

---

# THE 'TRUE RELIGION' AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL GOD OF SPINOZA

**Andrey Maidansky\* and Igor Boichuk**

*Belgorod National Research University, Department of Philosophy, 85 Pobedy St.,  
Belgorod 308015, Russia*

(Received 1 August 2019, revised 31 August 2019)

---

## **Abstract**

Spinoza's notion of 'God' is examined in the article through prisms of: (i) criticism of religious consciousness in 'Theological-Political Treatise', (ii) theory of affects developed in 'Ethics', and (iii) Spinoza's comments on language. Philosophy and religion are completely different in their foundations and goals. Spinoza argued therefore, there can be nothing in common between the religious and philosophical concepts of God except the word 'God'. Behind this religious name, Spinoza has a logical-mathematical concept of infinity, which serves as the 'most perfect method' of knowing the nature of things. The article examines the purpose for which Spinoza used the word 'God' along with the philosophical terms 'substance' and 'Nature,' and how his philosophical God differs from the gods of religions. The authors show that Spinoza's language strategy gave rise to discrepancies and made it difficult to understand the text, but it helped transform Spinozism into the mainstream of Modernity.

*Keywords:* idea, theology, universal, love, obedience

---

## **1. Introduction**

Spinoza's God is one of the most controversial characters of the 'philosophical theatre'. Contemporaries, with the exception of a handful of apostles, saw in Spinoza a 'deserter of religion', 'atheistic Euclid', and even 'Prince atheists' (*Atheorum Princeps*). A century later, Spinoza would turn into an *Architheist* (Herder), a *Christianissimus* and 'the God-intoxicated man' (Novalis). No less old are the suspicions that Spinoza secretly dragged into the philosophy the mystical Kabbalah's *Ain Soph*, or the Old Testament's *Jehovah* - disguising him in geometric clothes and taking away his personality (Schopenhauer). These differences have not subsided to this day. It is hardly possible to cope with them in the way of the study of Jewish education, various 'influences' and 'exchanges', as well as divinations about Spinoza's mentality. We propose to put all this stuff aside and look for a clue in his own texts. The three keys will be for us the teaching of Spinoza about religion and its

---

\*E-mail: maidansky@gmail.com, tel.: +7(950)7175194

relationship with Philosophy, his reasoning about language, and, finally, the theory of affects.

## 2. Separation of Philosophy from religion

The first fact on which we safely can and must rely: Spinoza in no way considered his philosophy to be religious. He unequivocally demanded “to separate religion from philosophical speculation (*religio a speculationibus philosophicis separare*)” [1]. This is literally a cross-cutting idea of his *Theological-Political Treatise*. A special chapter of this book is devoted to clarifying how best to “separate faith from Philosophy, which was the main goal of all work” [1, p. 264]. Spinoza comes here to the following conclusion.

“There are no dealings, or no relationship, between faith, *or* Theology, and Philosophy. ... These two faculties aim at, and are based on, completely different things (*sane toto coelo*). For the goal of Philosophy is nothing but truth. But the goal of Faith, as we’ve shown abundantly, is nothing but obedience and piety. Furthermore, the foundations of Philosophy are common notions, and that must be sought only from nature. But [the foundations] of Faith are histories and language, and [that] must be sought only from Scripture and revelation, as we showed in Ch. 7.” [1, p. 271]

What does this mean in respect to the word ‘God’? Obviously, the fact that the *philosophical* God has nothing to do with the gods of *religious* traditions and creeds. In general, all the content of *Ethics* should be understood in a purely philosophical, i.e. scientific, and not religious and theological sense. Philosophy explores the ‘common notion’ of God, which is given in the intellect; while the idea of God, drawn by the prophets and theologians, belongs to the field of inadequate ‘knowledge of the first kind’ – opinion or imagination. The word ‘God’ is one and the ideas are as different as chalk and cheese, *toto coelo*.

