

Baruch Spinoza

Bio

Baruch Spinoza was a Dutch philosopher whose work in challenging the Cartesian Mind-Body Model has remained highly influential in contemporary philosophy. A Jewish intellectual, Spinoza studied in yeshiva (a school of religious studies), before finally undertaking a broader approach to his work. His ideas proved to be highly controversial, however, and his work was formally challenged by the Roman Catholic Church and Jewish spiritual leaders. Eventually, Spinoza received a cherem (excommunication) from the Jewish people. His legacy continues today, however, as one of the most important philosophers of the Modern movement.

Key Ideas

- God is the ‘Substance’ from which all reality, all existence, is derived (a theory called ‘Panenthe-ism’).
- All that exists is a ‘mode’ (a form taken by) the Substance (‘God’).
- God is not a personal being concerned with the lives of human beings.
- The universe was not consciously created with a specific purpose or meaning.

Resources

Ethics is Spinoza’s most influential work, although it was published after his death. In it, he pro-poses new definitions of the word ‘God,’ critiques the Cartesian Mind-Body Model pioneered by Renee Descartes, and attempts a coherent moral outlook.