

History of Modern Western Philosophy



Error and Freedom

Baruch Spinoza

Philippe Coleman

The premise of Spinoza's theory of error and freedom

- Same premise for the psycho-physical parallelism : the theory of substance
- God is nature (Deus sive Natura) and substance

The questions

- How can we be free? (if we are determined)
- How can we err? (if we are God)

Spinoza's answers

1. All the ideas are true (but some are truer than other)
2. There is no free will but free necessity

1.1 the levels of truth

Lack of truth

absolute truth



1.2 How can we make the difference between inadequate and adequate ideas?

1. The distinction between passive and active ideas

2. The three kinds of Knowledge

a. experience (passive, confused)

b. reason (active, adequate)

c. intuition (active adequate and divine)

2.1 There is no Free will

1. Causality is the principle of nature
2. Acting because of external causes is not being free

Objections

1. We have the feeling of being free
(Descartes)

the stone image

2. Are humans still responsible without Free
Will?

the snake, the serial killer and the “so what?!”
argument

2.2 Free necessity

1. God's example

2. Human free necessity

seeking active and adequate ideas

3.1 Conclusion

Error (lack of truth)

Truth

Experience

reason

intuition

(Thinking stone)

Freedom

God's Love (Blessedness)

Harmony (nature/acts)

Evil (lack of Blessedness)

3.2 Consequences of Spinoza's ethics

▪ Levels of truth and the lack of humane nature

Would you blame an oyster for not being as wise as Socrates?

So, why should you blame Britney Spears for not being as wise as Socrates?

If you are surrounded by wise people you will define humans as rational animals; but if you are surrounded by morons you will define humans as stupid bipeds. No standard human nature and therefore no standard level for humans on the “ladder of truth”.

▪ Determinism and ethics

Would you blame the fly, who is attracted by light and burning on a lamp? So, why would you blame the liar for being a liar?

No needs to involve “God's anger” (anthropomorphism), lying is bad because it has negative consequences (especially for the liar), and not because it is bad *per se*.



« Spiteful » Spinoza

1632-1677

Nationality: Jewish/Portugese/Dutch

Group Alliances:

"Contumelious" Continental Rationalists

"Destructive" Determinists

"Pernicious" Pantheists

AKA: Spinoza the Bulldoza

Spinoza Spins Over Ya

Throws Ya Spinoza

Benedictus de Spinoza

Powers: knowledge of the infinite intellect of God, invisibility

Weaknesses: geometric method, excommunication