The same words of the human language can express both ‘confused’ ideas of the imagination and ‘clear and distinct’ ideas of the intellect. But, by its nature, language is much better suited to expressing sensual images and abstractions of imagination than common notions of the intellect. Language is the creation of a ‘crowd’ (*vulgus*), that is why it is so difficult for the intellect to convey its ideas through words.

“Since words are part of the imagination, ... it is not to be doubted that words, as much as the imagination, can be the cause of many and great errors, unless we are very wary of them. Moreover, they are established according to the pleasure and power of understanding of ordinary people, so that they are only signs of things as they are in the imagination, but not as they are in the intellect.” [1, vol. 1, p. 38]

When reading these lines from the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, complaints of Francis Bacon on the “idols of the market-place” come to mind [2]. This is on account of these idols that Spinoza was considered a religious thinker. The word ‘God’ literally hypnotized readers, easily breaking through the wall, with which Spinoza tried to protect Philosophy from religion.

In addition, Spinoza's texts (as well as Descartes' and Leibniz's) are full of scholastic terms and expressions. Thus the author of *Ethics* turned into a theologian, 'the last of the medievals' [3, p. 273; 4].

The magic of the word 'God' confused even materialistic philosophers, militant critics of religion in general and Judeo-Christian religious traditions in particular. "The philosophy of Spinoza was a religion" – declared Feuerbach [5]. Marxist L.I. Akselrod (orthodox) saw in the Spinoza system the development of the "cult of Jehovah", which "firmly took possession of the touching and poetic soul of the great philosopher". His teachings are imbued with a "deeply rooted religious feeling". Only in place of Jehovah Spinoza had put the deified "world order", or Nature, Axelrod concluded [6, p. 552].

If Spinoza himself considered it absolutely unacceptable to mix Philosophy with religion, and even more so with Theology, then the readers of his *Ethics* constantly practiced such mixing. Only in the past half century has this bad tradition visibly weakened. Today, it is considered good practice to praise Spinoza as the 'first secular Jew', the pioneer and inspirer of the European 'Radical Enlightenment'. This is, of course, a much more adequate view.

Spinoza's desire to protect Philosophy and Science in general, from religious interventions does not mean, however, that he had a negative attitude towards religion. This is not true. Religion brings great benefits to people. On the one hand, it teaches them to obey, subordinate their private interest to the common, and on the other, it comforts them in their misfortunes and strengthens them with hope.

Theology is quite different. Spinoza is extremely negative towards this hybrid of Philosophy with religion, the intellect – with the imagination, the concepts of 'pure mind' (*ex pura mente*) – with abstractions of 'vague experience'. The word 'theology' in his texts has a pejorative colouring, except when it comes to the 'word of God' as such, or the 'revelation'. This kind of 'elemental' theology preaches obedience and teaches righteous living without pretending to know the nature of things and without resorting to logical argumentation ('mathematical demonstrations', as Spinoza puts it).

Only in one place *Ethics* Spinoza, in a respectful tone, mentions the theologians: "some of the Hebrews seem to have seen, as if through a cloud", the truth about the relationship of ideas and bodies, the intellect of God and created things [1, vol. 1, p. 451]. Vague speculation is the maximum that Theology is capable of. As for the rest, "the theologians have mainly been anxious to twist their own inventions and fancies out of the Sacred Texts, to fortify them with divine authority" [1, p. 170]. "Maimonides and others ... extort from Scripture Aristotelian rubbish and their own inventions. Nothing seems to me more ridiculous." [1, p. 82]

Spinoza undoubtedly ranked Maimonides as 'some of the Hebrews' who were able to see the truth through the theological cloud. His opus magnum, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, was in Spinoza's library and was familiar to him from school. In chapter 68 of part I, the interpretation of the identity in God of the

intellect and the things comprehended by His intellect was given (with reference to the ‘divine philosophers’).

