Chapter I

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ONTOLOGICAL POSITION OF SPINOZA
Chapter 1

An Examination of the Ontological Position
of Spinoza

As Timothy L.S. Sprigge had once pointed out, "if an idealist is one who thinks that all is thought, then Spinoza is an idealist, while if a materialist is one who thinks that all is matter, then Spinoza is equally a materialist." (1) Philosophers and commentators find it slippery to track down Spinoza into definite frames of characterisation. This ability of evasion that one sees in Spinoza is basically owing to his great attempt to bridge the dualism in his predecessor Descartes.

Born in 1632 in Amsterdam (Holland/Netherlands/the Dutch) to Jewish parents who

came there through the Spanish invasion and partial occupation, Spinoza grew up as a Dutch patriot. Being Calvinist protestants, the Dutch people were in general proscribed by the Catholic monarchy of Spain. Spinoza opposed the orthodoxy and wrote against the scriptures for which he was beaten up by the orthodoxy and banned by the state. His books were read and circulated underground by his friends. As published works, his books had seen light only since 1670. And his early demise at the age of 45 in 1677 could not earn him respect as a great philosopher in his lifetime. Hegel could later appreciate the greatness in this philosopher.

*Ethics*, published posthumously, is the main work of Spinoza. We are basing our analysis of his ontology and epistemology mainly on this work. Substance, attributes and modes together form the whole of his ontology. In our treatment of Spinoza's ontology, we would differentiate him in certain respects from Aristotle, Descartes, Locke and Leibniz. Spinoza's consideration of man as an unique mode and his concept of mind body relation would also be dealt here. In the end, Spinoza would be examined in the context of his answer to the question of ultimate reality.
Substance, God and Nature

Substance is the central ontological term in Spinoza's philosophy, though in different contexts he equates the term with God and nature. By substance, Spinoza means:

that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself; in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception.(2)

This definition points at the fact that substance cannot be anything. It can be only that which is not dependent on anything else. Only that which is all-encompassing can come within the specification of such a definition. And this can only be one; it cannot entertain any other. More than one means their interdependence and hence no independence.

Spinoza builds up his arguments in an Euclidean manner. He starts with consistent axioms and

from such definitions he goes on deriving conclusions with the help of propositions. Let us see some of the propositions he uses to clarify the nature of substance.

"Substance is by nature prior to its modifications" (3) Because, by mode he defines "that which exists in, and is conceived through, something other than itself", (4) which goes contradictory to the definition of substance.

Proposition V says: "There cannot exist in the universe two or more substances having the same nature or attribute". (5) "One substance cannot be produced by another substance", (6) says the sixth proposition. The essence of all these propositions points out that there cannot be more than one substance. This is to assert a monist principle against the Cartesian dualism.

3. Ibid., p. 46.
4. Ibid., p. 45.
5. Ibid., p. 47.
6. Ibid.
Existence is the nature of substance and the substance is necessarily infinite. (7) He equates substance with God. "Besides God no substance can be granted or conceived". (8) "Whatsoever is, is in God, and without God nothing can be, or be conceived". (9) The sameness of God and substance is argued in the proof given to the proposition XIV. The proof says:

As God is a being absolutely infinite, of whom no attribute that expresses the essence of substance can be denied..., and he necessarily exists...; if any substance besides God were granted, it would have to be explained by some attribute of God, thus two substances with the same attribute would

7. Ibid., p. 48. "Prop. VII. Existence belongs to the nature of substance"; "Prop. VIII. Every substance is necessarily infinite".

8. Ibid., p. 54.

9. Ibid., p. 55.
exist, ... is absurd; therefore, besides God no substance can be granted, or, consequently, be conceived. If it could be conceived, it would necessarily have to be conceived as existent; but this (by the first part of this proof) is absurd. Therefore, besides God no substance can be granted or conceived.(10)

From this proof, Spinoza derived two corollaries: (i) God is one, and only one substance is possible and it is absolutely infinite; and (ii) extension and thought are attributes of God.(11) Spinoza defines God:

By God, I mean a being absolutely infinite - that is, a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.(12)

Thus God is infinite; has infinite attributes; each attribute is again eternal and

10. Ibid., pp. 54-55.
11. Ibid., p. 55.
12. Ibid., p. 45.
infinite. Before going into the details of attributes, let us see the identity of God with Nature.

