist, “was the wind blowing, and why was the man at that very time walking that way?” If you again answer, that the wind had then sprung up because the sea had begun to be agitated the day before, the weather being previously calm, and that the man had been invited by a friend, they will again insist: “But why was the sea agitated, and why was the man invited at that time?” So they will pursue their questions from cause to cause, till at last you take refuge in the will of God -in other words, the sanctuary of ignorance” (*Ethics*, 1 Appendix; AW 162a-b, but in an alternate translation).
- Why did the big bang occur?

# Three Aspects of Spinoza's Philosophy

- ✓1. Monist metaphysics;
2. The relationship between mind and body; and
3. Freedom of the will and the problem of error.

# Mind and Body

- There is just one substance.
- Is it material or ideal?
- Descartes posited both minds and bodies.
  - substance dualist
- Hobbes tried to explain everything with just bodies
  - materialist monist
- Spinoza claims that the one substance is both mind and body.
  - weirdo monist
- What we ordinarily think of as objects are properties, or attributes, of God.
- There are mental properties, and there are physical properties.
  - substance monist
  - property dualist



# An Argument for Property Dualism

- Recall Descartes's master argument for substance dualism.
  - D1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.
  - D2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.
  - D3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, can be separated by God, and so are really distinct.
  - DC. So, my mind is distinct from my body.
- If we are unconvinced by D3, we can weaken it, and the conclusion.
  - PD1. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my mind, independent of my body.
  - PD2. I have a clear and distinct understanding of my body, independent of my mind.
  - PD3. Whatever I can clearly and distinctly conceive of as separate, are really distinct concepts.
  - PDC. So, my mind is conceptually distinct from my body. I.e. mental properties are distinct from physical properties.

# Contemporary Property Dualism

There is just one (material) substance  
but it has some mental properties and some physical ones.

- Mental properties, like those that compose our conscious states, are not completely explicable in terms of physical properties.
- The claim that a conscious sensation just is the firing of neurons in the brain, seems difficult to defend.
  - Hobbes says that pain, or sensation of red, or taste of a mango, is just the firing of neurons in my brain.
- Still, we might argue that mental states supervene on physical states: for every mental state, there is a corresponding physical state.
  - A set of properties A supervenes upon another set B just in case no two things can differ with respect to A-properties without also differing with respect to their B-properties. In slogan form, “there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference”.
  - Maintains the physicalist’s claim that for every mental state there is a corresponding physical state
- Identifications of mental and physical states are category errors.
  - Different properties
  - The one can not be reduced to, or explained in terms of, the other, even if there really are only bodies.



# Substance Monism and Property Dualism

## Compatible

- Substance monism: there are just physical bodies.
- Property dualism: mental properties are irreducible to physical properties.
- The contemporary substance monist (i.e. materialist)/property dualist just claims that while everything is physical, there are mental properties (like having conscious experience) that aren't explicable in physical terms even if they are utterly accountable, in some perhaps causal sense, by interactions in the material world.
- Whatever mental properties are, for the contemporary materialist, they don't force us to posit a separate mental substance.

# Spinoza's Property Dualism is Not the Contemporary Version

- No materialist base
- The properties of which Spinoza claims there are two types (mind and body) are ordinarily taken to be substances.
- So, Spinoza's property dualism is a different kind than contemporary property dualism.
- Still, it shares some of the characteristics of contemporary property dualism.
- Spinoza agrees that there is a mental world and a physical world and neither one explains the other.

# Spinoza's Monism and Hobbes's Monism

- Hobbes's anemic account of consciousness shows that a rejection of Descartes's dualism is trickier than it looks.
- It will not do simply to say mental states are physical states.
- The deep question is how to take what look to be two things and make them one.
- Spinoza's monism is a subtler and more promising approach.