At the same time, Spinoza condemned, in the most categorical manner, the attempts of Maimonides and other scholastics to reconcile reason and faith, Philosophy and religion. In Spinoza’s eyes, this occupation is detrimental to both Philosophy and religion itself. “If Maimonides is taken, as he has been, as a paradigm of religious rationalism in Judaism, then Spinoza’s critique of Maimonides is a critique not only of Maimonidean biblical hermeneutics but of the attempt to forge some kind of synthesis of biblical faith and Philosophy.” [7, p. 555]

Any kind of philosophizing about the foundations of religion “gave rise to many disputes and schisms, which have tormented the church incessantly from the time of the Apostles to the present day, and will surely continue to torment it forever, until at last someday religion is separated from philosophic speculations and reduced to those very few and very simple doctrines Christ taught his followers” [1, vol. 2, p. 247].

Spinoza does not consider Christ to be a religious innovator. He did not teach people anything new, but only tried to bring them back to the fountainhead of *any* faith. What is this fountainhead? It is just love for the neighbour: “The whole law consists only in this: loving one’s neighbour. ... So this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith.” [1, p. 265] The entire connection of people, the very human society, is held up by the affect of love.

### 3. Love, obedience and the idea of God

By its nature, the affect of love is twofold. Religious/imaginative love for the neighbour is based on *obedience to the word* of God, while philosophical/intellectual love is based on *the knowledge of the nature of things* (= of God, in Spinoza’s sense).

Words, as we recall, are ‘part of the imagination’, and religious faith, with its concepts of God, is always perceived by word of mouth, ‘from hearsay’ (*ex auditu*). Consequently, faith belongs to the second kind of imaginative knowledge. (The first kind of imagination, according to Spinoza, is random sensory experience, the second kind is knowledge *ex auditu*).

To human mind, the idea of God is innate as a ‘common notion’. Any person enjoys it by nature, due to the ‘natural light’ of the mind. “The infinite being of God and his eternity are known to all (*omnibus esse notam*).” [1, vol. 1, p. 482] Another thing is that this innate idea of God is obscured by superstitions and “empty religion (*vana religio*)”, imposing “nothing but apparitions, the delusions of a sad and fearful mind” [1, p. 67].

In itself, the idea of God is absolutely nothing mystical, open only to selected people or nations. Anyone who has an intellect possesses the idea of God.

Quite a few commentators on Spinoza hold the view that the *infinite* intellect, as such, is nothing more than the idea of God. For example: "The 'infinite intellect' (i.e. the *infinita idea Dei*) ..." [8, p. 240]. "Infinite understanding is *not* part of the divine nature: it is merely the *idea Dei*." [9, p. 183]. "It is clear that an idea of God or an infinite intellect constitute the infinite immediate mode under the attribute of cogitation." [10, p. 196] "... The universe's cognition (what Spinoza calls 'the infinite intellect' or 'the idea of God')." [11, p. 26]

We believe this is not quite the case. The relationship here is typically Spinozian: the intellect and the idea of God are two different modes of being of the same thing. Two different ways of acting and expressing the substance itself as a thinking thing. Both of these infinite and eternal modes 'follow from the absolute nature' of the attribute of thought, but follow in different ways. The intellect is produced by God *immediately*, while all other modes of thought (Spinoza makes no exception for the idea of God) are produced *through the medium* of intellect. The intellect actually contains all the ideas – both the idea of God itself and the ideas of any of his modifications, finite and infinite.

Being *a part* of the infinite intellect, the idea of God is *equal* to the intellect by 'extension': all other ideas of the mind follow from it – "*infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect)*" [1, vol. 1, p. 424]. In the mathematical set theory, the presence within a whole of a part, equinumerous to the whole, is considered the distinguishing feature of an *actually infinite* [12].

By virtue of the famous proposition on the identity of order and connection of ideas and things [1, vol. 1, p. 451], the relation of the idea of God to other ideas is the same as the relation of substance to its modes. All things exist in God, but the distinction (and even the opposition) between God and things, *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, does not disappear. The same applies to the distinction between the idea of God and the ideas of things-modes within the infinite intellect.

Thus, between the intellect and the idea of God it is impossible to put an equality sign or 'i.e.' even though both of these modes express one thing under the same attribute. The infinite intellect and the infinite idea of God – the whole and its peculiar part – are equipotent, equinumerous, but not identical. They are different *formaliter*, in the language of medieval philosophy and Spinoza.

