

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

Russell Marcus
Hamilton College
Spring 2014



Class #9 - Spinoza's *Ethics*

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.

Freedom and Error - An Overview

- Descartes confronted a serious puzzle in the problem of error.
 - Once he had established that we are both created and preserved by an infinitely good God, the possibility of error, despite appearances, seemed unlikely.
 - Descartes's solution was constrained by the need to avoid ascribing imperfections to God, while admitting that God's creation was imperfect and prone to error.
 - Descartes solved that problem by showing how we could act independently of God.
- For Spinoza, the problem of error appears even more intractable.
 - Not only are we created and preserved by God, we are God!
 - Descartes availed himself of some sort of independence from God: our free will.
 - Spinoza denies that we have such freedom.
- Descartes can sneak out the window to go to the party.
- Spinoza is stuck inside the house.



All Ideas are True

- Since we are, in substance, God, it seems that there can be no false ideas; all ideas are true.
 - ▶ All ideas are true insofar as they are related to God (*Ethics* 2P32, AW 178a).
 - ▶ There is nothing positive in ideas whereby they can be said to be false (*Ethics* 2P33, AW 178a).
 - ▶ Every idea which in us is absolute, that is adequate and perfect, is true (*Ethics* 2P34, AW 178a).
- There are clearer ideas and more confused ideas, and the clearer ones are closest to the truth.
- At a limit, there are even adequate ideas.
- But, since we are just one attribute of God, we only have ideas from a particular perspective, and this limitation prevents full apprehension of truth, generally.

Descartes and Spinoza on Ideas

- Descartes claimed that ideas, in themselves, could not be false.
 - An idea is like a picture.
 - For sensory ideas, we have an image.
 - For non-sensory ideas, we have a non-sensory representation.
 - We can either affirm or deny that our representation holds in reality.
 - Truth and falsity do not apply to ideas; they are matters of judgment.
- Spinoza argues that every idea contains within itself an affirmation.
 - Ideas are not mere representations
 - They carry beliefs with them.
- Spinoza's claim that all our ideas are true is thus not Descartes's claim that they can not be false.

Revenge of Doxastic Involuntarism

we can not choose what to believe

- Descartes's assumption that we can separate ideas from judgments appears uncontroversial.
- But it leads to the odd claim that we are free to choose whether or not to affirm a given belief.
- Try to believe that, say, your roommate is an alien from Venus.



Spinoza's Built-In Beliefs



- “I deny that a man makes no affirmation insofar as he has a perception. For what else is perceiving a winged horse than affirming wings of a horse? For if the mind should perceive nothing apart from the winged horse, it would regard the horse as present to it, and would have no cause to doubt its existence nor any faculty of dissenting, unless the imagining of the winged horse were to be connected to an idea which annuls the existence of the said horse, or he perceives that the idea which he has of the winged horse is inadequate” (*Ethics* 2P49 Scholium, AW 186b-187a).
- The default belief attached to any idea is an affirmation.
- To deny that there is a winged horse, there must be another positive idea which crowds it out, which overrides our initial affirmation.
- Even the most confused and inadequate idea has some measure of truth in it.
 - A chimera or a hallucination at least reflects a change in a mode of the one true substance.
- Truth comes in degrees.
- Our less-true ideas are, ideally, over-ridden by the more-true ones.
 - “To begin my analysis of error, I should like you to note that the imaginations of the mind, looked at in themselves, contain no error; i.e., the mind does not err from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is considered to lack the idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines to be present to itself” (*Ethics* 2P17 Scholium, AW 173b).
- Spinoza has recast the problem from one of accounting for how we make mistakes to one of describing why some ideas are more true than others.

Passive and Active Ideas

- As long as we are passive, we are receiving ideas from outside of us.
- Those ideas are of bodies.
- Ideas of bodies are inadequate, or mutilated, or confused.
 - They are caused by the interaction of my body and other bodies.
 - Recall Descartes's claim that the wax brought him more knowledge about himself than it did about the wax.
- The inadequacy of our understanding of wax and other objects outside of ourselves prevents us from excluding those overriding ideas which block them out.
 - The inadequate ideas are not false, exactly; how could they be?
 - But, they are less true than the adequate ones.
 - They are governed by psychological associations, rather than by logical ones.

Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata

- *Natura naturans* is active nature, as God conceives herself.
- *Natura naturata* is passive or generated nature, God as conceived through modes.
- Spinoza has removed as much of the anthropocentric view of God as he could from Descartes's metaphysics.
- But, there are limits.
- We are finite, and any account of the world and its structure will have to include us.
- Spinoza includes us by making us part of God, considered in a finite mode.

Error?



- Descartes considered two ideas we have of the sun: a sense idea and one derived from reason.
 - ▶ The former is false, and the latter is true.
- Spinoza thinks that both are true, to different degrees.
 - ▶ We do make an error, when we affirm that the sun is small, or not so far away, as it appears.
 - ▶ But that error is, properly speaking, just inadequacy, not falsity.
- “When we gaze at the sun, we see it as some two hundred feet distant from us. The error does not consist in simply seeing the sun in this way but in the fact that while we do so we are not aware of the true distance and the cause of our seeing it so. For although we may later become aware that the sun is more than six hundred times the diameter of the earth distant from us, we shall nevertheless continue to see it as close at hand. For it is not our ignorance of its true distance that causes us to see the sun to be so near; it is that the affection of our body involves the essence of the sun only to the extent that the body is affected by it” (*Ethics* 2P35 Scholium, AW 178b).

Adequate Ideas

- “Those things that are common to all things and are equally in the part as in the whole can be conceived only adequately” (*Ethics* 2P38, AW 179a).
- Common ideas are those that come from the use of reason, which is one of three kinds of knowledge Spinoza describes in 2P40 Scholium 2.
- The other kinds are sensory, which Spinoza calls opinion or imagination, and intuition, which Spinoza says is the highest kind of knowledge.
- The common ideas are the result of reasoning, which does not rely on inadequate ideas received passively from outside of us but, rather, on active ideas we discover ourselves.
- Those active ideas are the ones that are most secure.
- They are governed by logical necessity, and they allow us to engage God.
- “The human mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God...and thus it is as inevitable that the clear and distinct ideas of the mind are true as that God’s ideas are true “(*Ethics* 2P43 Scholium, AW 182).
- Primarily, the common notions concern pure geometry and philosophy, and knowledge of God.

Is There a Counsel Here?

- We should spend our time focusing on the adequate ideas?
- The situation can not be quite that simple.
- We lack the freedom to choose other than the way in which one chooses.
 - ▶ Everything is determined.
 - ▶ Descartes's doubt is impossible.
 - ▶ No counsel against it could be effective or even appropriate.
- Still, Spinoza defends a kind of freedom which arises from focusing on the active ideas.

Freedom

- Freedom is having a greater proportion of adequate ideas, so that one is more fully self-determining.
- Since we can never have only active ideas, purely adequate, freedom, like truth, is a matter of degrees.
- Even though our actions are determined, we can still strive (in some sense) to be free of our passions, our base desires.
- Such striving leads us to a kind of eternity.
- We can strive to be free by contemplating ourselves as finite modes in Nature.
- “The mind’s intellectual love towards God is the love of God wherewith God loves himself not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he can be explicated through the essence of the human mind considered under a form of eternity. That is, the mind’s intellectual love towards God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself... From this we clearly understand in what our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love towards God “(*Ethics* 5P36, and Scholium, AW 191-2).

Leibniz and Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza

- Hobbes, Spinoza, and Leibniz provide responses to Descartes, who attempted to accommodate the new science and the orthodox, theological world view.
- Hobbes and Spinoza were eager to dismiss the religious orthodoxy.
- Leibniz rejects:
 - ▶ Hobbes's materialism
 - ▶ atheism (or at least naturalism) of both Hobbes and Spinoza
 - ▶ the view, found in both Hobbes and Spinoza, that everything is necessary

On Bodies

- Leibniz also rejects Descartes's account of bodies
- Descartes had argued that bodies are essentially extended, unthinking, divisible, individual substances.
 - Geometry enmaterialized
- Leibniz argues that the claim that bodies are unthinking leads to the impossibility of thought.
 - The ultimate constituents of the material world have within them a source of action.
 - The fundamental components of the world are not inert divisible matter, but active, mind-like substances.
- “Each portion of matter can be conceived as a garden full of plants, and as a pond full of fish. But each branch of a plant, each limb of an animal, each drop of its humors, is still another such garden or pond” (M67, AW 281b).