The terms substance, God and nature are identical in Spinoza. He uses these terms in his philosophical system in different contexts selectively and according to needs of the context. In the Part II (Concerning God) of Ethics, as we have seen now, he discusses about the substance, and proves that only one substance can exist. After this he shows the similarity between God and substance and declares that God is the only substance.

The term Nature in one sense is used by him as synonymous to God. In Ethics, he differentiates between active nature and passive nature. He calls them 'natura naturans' and 'natura naturata' respectively. He connects God with active nature, i.e., 'natura naturans'. He explains that, "... by nature viewed as active we should understand that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself, or those attributes of substance, which express eternal and infinite essence, in other words.... God in so far as he is considered as a free cause".(13)

13. Ibid., p. 68.
Spinoza then defines the passive nature:

By nature viewed as passive I understand all that which follows from the necessity of the nature of God, or of any of the attributes of God, that is, all the modes of the attributes of God, in so far as they are considered as things which are in God, and which without God cannot exist or be conceived.(14)

The nature or the external world we confront is the passive nature. And nature as God is all-embracing.

In Part IV of Ethics, Spinoza explains the identity of cause and existence of God/Nature. The "eternal and infinite Being, which we call God or Nature, acts by the same necessity as that whereby it exists."(15) Nature does not work with an end in view.(16) In the Appendix to Part I also, Spinoza

---

15. Ibid., p.188.
16. Ibid.
treats the same subject. Nature or God acts solely by the necessity of his own nature`; "he is the free cause of all things"; "all things are predetermined by God, not through his free will or absolute fiat, but from the very nature of God or infinite power".(17)

In fact, the "reason or cause why God or Nature exists, and the reason why he acts, are one and the same."(18) For God's existence and action, there is no end and no origin.(19) Every thing follows from its divine nature. Everything comes out of "the necessity of his essence."(20) It does not mean nature or God is passive. From the Proposition XVI in Part I, Spinoza derives the corollaries that (i) "God is the efficient cause of all", (ii) "God is a cause in himself, and not through an accident of his nature", and (iii) "God is the absolutely first cause".(21) So, in Spinoza's argument, God is self-caused or 'causa sui'.

17. Ibid., p. 74.
18. Ibid., p. 188.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 59.
21. Ibid.
Now, we have seen the relation between the three terms in Spinoza's philosophy, i.e., substance, God and nature. These words are used synonymously. But the question arises why Spinoza uses three words for the same thing. Sanat Kumar Sen cites the attempt of Leon Roth in bringing out the differences in the usage of these terms in Spinoza's philosophy. Sen writes:

Spinoza uses one term or another according to its appropriateness in a particular context. "Three primary problems of thought", writes Leon Roth, "are those of origin, structure and stuff. When Spinoza is thinking of the first, he would seem to use the word 'God'; when of the second, 'nature', and when of third, 'substance'. They are all one and the same although from different points of view". (22)

Having seen the Substance in Spinoza, it is time for us to see this concept in relation to the

usage of it by the philosophers before Spinoza. During Spinoza's time, that is, in the Seventeenth century, the term was widely used. The concept of Substance has a long history which ultimately goes back to Aristotle. Aristotle used the term as what exists independently of others, or in the sense of what exists 'in itself'. Aristotle says: "Some things can exist apart and some cannot, and it is the former that are substances". (23)

As rightly pointed out by Thomas Carson Mark, Spinoza does not derive his concept from Aristotle. (24) Spinoza conceives only one substance while for Aristotle anything that exists in itself independently of others can be a substance. Thus, a physical object is a substance while the colour or smell depending on that object is not. Aristotle talks of various kinds of substances. Spinoza's substance is all-inclusive, one only reality. Substance is one among the categories in Aristotle. But for Spinoza it is the sole substratum.