Another subtle point: since the idea of God is given *a priori* and in no way depends on philosophical reflection, then what does the first part of *Ethics* entitled 'On God' offer us? Obviously, we find here not a simple idea of God, but a *reflexive* one, or the 'idea of idea' of God. Spinoza constructs his *philosophical* God through the reflection of simple common notion of God. According to *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the "idea of idea" is nothing but a method of acquiring knowledge, and the reflective idea of God is the "most perfect Method" (*Methodus perfectissima*), i.e. universal and most powerful of all possible [1, vol. 1, p. 19]. In the first part of *Ethics*, such a method is forged, and in the subsequent parts it is applied.

Further. Any idea causes a certain affect in the mind. *Amor Dei*, love of God... For what purpose does Spinoza add the adjective ‘intellectual’? He clearly wants to distinguish this higher kind of love, generated by adequate ideas, from the feeling of love caused by religious faith. In philosophers and in the crowd, both the concept of God and the love of God are completely different. It would not hurt those who naïvely consider Spinoza to be a religious thinker on the grounds that he sang *amor Dei intellectualis* to keep this in mind.

The purpose of ‘true Religion’ (*Religio vera*) is not to cognize God, but to maintain everyday morality and social order. While Philosophy is seeking truth and the meaning of life (ethics). If these two tasks are not mixed, one is not a hindrance to the other. “I can’t wonder enough”, Spinoza writes, at the people “who have then introduced into religion so many matters of philosophic speculation that the Church seems to be an Academy, and Religion, science, or rather, a logomachy (*altercatio*)” [1, vol. 2, p. 257–258].

The founders of religions dealt primarily with an ignorant multitude and adapted their creeds to the mental state of the crowd and its life demands. Their speeches and writings appealed to the imagination and passions, and not to the intellect. They did not confirm the dogmas of faith with the arguments of reason, but ‘only by experience – that is, by miracles and historical narratives’.

“From all this it follows that the doctrine of Scripture does not contain lofty speculations, or philosophical matters, but only the simplest things, which anyone, even the very slowest (*tardissimus*), can perceive.” [1, p. 257]

What are these things? – The Book of books teaches honesty, modesty, compassion, etc. All this together is called ‘love of your neighbour’ and forms the foundation of ‘true Religion’. The problem is how to get people to *obey* this ‘word of God’? Scientific argumentation is no good here, it would instantly alienate a lot of listeners. Few aspire to virtue, being guided by pure reason. The crowd requires for this an imaginary Lord God – the all-seeing heavenly judge, merciful and terrible. This is how Scripture draws it, which does “a great comfort to those whose powers of reason are not strong, and brings no slight advantage to the Republic” [1, p. 280].

The target audience of the Scriptures is not a handful of philosophers, but the common people who need to be taught obedience (*obedientia*). This concept is axial in Spinoza’s religious discourse. Spinoza denies religion and Theology the right to enter the “kingdom of truth and wisdom” (*regnum veritatis, et sapientiae*); their domain is the “kingdom of piety and obedience” (*regnum pietatis, et obedientiae*) [1, p. 277]. Spinoza has no illusions about enlightening masses. The crowd has always lived and lives by passions; it is possible to instil in it humanity, ‘love of neighbour’, only through the injection of powerful passions – fear and hope, above all. So did the creators of religions.

The passions (passive affects) of the mind arise from inadequate ideas of imagination and inseparably accompany them. Miracles and unusual things affect the imagination much better than any ‘mathematical demonstration.’ “The creators of Scripture knew this very well and ‘spoke according to the power of

understanding of the common people (*vulgus*), whom Scripture is concerned to make obedient, not learned." [1, p. 262]

If religious love rests in obedience to the word of God, then intellectual love for God "proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun. So under the guidance of reason we can love God, but not obey him" [1, p. 293]. One can only obey an external force or word; obedience is the opposite of freedom. If anyone cognizes God as his own nature, 'substance', then love for God coincides with love for the self and for humanity altogether – with love for all 'thinking things' with which we form 'as it were, one body – namely, the body of a society (*unum quasi corpus, nempe societatis*) [1, p. 114].

