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## Descartes and Spinoza

### Development lines of Spinozism based on a comparative analysis of *Meditations on First Philosophy* and *Ethics Proved in Geometrical Order*

- summary of the dissertation -

The present dissertation neither contains a complete elaboration of all the threads of Descartes' and Spinoza's philosophy, nor does it attempt to criticize opinions on Descartes' and Spinoza's view or various way of presenting their system which have appeared in the history of philosophy. The aim of the work is to study Descartes's main theses by analyzing his metaphysical sources in *Meditations on First Philosophy* and their impact on the claims adopted by Spinoza in the domain of moral philosophy of *Ethics Proved in Geometrical Order*.

The dissertation consists of a preface and five chapters. The first chapter is devoted to Spinoza's early works: *The Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, Descartes' *'Principles of Philosophy'*, *Metaphysical Thoughts*, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, *Theologico- Political Treatise* and *Letters*. This part also presents Spinoza's philosophical and scientific heritage, from his interest in Cartesianism to his own system. The second chapter introduces readers to Descartes' philosophy. This part elaborates on his deepest and most lasting legacies, and discusses the essential notions of Cartesianism: 'Method', 'Mind', 'Body', 'God' and 'Freedom'. The next chapter of the dissertation is an attempt to show the main ideas of Spinoza's philosophy. The structure of this part is similar to that of the previous one and the same notions are discussed. The next part of the dissertation compares source texts in the field of philosophical work. It encompasses a comprehensive list of issues, starting in the same order as the two previous chapters. The final chapter is devoted to contemporary research of Spinozism. It includes information about reception of Spinoza's works in contemporary systems of thinking.

The dissertation makes an attempt to compare two perspectives: a perspective which can be found in Descartes' *Meditations* and that observed in Spinoza's *Ethics*. There is no doubt as to the influence which Descartes had on Spinoza's philosophy, yet it must be admitted that both philosophers had different goals. In conclusion, the dissertation claims that Spinozian and Cartesian conceptions differ significantly. Descartes considered a reform of the sciences to be the fundamental task of philosophy. The main areas of his interests were metaphysical and epistemological issues. Conversely, Spinoza recognized ethical and

antropological aspects to be the most important questions. Spinoza's *Ethics* is an interpretation of happiness, which every human being strives for. It seems that Descartes' main intention is the true understanding as the structure of thinking.

Spinoza, like Descartes, came to the conclusion that human knowledge cannot be established by experience, but must be grounded in reason itself, which is the only tool that can guarantee a true view of the essence of things. However, he denies that reason and its activity can be the only subject of human knowledge. Indisputable knowledge should begin with the affirmation of the existence of an infinite substance characterized by logical necessity. Contrary to Spinoza, according to whom substance appears at the beginning of the discussion and is the source of everything that exists, Descartes' concept of infinity in the cognitive order is something derived in relation to what is finite. On the other hand, the Cartesian concept of infinity is the cognitive foundation of everything that exists. In such an understanding, Spinoza's critique of Descartes' confusion of the cognitive order with ontic order would be unfounded.

There cannot be more than one substance. The author of the *Ethics* did not agree with his predecessor as to the definition of individual finite things as substances. Spinoza agreed with Descartes only on the point that it is only God that we can ascribe to the properties of substances and define as such. Thus, the Cartesian term for substance entered the Spinozaean system with some changes, for instance the idea of God as the creator of the world is removed. Spinoza consistently removes the second feature that played a key role in the Cartesian system – the personal character of God as purposeful and free.

Descartes' statement that the realm of thinking is independent of the realm of extension, and that it cannot be explained by material causes, meant for Spinoza a denial of the possibility of a causal relationship between Descartes' substances. The first thing Spinoza had to eliminate before he could think of a unified and consistent system was the Descartes' duality. Unlike Descartes, for whom the *cogito* was distinguished and contrasted with the surrounding world, Spinoza restored man to nature. The concept of human thinking which he proposed was entirely different from the idea of mind offered by Descartes. For Spinoza, thinking is not attributed exclusively to man. It is a universal quality which relates to the whole of nature. It has nothing to do with the distinct state of being human. But the conception developed by Spinoza is one of the most important propositions pointing to the outstanding role of human nature. Only man, by means of the knowledge of the third kind, in which he deals with true ideas, can achieve complete happiness. If that is the case, the difference between the philosophy of Descartes and that of Spinoza does not seem to be so great. However, it must be remembered that the fact that Spinoza tried to solve Cartesian difficulties determines the difference in the intellectual intentions of both thinkers.

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