Rehabilitating Final Causes

- According to Aristotle, there are four different kinds of causes:
 - C1. Efficient cause: the source of a change (basically our contemporary notion)
 - C2. Final cause: the goal, or telos, of an object or event
 - C3. Material cause: the constituent matter of the object
 - C4. Formal cause: what it is to be an object
- Galilean physics denigrated C2-C4, focusing on C1.
- Leibniz, seeking a return to an anthropocentric view of God's role in the universe, looked to rehabilitate the notion of a final cause.
- Bodies act according to laws of efficient causation, but souls act, like God, according to laws of final causes.
- “It would be best to join together both considerations, for if it is permitted to use a humble comparison, I recognize and praise the skill of a worker not only by showing his designs in making the parts of his machine, but also by explaining the instruments he used in making each part, especially when these instruments are simple and cleverly contrived. *And God is skillful enough artisan* to produce a machine which is a thousand times more ingenious than that of our body, while using only some very simple fluids...” (D22, AW 237b-238a)

Motivating Leibniz from Spinoza

- Leibniz accepts Spinoza's demand for explanatory completeness.
 - ▶ Corollary: the Principle of Sufficient Reason
- But Leibniz believes that Spinoza's view cedes too many intuitive phenomena.
- Leibniz wants to reclaim free will.
 - ▶ Spinoza relied on God's foreknowledge to establish determinism.
 - ▶ Leibniz attempts to rectify God's foreknowledge with freedom.
- And, he wants to solve the problem of interaction while maintaining multiplicity.
 - ▶ Spinoza posited parallelism to avoid interaction, but invoked a dual-aspect theory (property dualism) to explain the parallels.
 - ▶ Leibniz accepts that the body is another perspective on the mind.
 - ▶ But, he denies the singularity of substance.

Leibniz and God

Leibniz invokes God in many aspects of his work.

- The Super-Monad (creator)
- Guides the (teleological) changes in monadic perceptions
- Foretells the future states
- Infinite Analysis
- Protector of the Principle of Sufficient Reason
- Elector of the best world (divine benevolence)
- It would be good to have an argument.

Leibniz's Cosmological Argument

- “There must be a *sufficient reason* in *contingent truths*, or *truths of fact*, that is, in the series of things distributed throughout the universe of creatures, where the resolution into particular reasons could proceed into unlimited detail...And since all of this *detail* involves nothing but other prior and or more detailed contingents, each of which needs a similar analysis in order to give its reason...It must be the case that the sufficient or ultimate reason is outside the sequence or *series* of this multiplicity of contingencies, however infinite it may be...The ultimate reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the diversity of changes is only eminent, as in its source. This is what we call *God*”(M336-8, AW 278b).
- From the mere existence of this world, and the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), Leibniz thus derives the standard characteristics of God.
- PSR follows from Leibniz's conception of truth as a claim in which a predicate is contained in a subject.
 - If some effect did not have a cause, if some truth had no reason, then there would be a claim whose subject did not contain its predicate.
 - Analysis is the foundation of twentieth-century analytic philosophy.

Multiplicity or Completeness?

- So far, so Spinoza.
- Spinoza insists on the completeness of substance, and concludes that there is just one.
- Leibniz insists on the multiplicity of substance, concludes that individual substances must be complete in themselves.
- Since there are composites, these must be made of parts.
- Thus, there must be some basic elements.



Our Approach to Leibniz's Work

The *Monadology* and the *Discourse on Metaphysics*.

1. Monads;
2. The Complete-World View of Substance;
3. The Mind/Body Distinction;
4. Theodicy;
5. Freedom and Harmony;
6. The controversy with Newton over space and time.

GOTTFRIED

Leibniz

AT **LAST**—MY COMPUTATIONAL MACHINE IS FINALLY FINISHED — IT'S THE FIRST OF ITS KIND ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT!

I'D LIKE TO SEE THAT THIEVING BASTARD NEWTON TRY TO TOP **THIS!**

☹️sigh☹️ AH WELL... EVERYTHING IS A PART OF GOD'S PLAN, SUFFERING AND ENVY SIMPLY A PHENOMENON OF PERCIPIENT BEINGS...IT CAN ONLY BE THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS, AS SUCH...

THOUGH IT'D BE A HELLUVA LOT BETTER WITHOUT DIRTY PLAGIARIZING ENGLISH SCIENTISTS