As Étienne Balibar has aptly put it, "the fundamental dogma of true Religion is, in effect, that love of God and love of one's neighbour are really one and the same" [13].

Spinoza insists that love for God (and therefore for Man) manifests itself only in deeds and actions, and not in words and symbols. "We must judge the piety of each person's faith from his works alone (*ex solis operibus*)." [1, p. 73] He repeats this idea again and again, using as an argument in favour of religious toleration, on the one hand, and to defend the 'freedom of philosophizing' on the other.

True Religion consists of *desires and actions* that follow from the idea of God common to all people. "Again, whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, or insofar as we know God, I relate to Religion." [1, vol. 1, p. 565] Desire (*cupiditas*), or a conscious appetite (*appetitus cum ejusdem conscientia*), is, according to Spinoza, the primary affect of the mind, from which all other affects are derived.

Words and symbols, dogmas and rituals, and even *faith* stemming from external experience, all refer to 'empty religion'. In this regard, Spinoza cites the apostle James with approval: "faith by itself, without works, is dead", adding: "From these things it follows next that we can judge no one faithful or unfaithful except from their works". What works exactly? Those dictated by *obedience*, answers Spinoza: "For where there is obedience, there faith is also". It is completely unimportant whether the dogmas of faith are true or whether they "do not have even a shadow of the truth" (*nec umbram veritatis habent*); the main thing is that these dogmas "move the heart to obedience" [1, p. 265-267].

Thus, *true Religion is indifferent to truth*. It only cares about human affairs; its goal is to make people obey. This universal religion gets the right to be called 'true' due to the fact that it is partially based on the true idea of God. This idea causes in minds the affects of desire, contributing to the consolidation of their individual and collective existence.

If the idea of God is the only ('adequate', in terms of Spinoza) cause of certain desires and actions, the person acts *freely*, 'according to the guidance of reason'. And if the idea of God is 'partial, or inadequate', cause of desires and actions (i.e. the person obeys some external power or word, along with the idea of God), the actions become *forced and constrained* (*coactae*).

For example, helping one's neighbour can be forced if it is out of a *sense of compassion*, or free if it results from an *understanding* of the benefits of mutual aid. Compassion is a passive affect of imitation of others' displeasure and the reverse side of envy; the rational help to people is based on the active affect of *generosity*. People should help each other "not from unmanly compassion, partiality, or superstition, but from the guidance of reason" [1, vol. 1, p. 490]. To a free, rational person compassion brings only harm; to the crowd, this affect is useful, for it is able to temper the much worse passions of the mind. The Christian cult of compassion is good for the crowd, but bad for the philosopher. The same applies to any other religious tenets demanding obedience. Subjecting to religious imperatives, one acts not freely, but forcedly.

#### 4. Language strategy

Why did Spinoza decide to use the word 'God', if he really wanted to separate Philosophy from Theology? Why not be content with two philosophical equivalents – 'Nature' (more precisely, *Natura naturans*) and 'substance'? This would help protect his philosophy from diffusion with religious doctrines, and the label of the 'pantheist' would disappear by itself.

To take the word 'God', to squeeze religious content from it to dryness, and after to sing 'love for God'... Did Spinoza realize that, for the most part, readers would misunderstand him, no matter how carefully reservation about the philosophical meaning of the word 'God' was made? Surely he was aware, because life had repeatedly confronted him with a similar public. In the Preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza addressed his work to the 'Philosophical reader' (*Philosophus lector*), adding: "As for those who are not philosophers, I am not eager to commend this treatise to them. There's nothing in it which I might hope could please them in any way. ... I don't ask the common people to read these things, nor anyone else who is struggling with the same affects as the common people. Indeed, I would prefer them to neglect this book entirely, rather than make trouble by interpreting it perversely, as they usually do with everything." [1, p. 75]

Spinoza did not allow his friends to translate the *Theological-Political Treatise* from learned Latin into Dutch – the language of the crowd, which a couple of years later would tear apart the de Witt brothers and begin to devour their remains.