23. Aristotle, Metaphysics, XII, 5, 1070b.
In fact, Spinoza starts his metaphysics from the premises of Descartes (1596-1650). Spinoza does not accept as such the premises of Descartes. He modifies them. Spinoza allows only one substance from Descartes'. Descartes admits three substances - God, matter and mind. God is the absolute substance, and matter, the material and mind, the spiritual substances. The last two are relative substances when compared to God, the absolute one. Descartes also gives importance to God; but he allow other two substances. Spinoza found this conflicting and gives only God the status of substance.

Spinoza's definition is more or less same as that of Descartes'. As Sen has rightly said, "only he takes the definition strictly and seriously, and sees that the name cannot be rightly applied to anything else but God".(25)

Spinoza concludes not only that the substance is only one, that is, God, but also that extension and thought are the attributes of God

through which he overcomes the problem of dualism in Descartes. In comparison to Descartes', Spinoza's substance is only one which represents the whole universe. So, in his view, not only the existence of the substance appertains to its essence, but the substance must be conceived as infinite. While answering his friend Lewis Meyer, Spinoza elaborates this point:

The points to be noted concerning substance are these: First, that existence appertains to its essence; in other words, that solely from its essence and definition its existence follows... Secondly, as a consequence of the above, that substance is not manifold, but single: there cannot be two of the same nature. Thirdly, every substance must be conceived as infinite".(26)

The kind of necessity reiterated by Spinoza in his concept of substance/God irritated Leibniz very much. Leibniz holds that even the refutation of such an idea is not worth. About Spinoza Leibniz:

... he appears to have expressly taught; that there is a blind necessity, having denied the Author of things, understanding and will,... It is true that Spinoza's opinion on this point is not without obscurity, for he attributes thought to God after having deprived Him of understanding... There are even passages in which he relents a little on the question of necessity... he does not recognise any goodness in God, properly speaking, and teaches that all things exist by the necessity of the Divine nature, without any choice on the part of God. We will not amuse ourselves here in refuting so bad, and indeed so inexplicable an opinion.(27)

So nil is the spiritual and so strong is the material in Spinoza to provoke Leibniz. Leibniz's aversion to necessity and his quest for a perception of choice and freedom took him to a position of plural monads. In Locke, the necessity of essence as existence is not taken as certain. The being of the essence of substance in Locke is only supposed or normal.

Attribute

The relation between attribute and substance is clear from Spinoza's definition of attribute: "By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of substance". (28) The essential nature of substance can be conceived through itself because, as he says, each "particular attribute of the one substance must be conceived through itself". (29) In his view God has infinite attributes. "God or substance consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality, necessarily exists". (30) This description by Spinoza clearly shows that the attributes of substance or God are the essential nature of God as conceived by the intellect, and are called 'attributes' because to conceive God or substance intellectually is to attribute such and such a nature to God or substance.


29. Ibid., p. 50.

30. Ibid., p. 51.
As God's essential nature is infinite, there is an infinity of ways in which he can be conceived by the intellect, and therefore there must be allowed to be an infinity of attributes, and each attribute, being the essential nature of God or substance as it presents itself to the intellect, in itself is infinite. If it was not infinite in its own kind, it could not be an expression of the essential nature of God. Therefore, one is compelled to speak of an infinity of attributes, each of which is in itself infinite.

By infinite attributes, Spinoza meant not only the infinity of each attribute but also their infinite number. As substance is absolutely infinite, finite number of attributes cannot represent its essence. Spinoza writes:

... nothing in nature is more clear than that each and every entity must be conceived under some attribute, and that its reality or being is in proportion to the number of its attributes expressing necessity and eternity and infinity. Consequently, it is abundantly clear, that an absolutely infinite being must necessarily be defined as consisting in infinite attributes, each of which expresses a
certain eternal and infinite essence.(31)

