

Philosophy 203
History of Modern Western Philosophy

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Class 8 - Spinoza's *Ethics*
Parts 2 and 5

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.
 - 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, are really distinct concepts.
 - DC*. So, my mind is conceptually distinct from my body. I.e. mental properties are distinct from physical properties.
- The new argument gives up on substance dualism, and establishes property dualism.

Contemporary Property Dualism

- 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.
- Then, instead of looking for the conscious experience in our brains, we look for the neural correlates of consciousness.
- Thus substance monism (there are just physical bodies) is compatible with property dualism (mental properties are irreducible to physical properties).
- Spinoza agrees that there is a sharp separation of mental and physical attributes, as we will see.



Mental Properties

- Recall Descartes's argument that bodies or machines, like animals, can not think.
- He appeals to two characteristics of people:
 - ▶ language use
 - ▶ behavioral plasticity
- Our bodies are essentially similar to those of animals, yet we can think.
- “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.
 - ▶ It would be like trying to run Windows 7 on a 1960s mainframe computer.
 - ▶ It just doesn't fit.
- Spinoza, like the contemporary substance monist/property dualist, rejects Descartes's claim that there is an incompatibility between minds and bodies.
 - ▶ 2P7: “The order and connection of ideas is the order and connection of things.”
 - ▶ 2P7 is key for understanding Spinoza's solution to the mind-body problem, which we call parallelism.

Revenge of the Problem of Interaction

- Talk of minds and bodies is misleading, since they are not individual, independent substances.
- Still, it will be easier to talk like normal people, and just remember that we are referring to attributes, rather than things.
- Spinoza rejects Descartes's substance dualism, as we have seen.
- But he maintains a dualism among attributes: there are mental attributes of the one substance and there are physical attributes of the substance.
- Since everything is God, and there are minds and bodies, these must be properties of God.
- Notice that this means that God is, at least in one attribute, material.
- Descartes's argument that the bodies are insufficient to support minds is thus moot; these are properties of an infinite substance.
- Nevertheless, the argument for property dualism still holds, so that there is a problem of interaction between these properties.

Toward Parallelism

- “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).
- Given that a monist metaphysics might be motivated by the problem of interaction, it is disappointing that the problem reappears for Spinoza at the level of properties.
- Spinoza claims that though the mind and body do not interact, they move parallel to each other in such a way as to give the appearance of interaction.

How many attributes? (An aside)

- “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).
- Imagine that there were aliens with an extra capacity for sense perception.
- Suppose they had our five senses, but antennae with a sixth kind of receptor in addition.
- We perceive the world in only five modalities; the aliens perceive the world in six.
- We have absolutely no idea what it would be like to have a sixth sense, like this, 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 additional attributes perceivable by God, other aspects of nature hidden from us.
- In fact, since God is infinite, there is some reason to believe that there are other such attributes.

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.
- Perhaps 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, say
 - ▶ Just as 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.
- It is hard to see how attributes could move.
 - The relations among attributes does not seem to follow directly from our ordinary conception of the relations among bodies.
 - That is, bodies can move relative to one another, but 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).

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- 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.
 - ▶ For, not only are we created and preserved by God, for Spinoza; we are God!
 - ▶ Descartes availed himself of our independence, at some level, from God: our free will.
 - ▶ But, Spinoza denies that we have such freedom, as we have seen.
- 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.

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? For² 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 himself.
- *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.
 - ▶ He determined that 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).