Then for what purpose did the philosopher need the word 'God'? The answer must be sought in Spinoza's psychological theory. The first clue we find at the beginning of *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Arguing about how a philosopher should live surrounded by ordinary people, guided not so much by reason as by blind affects, Spinoza formulates three 'rules of living'. The very first rule is "to speak according to the power of understanding of ordinary people (*ad captum vulgi loqui*)" and "to yield as much to their understanding as we can." Why? From this, the philosopher can receive 'a considerable advantage", Spinoza responds. It is helpful to be friends and

dangerous – hostile with the crowd. When people hear pleasant, especially – sacred to many, words, one can hope that “they will give a favourable hearing to the truth” [1, vol. 1, p. 12].

Could the religious word ‘God’ be such a concession to the understanding of the crowd? At first, Spinoza called motion and intellect ‘sons of God’, natural necessity ‘divine predestination’, etc. He must have decided later that he had gone too far with language concessions to the crowd, since in *Ethics* we do not find the theological vocabulary of such a register.

As noted in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, the prophet Moses acted quite correctly, ‘speaking according to the Hebrews’ power of understanding’, and the apostle Paul, ‘who was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews’. Likewise, the philosopher should express his thoughts in the language of his target audience. This does not guarantee that they will *understand* you, but at least they will *hear* you. If a philosopher is surrounded entirely by religious people (including in the ‘Republic of Letters’), the word ‘God’ is the best way to incline their ear to the perception of philosophical truths. Of course, the meaning of these truths will inevitably suffer from the confusion of the language of science with the ‘word of God’, but this price has to be paid. There was simply no reasonable alternative at the time of Spinoza.

A similar language strategy was already developed by Maimonides. In the speeches of the prophets, he divided two layers: one intended for the ignorant multitude, the other, the esoteric layer – for men of knowledge, or ‘the perfect man’.

Maimonides recommended the same policy to philosophers. Moshe Halbertal, in the chapter ‘Double Language and the Divided Public’ in *Guide of the Perplexed*, comments on this place at Maimonides as follows. “Esotericism is intended, first and foremost, to protect the philosopher and philosophy from the mockery of the multitudes that cannot fathom it. More important, it protects the philosopher from the iron fist of the religious or political authorities, who see the philosopher as a dangerous subversive, seeking to undermine the political order or religious doctrine. ... Esotericism is thus a precondition for the existence of philosophy as an independent and unrestricted domain. The philosopher protects his freedom of thought through concealment, and in order to transmit his views to those who are worthy of receiving them, he develops sophisticated instruments of writing and speaking in double language.” [14]

Certainly, language esotericism went with Rambam much further than with Spinoza. According to Maimonides, the two-layer structure of the language is not only *politically* expedient in the relationship of the philosopher and the crowd, but also corresponds to the *symbolic* nature of philosophical knowledge (‘essential esotericism’, according to Halbertal). Spinoza, as we have seen, considered ridiculous the attempts to ‘extort from Scripture’ Aristotelian or any other kind of philosophy. He contrasted the method of symbolic interpretation of the text with the historical-critical method, that “admitted no other principles or data for interpreting Scripture and discussing it than those drawn from Scripture itself and its history” [1, p. 171].

Spinoza observed his first rule of living not only in communication with ‘ignorant multitude’ and religiously-minded ‘learned men’. His language is not limited to only two layers. He spoke different languages to scholars.

Thus, in *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy* Spinoza uses exclusively Cartesian terminology: he writes about ‘substances’ in the plural, about the ‘will of God’, etc. In the Preface, Spinoza’s friend Lodewijk Meyer explains that “what is found in some places – viz. that *this or that surpasses the human understanding* – must be taken in the same sense, i.e., as said only on behalf of Descartes” [1, vol. 1, p. 230]. Similarly, in correspondence with those who are not familiar with his own metaphysics, Spinoza speaks in Cartesian *koiné*, familiar and understandable to his educated contemporaries.