Of course, Spinoza's substance had infinite attributes. But in his view, man can know only two of these infinite number of attributes because man is a mode of these two attributes only - his mind being a mode of thought and his body that of extension. Man does not and cannot know any other attributes. He can know only those which are involved in the composition of his nature. To a correspondent who asked Spinoza to show the cause why we cannot know more attributes of God, Spinoza answers:

the human mind can only acquire knowledge of those things which the idea of a body actually existing involves, or of what can be inferred from such an idea. For the power of anything is defined solely by its essence...; the essence of the mind... consists solely in this, that it is the idea of body actually existing: therefore, the minds of power of understanding only extends to things, which this idea of body contains in itself, or which follow therefrom. Now this idea of body does

31. Ibid., p. 51.
not involve or express any of God's attributes, save extension and thought.... It is therefore plain, that the human mind, or the idea of the human body neither involves nor expresses any attributes of God save these two. Now from these two attributes, or their modification, no other attributes of God can be inferred or conceived. I therefore conclude, that the human mind cannot attain knowledge of any attribute of God besides these....(32)

Spinoza defined these two attributes. He says that, "Thought is an attribute of God, or God is a thinking thing",(33) and "Extension is an attribute of God, or God is an extended thing".(34) This terminology - thought and extension - is Cartesian. But, whereas Descartes speaks of "thinking substance" and "extended substance", Spinoza does not consider thought and extension to be substances. In his view, thought and extension are attributes of one substance; bodies, or physical existence, represent being conceived under the

32. Ibid., pp. 398-9.
33. Ibid., p. 83.
34. Ibid., p. 84.
attribute of extension and ideas or mental existence, represent being conceived under the attribute of thought. These bodies and ideas are considered by Spinoza as modes of attributes.

Mode

By 'mode', Spinoza meant "the modifications of substance, or that which exists in, and is conceived through, something other than itself." (35) In the view of Spinoza, whole existing reality means substance and its modifications. He said that anything which exists, "exists either in itself or in something else", (36) i.e., they are either substance or its modifications. These modifications of substance are modes. While answering his friend Lewis Meyer, Spinoza pointed out the same. "The modifications of substance I call modes." (37) Modes can be said to be existent as well as non-existent. "Their definition, in so far as it is not identical with that of substance, cannot involve any

35. Ibid., p. 45.
36. Ibid., p. 47.
37. Ibid., p. 318.
existence. Hence, though they exist, we can conceive them as non-existent. From this it follows, that when we are regarding only the essence of modes, and not the order of the whole of nature, we cannot conclude from their present existence, that they will exist or not exist in the future, or that they have existed or not existed in the past."(38) In other words, modes have some duration while the substance have eternity.(39) So the existence of substance is entirely different from the existence of modes. We can say that, in Spinoza's philosophy, substance and modes are two poles of the same integral reality. While substance is in itself, modes are in another, or, in other words, modes are not self existent; they depend on substance, which is distinguished from them as their other. Modes are not separate from substance. Their relation to substance is an intrinsic one. So, nature of mode is revealed to us solely under the two infinite absolutes, that is, thought and extension. The modes which seem essential to the constitution of these two infinite and eternal attributes must themselves be infinite and eternal, and

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
they are therefore distinguished by Spinoza as the immediate, infinite and eternal modes. Spinoza:

A mode.... which necessarily exist as infinite, must follow from the absolute nature of some attribute of God, either immediately.... or through the means of some modification, which follows from the absolute nature of the said attribute; that is...., which exists necessarily and as infinite.(40)

In Spinoza's writings we find basically two types of modes. They are infinite and finite modes. In his view, the modes or the states of substance can be graded in an order of logical dependence, beginning with the infinite and eternal modes as necessary and universal feature of the universe, and descending to the finite modes, which are limited, perishing and transitory differentiations of nature. The transitory, finite modes can only be understood as effects of the infinite and external modes; they are, in this sense, dependent on the modes of higher order.