# Substance

- Spinoza's one substance, which he calls God or Nature, is infinite.
  - ▶ Complete
  - ▶ All possible attributes
- Substance has both mental attributes and physical attributes.
  - ▶ Minds and bodies are both properties of God.
  - ▶ God is, at least in one attribute, material.

# A Diversity of Attributes!

This is not a central claim and affects little in the rest of Spinoza's work

- “Each entity must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality or being it has, the more are its attributes which express necessity, or eternity, and infinity. Consequently, nothing can be clearer than this, too, that an absolutely infinite entity must necessarily be defined (Def. 6) as an entity consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a definite essence” (*Ethics* 1P10, AW 147b).
- An analogy: we have no idea what it would be like to have a sixth sense, but there is no reason to think that there couldn't be such a thing.
- So it is with the attributes of God, for Spinoza.
- We only know the worlds of minds and bodies, but there could be other aspects of nature hidden from us.
- The infinitude of God

# Apparent Incompatibility of Mind and Body

## Spinoza with Descartes and the Property Dualists

- Recall Descartes's argument that bodies or machines, like animals, can not think.
  - language use
  - our behavioral plasticity
- Our bodies are essentially similar to those of animals, perhaps a bit more complex in places.
- Yet we can think, and (other) animals can not.
- This alone shows Descartes that there must be minds independent of bodies.
  - “For while reason is a universal instrument that can be of help in all sorts of circumstances, these organs require some particular disposition for each particular action; consequently, it is for all practical purposes impossible for there to be enough different organs in a machine to make it act in all the contingencies of life in the same ways as our reason makes us act” (*Discourse Part Five, AW 33a*).
- The number of thoughts that we have could not be instantiated in a physical body.
  - Like trying to run Windows 8 on a 1960s mainframe computer
- Descartes concludes dualism and is saddled with a problem of interaction.
- Spinoza (unlike Hobbes) takes the problem seriously.



# Attempting to Bridge the Gap

- Spinoza and the contemporary property dualist reject Descartes's claim that there is an ultimate incompatibility between minds and bodies.
- Spinoza's monism is supposed to solve the problem of interaction.
- Hobbes's monism solved the problem by denying that there are mental substances.
- Spinoza can not invoke that solution since he believes that there are mental attributes of substance and there are physical attributes of substance.

# Revenge of the Problem of Interaction

- “The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion, to rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else). Proof: All modes of thinking have God for a cause, insofar as he is a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is explained by another attribute (by 2P6). So what determines the mind to thinking is a mode of thinking and not of extension, that is (by 2D1), it is not the body. This was the first thing. Next, the motion and rest of a body must arise from another body... whatever arises in the body must have arisen from God insofar as he is considered to be affected by some mode of extension, and not insofar as he is considered to be affected by some mode of thinking (also 2P6), that is, it cannot arise from the mind, which (by 2P11) is a mode of thinking. This was the second point. Therefore, the body cannot determine the mind, and so on” (*Ethics* 3P2).
- Disappointing that the problem reappears at the level of properties.
- Unique and fascinating solution
  - ▶ The order and connection of ideas is the same as order and connection of things (*Ethics* 2P7, AW 166).

# Parallelism Explained



- Let's say your sweetheart gives you a kiss, which makes you feel happy, which in turn makes you hug your sweetie back.
  - ▶ It looks like a physical event caused a mental event which in turn caused another physical event.
  - ▶ Whether these events are made of interacting substances or properties is immaterial.
- What is really happening, according to Spinoza's parallelism, is that there are two independent causal sequences.
  - ▶ In the physical chain, the kiss,  $p_1$ , causes a second physical event,  $p_2$ , which causes the hug,  $p_3$ .
  - ▶ In the mental chain, a mental event,  $m_1$  causes the happiness,  $m_2$ , which causes a third mental event,  $m_3$ .
  - ▶  $m_1$  is the mental correlate of the kiss, and  $m_3$  is the mental correlate of the hug; we are unaware of those ideas.
  - ▶ Similarly, there is a physical correlate,  $p_2$ , of the mental state of happiness.
  - ▶ There is no interaction between the  $p_i$ s and the  $m_i$ s.
  - ▶ But, it appears as if there is, since the two chains are aligned just right.

