

BARUCH (BENEDICT) SPINOZA

- Spinoza is considered to be the greatest western Jewish philosopher after Maimonides

Biography

- Born 1632 Amsterdam, Netherlands
- He was a child of a Portuguese Jewish family that has migrated to the Netherlands at the end of the 16th century.
 - ↳ There, in an atmosphere of religious toleration, Spinoza was trained in the religious and philosophical traditions of Judaism.
- Tutored in Hebrew, the Old Testament, the Talmud, and a mystical tradition called “Kabbalah”
 - ↳ Kabbalah provided a means to approach God directly
- A superb linguist, he was fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Hebrew and Latin
- By age 24, Spinoza had reached conclusions concerning God and the world, and concerning the interpretation of the Scripture that were unacceptable to the Jewish community in the Netherlands
 - ↳ After failed attempts to “correct” the young philosopher, the Rabbis of Amsterdam solemnly excommunicated him.
 - ↳ Following this, Spinoza fled Amsterdam and entered a life of relative seclusion
- He earned his living as a lens grinder by day, and practiced silent meditation, reading and writing by night
- In 1673, he was offered a chair of Philosophy at the university of Heidelberg. He politely declines (fears losing academic freedom)
- Health began to fail about 1676.
- Died 1677 (age 44) near the Hague, Netherlands
 - ↳ His young death might be due to a lung illness, possibly a result of breathing in glass dust from the lenses that he ground



Philosophy (major ideas)

Freedom of judgement and freedom of inward piety are inalienable rights of human beings

What we perceive to be a world and all its creatures and plants, etc, is actually the whole of God or nature in its attributes of extension

Philosophy and religions are distinct and separate to the divine; the former dealing with rational truths about God, the latter with obedience and worship.

Since thought and extension are attributes of the one substance, the problem of dualism is overcome

There can only be one infinite, divine substance, comprising all of reality

Spinoza never denied the existence of God.
↳ But he defined God in a manner so unacceptable to most of his contemporaries that they viewed his belief as a form of **atheism**

God and nature (understood as substance) are identical inasmuch as God is infinite

The just exercise of sovereign power by a constitutional government is suitable to the preservation of liberty in religious as well as civil matters