40. Ibid., p. 65.
The infinite, immediate and eternal modes under the attribute of extension are motion and rest; and the infinite mode under thought is intellect. Spinoza keeps motion and rest as well as intellect in both the categories of infinite and finite modes. In a way this helps him to solve the difficult problem of translating the infinite modes into finite modes. In any derivation attempt this problem would have given indissoluble difficulties. But in Spinoza, God is the efficient cause of everything. Even the finite modes are so conditioned by God, because a conditioned existence cannot condition itself. He devotes a proposition for this:

A thing which is conditioned to act in a particular manner, has necessarily been thus conditioned by God; and that which has not been conditioned by God cannot condition itself to act. (41)

So, all the modes or modifications of substance are concrete, finite expressions of God. At the same time, "God does not act according to freedom of the will". (42)

41. Ibid., p. 66.
42. Ibid., p. 70.
But all things "necessarily follow from the nature of God."(43) Spinoza proposed:

Things could not have been brought into being by God in any manner or in any order different from that which has in fact obtained.(44)

Infinite modes are concretely expressed as mediate, finite modes. Motion and rest become finite in bodies, infinite in thought and God. Intellect is also either in function finite or in function infinite.(45) Intellect "must comprehend the attributes of God and the modifications of God"(46) Spinoza defines the intellect in function as "the very act of understanding."(47) Intellect in function, whether finite or infinite, is a finite, mediate mode of thought different from the infinite intellect which is only a mode of thought.

43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 69.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
Intellec' in function when it comprehends is the understanding or the intellect. Intellect in function when it acts is the will. (48) So, intellect in function is finite and particular mode despite its finite or infinite functional nature. Spinoza refers these particular intellectual modes to the passive nature:

The intellect in function, whether finite or infinite, as will, desire, love, etc. should be referred to passive nature and not to active nature. (49)

Bodies and ideas are concrete finite modes respectively of extension and thought. Bodies and ideas have particular existence. Any individual body can be a complex combination of various bodies. Mind is the totality of ideas. Man is an unique mode which combines both extension and thought and that is why, in Spinoza's view, we are able to know only two attributes of God or substance. Animals also form a kind of modes. Before going to see the unique mode of man, let us see how Spinoza defines bodies and ideas.

48. Ibid., p. 67.

49. Ibid., p. 69.
Body is defined as:

a mode which expresses in a certain determinate manner the essence of God, in so far as he is considered as an extended thing. (50)

Bodies are different not in respect of substance, but in respect of motion. "All bodies are either in motion or in rest." (51) Spinoza:

Bodies are distinguished from one another in respect of motion and rest, quickness and slowness, and not in respect of substance. (52)

Similarly, Spinoza defines idea as a finite mode of thought. By idea, Spinoza means "the mental conception which is formed by the mind as a thinking thing." (53) He explains it further:

50. Ibid., p. 82.
51. Ibid., p. 93.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., p. 82.
the actual being of ideas is... a mode of thought, that is... a mode which expresses in a certain manner the nature of God, in so far as he is a thinking thing. (54)

The interconnection of modes because of the all pervasiveness of the single substance is effectively explained by S.K. Sen in his study on Spinoza's ontology. Sen says:

Finite modes are determinate expressions of Substance and the Attributes. In their totality, so to speak, they constitute the exhaustive actuality of the infinite Power that is Substance. They represent one end of the divine causal process which is from essence to existence, from power to its actualization.... Further, since the Power they all express is one, infinite and indivisible, it follows that its expressions cannot be isolated from and unrelated to one another, but must form, in or in spite of

54. Ibid., p. 85.
their distinctions, a related unity. The finite modes, then, are not discrete 'windowless' identities, but constitute an interrelated system. (55)

Man, Mind and Body

For Spinoza, human being is constituted of finite modes of the attributes of thought and extension; and the unity of the attributes is expressed in him as the epistemic union of mind and body. First, we shall discuss the man's body and man's mind separately, before going into the relation between them.

We saw that the bodies in Spinoza are modes which are differentiated from each other thorough the motion and rest. He also explains the individual as a body which is composed of several or even infinite bodies. Spinoza devotes the predominantly major part of his Ethics to the study of human nature. In the beginning of the Second Part, he deduces man from the nature and attributes of God. Without going into the

55. Sanat Kumar, op.cit.(N. 25), p. 120.
derivation, we shall see one by one the body and the mind of man.

In his premises on human body, Spinoza presents six postulates. They are:

I. The human body is composed of a number of individual parts, of diverse nature, each one of which is in itself extremely complex.