# The Costs of Parallelism

- Spinoza's parallelism solves the problem of interaction by explaining how the appearance of interaction can arise from a system in which there is no interaction.
- That solution comes at a cost of positing extra mental and physical states.
- There must be a mental state corresponding to every physical state, and a physical state corresponding to every mental state.
- The contemporary defender of supervenience might subscribe to the latter claim.
- The former claim is much more foreign, and difficult to understand.
- There seem to be lots of physical states with no corresponding mental state.
- What mental state is the correlate of, say, the tree falling in the forest with no one to hear it?
- Still, the cost of his profligacy is small, since Spinoza is already committed to the broadest possible infinity of states, in God.

# Monism and Parallelism

- Talk of interaction between the body and mind should, strictly speaking, be understood more like talk about different properties of the same substance.
- The difference between the mind and the body is more like the difference between perceiving an object with two different sense modalities.
  - ▶ the taste and the look of the apple
  - ▶ We can perceive the wax with our different senses, so we have mental and physical aspects of ourselves.
- The mind is always thinking about the body.
  - ▶ “That which constitutes the actual being of the human mind is basically nothing else but the idea of an individual actually existing thing” (*Ethics* 2P11, AW 168b).
  - ▶ “Whatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind is bound to be perceived by the human mind; i.e., the idea of that thing will necessarily be in the human mind. That is to say, if the object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body without its being perceived by the mind” (*Ethics* 2P12, AW 169a).
  - ▶ “The object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body -i.e., a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else” (*Ethics* 2P13, AW 169b).
- Spinoza is claiming that the wax and one’s body and mind are all part of the same whole.
  - ▶ “The human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God; and therefore when we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we are saying nothing else but this: that God...has this or that idea” (*Ethics* 2P11 corollary, AW 169a).

# Motion and Spinoza's Physics

- Bodies are not independent, and self-subsisting.
  - Of course.
- The very notion of motion has to be altered.
- We ordinarily think of motion in terms of objects changing their places.
- The relations among attributes does not seem to follow directly from our ordinary conception of the relations among bodies.
  - Bodies can move relative to one another.
  - The relative motion of attributes is less clear.
- “We have conceived an individual thing composed solely of bodies distinguished from one another only by motion-and-rest and speed of movement; that is, an individual thing composed of the simplest bodies. If we now conceive another individual thing composed of several individual things of different natures, we shall find that this can be affected in many other ways while still preserving its nature. For since each one of its parts is composed of several bodies, each single part can...without any change in its nature, move with varying degrees of speed and consequently communicate its own motion to other parts with varying degrees of speed. Now if we go on to conceive a third kind of individual thing composed of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many other ways without any change in its form. If we thus continue to infinity, we shall readily conceive the whole of Nature as one individual whose parts - that is, all the constituent bodies - vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual whole” (*Ethics* 2P13 Lemma 7 Scholium, AW 171-2).
- Bennett: consider how a thaw might, in a sense, move across a region.

# Determinism



- The interactions of bodies, however conceived, are governed by laws, and appeals to final causes and purposes are banished.
- These laws govern the behavior of both bodies and mind, making all of our decisions determined.
- “Nothing in nature is contingent, but all things are from the necessity of the divine nature determined to exist and to act in a definite way” (*Ethics* 1P29, AW 156).
- “Everything is determined, the beginning as well as the end, by forces over which we have no control. It is determined for the insect as well as the star. Human beings, vegetables, or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper” (Einstein).

# Three Aspects of Spinoza's Philosophy

- ✓1. Monist metaphysics;
- ✓2. The relationship between mind and body; and
- 3. Freedom of the will and the problem of error.