II. Of the individual parts composing the human body some are fluid, some soft, some hard.

III. The individual parts composing the human body, and consequently the human body itself, are affected in a variety of ways by external bodies.

IV. The human body stands in need for its preservation of a number of other bodies, by which it is continually, so to speak, regenerated.

V. When the fluid part of the human body is determined by an external body to impinge often on another soft part, it changes the surface of the latter, and, as it were, leaves
the impression thereupon of the external body which impels it.

VI. The human body can move external bodies, and arrange them in a variety of ways. (56)

As an individual being is itself formed of a number of other individual beings, human body is a complex machine made up of other machines.

Human mind in Spinoza is the idea which corresponds to the human body. He takes mind as identical with the infinite intellect in so far as it is finite and perceives only the human body. Spinoza:

I take the human mind to be identical with this said power, not in so far as it is infinite, and perceives the whole of nature, but in so far as it is finite, and perceives only the human body; ...(57)

---

56. R.H.M. Elwes (Tr.), op.cit., p. 96.
57. Ibid., p. 292.
Human mind is an idea, and it is an idea of something actually existing. Spinoza explains this:

... an idea is the first element constituting the human mind. But not the idea of a non-existent thing, for then... the idea itself cannot be said to exist; it must therefore be the idea of something actually existing. For an infinite thing,... must always necessarily exist; this would... involve an absurdity. Therefore, the first element, which constitutes the actual being of the human mind, is the idea of something actually existing.(58)

In the view of Spinoza, the mind is the subjectivity which reflects the existing human body. In his view, the mind and body of man constitute the same thing which is perceived in different attributes. So also, he took the idea of mind and mind itself as the same thing. Spinoza said:

the idea of body and body, that is, mind and body..., are one and the same individual

58. Ibid., pp. 90-91.
conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension; wherefore the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing, which is conceived under one and the same attribute, namely, thought.(59)

According to Spinoza, the essence of man is constituted by certain modes of the attributes of God, i.e., the modes of extension and the modes of thought. In the words of Lucia Lermonde, in Spinoza's man the unity of the attributes is expressed as "the epistemic union of mind and body".(60)

As it is an epistemic union, we should ask the question whether Spinoza's mind has a power of creating new ideas or not. Spinoza's answer is 'no'. He says:

The mind does not know itself, except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the modifications of the body.(61)

59. Ibid., p. 102.
61. R.H.M. Elwes(Tr.), op.cit., p. 103.
Spinoza argues that the mind perceives the body, the modifications of the body and the ideas of the modifications of the body. Further, Spinoza explains that this modification of the body starts after being affected by external bodies. When human body is affected by an external body, through few bodily changes, man forms the idea of external bodies. Similarly, the mind is able to regard as present external bodies, by which the human body has once been affected, even though they be no longer in existence or present.

Thus, Spinoza clearly shows the priority of body in the making of ideas. In his view, in man's mind, ideas originate after it is affected by external bodies. Prior to this, mind has only the idea of the human body which is mind itself. These views of Spinoza clearly point out his ontological position as a materialist one, and provide us enough doubts on the commonplace view that Spinoza is a rationalist who believes in the concept of innate ideas. We will go into these doubts when we discuss the epistemology of Spinoza. Now, we shall further deliberate on his ontological position itself.

62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., p.98.
Materialism in Spinoza

One of the chief features of Spinoza's ontology is his monism. The project of his metaphysics was to resolve the dualism, or to a certain extent, the triplism created by Descartes. Spinoza makes a heroic attempt to resolve the triplism of substance and the so-called Cartesian mind-body dualism that we see in Descartes. As we have seen, Spinoza gives the status of substance only to God or active nature; he uses the three terms more or less synonymously, with difference in emphasis. By relegating spiritual and material substance in Descartes to a status of attributes of thought and extension, Spinoza could rescind the problem of triplism. By deriving ontologically human mind and body from the one and only substance through mediations of attributes and various stages of modifications and combinations, the independent identities are denied to body and mind. Everything necessarily flows from God.

What is the nature of Substance? Is Spinoza a materialist? Or an idealist? The question of materialism and idealism can be decided on the basis of priority of spirit (idea) or matter (nature). Those philosophers who assert that spirit is primary and matter secondary are generally called idealists and those who take matter as primary, materialists. Engels
rightly said:

The great basic question of all philosophy, and especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being... Philosophers were divided into two great camps, according to their answer to this question. Those who asserted the primacy of mind over nature... formed the camp of idealism. The others, who regarded nature as primary, belonged to the various schools of materialism. (64)

We agree with Engels that every philosopher, and for that matter Spinoza too, must be properly evaluated and characterised. We find two known attributes of God in Spinoza. These attributes represent matter and spirit. These attributes have same place and power in the substance in Spinoza. So it is difficult here to locate Spinoza as a materialist or an idealist on these grounds.

As we have mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, it is very difficult to ontologically characterise the nature of ultimate reality in Spinoza. The problem presented by Sprigge(65) that it is difficult to track down Spinoza to any frame of characterisation is a genuine one. This problem remains as such if we look at his ontology from ontology itself. But if we pursue his ontology from the side of epistemology, it is possible to resolve this, and we would be in a position to characterise his system. Because, Spinoza does not leave any loophole in his ontology which directly or indirectly gives priority or emphasis to either mind or body. But in epistemology, when we see the origin of mind and the concept as a psychological totality of ideas in man and we see it as a result of the effects of the body on it and also of external bodies on the body itself, we find that the active mind, the subjective author of knowledge, is only a development, a materialist development out of the internal capacities and external factors.

Positively, we can say that Spinoza is a

65. T.L.S. Sprigge, op.cit. (Note 1), p. 149.
materialist, and negatively that he is not an idealist. If we start from modes back to substance, we can rightly say this. Let us take the mode 'man' which is a finite mode of attributes. There, we find that man could form the idea of anything when his body was affected by bodies; or, in a way, thing or object is primary and its idea is secondary. Same way, in his view, we find that mind is primarily, an idea of human body, and then more than this but because of other objects. Mind and ideas are of body and objects existing. On this basis, we are right in concluding that Spinoza is a materialist. In a negative sense, we find that Spinoza never talks of innate ideas as prior to their objects. In this sense also, he is not an idealist. We can give few statements of Spinoza from Ethics in support of our argument. Spinoza says:

The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words a certain mode of extension which actually exists and nothing else. (66)

66. R.H.M. Elwes (Tr.), op.cit., p. 92.
The mind does not know itself, except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the modifications of the body. (67)

The advantage which we derive from things external to us, besides the experience and knowledge which we acquire from observing them, and from recombining their elements in different forms, is principally the preservation of the body;... in proportion as the body is capable of being affected in a greater variety of ways and of affecting external bodies in a great number of ways, so much the more is the mind capable of thinking... the human body is composed of very many parts of different nature, which stand in continual need of varied nourishment, so that the whole body may be equally capable of doing

67. Ibid., p. 103.
everything that can follow from its own nature, and consequently that the mind also may be equally capable of forming many perceptions. (68)

Before we conclude, let us make a short visit into the existing prominent characterisations of Spinoza. Lucio Colletti, the Italian neo-Marxist, considers Spinoza as an idealist. Colletti is a typical example among many who evaluate Spinoza as an idealist. Spinoza's assertion that God is the only substance is onesidedly taken by Colletti for criticism. He takes the help of Hegel in doing this. Both Hegel and Colletti see 'what is, is God, and God alone' in Spinoza. Colletti concludes that "Spinozism is a form of idealism, of absolute immaterialism". (69)

On the one hand Colletti forgets that Spinoza's God is the Substance, not just idea or thought; then, he is not taking into account the world Spinoza deduces from God but in God. The differentiations of substance and modes, of natura

68. Ibid., p. 241.
naturans and natura naturata, of God and the power of God are glossed over in Colleti's enterprise on Spinoza. Neither thought as an attribute is given any priority, nor, as we have seen already, bodies are deduced from ideas in Spinoza. We think, Colleti's views won't stand to a proper reading of Spinoza.

Bertrand Russell is only one among many who declared Spinoza 'a pantheist'. Pantheism is a philosophical teaching according to which God is an impersonal principle which is not outside nature but identical with it. Pantheism sees God in nature. Russell argues:

The metaphysical system of Spinoza is of the type inaugurated by Parmenides. There is only one substance, 'God or Nature'; nothing finite is self-subsistent... Individual souls and separate pieces of matter are, for Spinoza, adjectival; they are not things, but merely aspects of the divine Being... Finite things are defined by their boundaries, physical or logical, that is to say, by what they are not: 'all determination is negation'. There can be only one Being who
...s wholly positive, and He must be absolutely infinite. Hence Spinoza is led to a complete and undiluted pantheism.(70)

The same problem that we confront in Colletti's analysis is very much in Russell also. Though the only Being, infinite and substantial, is God, the negated and determinate beings in the forms of modes are in God, and not the other way round. God's presence, but not in its 'infinity', is with the modes. But this presence is not a religious presence as any sense of pantheism would vouch for. Because, in Spinoza, already we have made the point that the active nature (God) is different from the passive nature, and the latter is the native where the pantheists see the God as identical with it. Spinoza's criticisms of the religious God is well known in his criticism of the Scripture.(71) A characterisation of Spinoza as a Pantheist would in no way do justice to his philosophy. A case of 'undiluted pantheism' is still more indefensible.

71. Spinoza, Short Treatise on God
Randall (Jr.) corroborates this view. He argues:

Things exist in God, and are conceived through God. Spinoza is not in any strict sense a "pantheist". In fact, no facile category is applicable to his thought, which is truly unique... The Germans have invented a term for his position: they call him a "panentheist". (72)

Panentheism sees everything in God, while pantheism find God-in-everything. "Panentheism (everything-in-God-ism) is the view that all things exist ultimately "in God". (73)

Spinoza's system is analysed wrongly as Panpsychism by Roger Scruton. The identity of mind and body but under different attributes, and the identity of the idea and body are taken by Scruton as

part of a logic leading to a "thorough-going panpsychism". (74) If ideas are the results of the bodily processes, it does not mean that bodies themselves are ideas. It seems that Scruton is mistaken in thinking that ideas can only come out of ideas.

In a similar issue of explaining the mind-body relation, Jonathan Bennett finds the doctrine of parallelism in Spinoza — "a one-one relation correlating mental with physical ones". (75) This is mistaken when one finds that Spinoza makes enough space for human error. Fictitious, false and doubtful ideas are possible. Adequate and inadequate ideas are also there. This is not possible in any one to one predetermined correspondence that is psycho physically parallel. To Spinoza, "mind can determine in many ways the ideas of things". (76)

---

76. R.H.M. Elwes (Tr.), op.cit., p. 40.
Let us once again come back to the characterisation of the system. Naturalism is a characterisation closer to that of materialism. Randall Jr. called Spinoza a rational naturalist. (77) In the Seventeenth century context, characterising Spinoza as a naturalist is more or less equivalent to a present day characterisation of him as a materialist. Oizerman appreciates the materialism in Spinoza and criticises his attempt of uniting metaphysics with materialism. (78) He rightly finds Spinoza's philosophy as an atheistic and materialist one. (79) Ilyenkov considers Spinoza a materialist thinker with dialectical insights. He said that Spinoza knew how to unite brilliant models of acutely dialectical thought with a consistently held materialist principle (rigorously applied throughout his system) of understanding thought and its relations to the external

77. Randall Jr., op.cit. (Note. 72), pp. 439-59.
79. Ibid., p. 166.
Marx also pointed out the materialist and dialectical insights in Spinoza, and we will go into this in the chapter (fifth) on comparison. The difficulties faced by Sprigge or Mark (81) in characterising Spinoza's system owe their origin to the fact that, as already pointed out, these analysts look at ontology from ontology itself. The informational input that we are going to get from Spinoza's epistemology would take us further deep into his system, and enable us to characterise it.