In *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza never called God ‘substance’. And in *Ethics* the term ‘substance’ appears only in the first two – metaphysical – parts of the book; in talking about the affects ‘God’ is much more appropriate. Language is not only a form of expression of thoughts, but also a means of influencing people. The word ‘God’ causes in the crowd passive affects, serving a religious reflex of obedience.

Of course, Spinoza could express his thought with the help of one – purely philosophical – term ‘substance’. If throughout the whole text of *Ethics* ‘God’ is replaced by ‘substance’, the philosophical meaning of the book will not change one iota; only the affective colouring of the text will change. The reverse replacement cannot be made just like that, for the term ‘substance’ is already included in the initial definition of God. Through the concept of substance, the philosophical (read: non-religious!) meaning of the word ‘God’ is defined. And the expression ‘I understand’ (*intelligo*) here, as it were, underlines that we are faced with the God of *intellect*, and not the imaginary gods of religions.

The study of affects gives us a second clue when answering the question why Spinoza preferred to write about ‘intellectual love of God’ rather than of Nature or substance. For him, these three terms are synonyms; all three cause the same affect, which induces the mind to cognition, to “perfecting the intellect”, which is our “supreme good” [1, p. 128].

For Spinoza’s contemporaries, the situation was different. It would be absurd and ridiculous to tell them about the ‘love of substance’. But the word ‘God’ gave them a powerful affect, ‘passion’, which the philosopher used as an emotional enhancer of the ‘voice of truth’. The arguments of the mind alone will not convince the crowd, it lives mainly by passions. An affect can be restrained or taken away only by another, stronger affect [1, vol. 1, p. 550]. Then could the author of *Ethics* neglect such a powerful means of influencing the reader’s feelings as the word ‘God’? If the word ‘substance’ is addressed to the theoretical reason and the intellect in general, then the word ‘God’ is clearly intended to awaken a favourable affect in the reader’s mind. At the same time, as a person alien to all hypocrisy, Spinoza already in the first lines stipulates a purely philosophical meaning, which he puts into this word: “a being absolutely infinite, i.e., a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes” [1, vol. 1, p. 409].

More specifically, the philosophical God is defined as a thinking and extended thing [1, vol. 1, p. 448-449]. In essence, this God is nothing but the eternal causal connection of things, *ordo et connexio rerum/causarum*, expressing itself in corporeal and ideal forms, via the attributes of extension and thought (and other infinite attributes unknown to us). Infinite extension is the order and connection of bodies, the way they interact. The laws of physical sciences give us a specific description of the attribute of extension. And infinite thought is the order and connection of ideas, or the way in which one idea is logically connected with another. As we see, there is absolutely nothing religious in the Spinoza definitions of God.

'God' is far from being the only word whose meaning Spinoza altered in the way his theory required. In *Ethics* we find open recognition of this fact: "I know that in their common usage these words mean something else. But my purpose is to explain the nature of things, not the meaning of words. I intend to indicate these things by words whose usual meaning is not entirely opposed to the meaning with which I wish to use them. One warning of this should suffice." [1, vol. 1, p. 535-536] Spinoza is quite satisfied if the meaning he invented does *not go completely at odds (non omnino abhorret)* with the old, commonly used meaning of the word! The philosopher has the right to modify semantics of the natural language virtually in any way. It is enough to notify openly about this once. Such a language strategy was bound, of course, to give rise to deep discrepancies and controversies in the minds of readers. It is this strategy that seems to us to be the culprit of most of the difficulties that have prevented from understanding Spinoza for centuries. At the same time, from a pragmatic point of view, Spinoza's language strategy proved to be extremely successful. Thanks to it, Spinozism, which at first existed as an 'underground' trend of radical enlighteners, by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had turned into the intellectual main-stream of Modernity. Thanks to the openness of Spinoza's language to the most varied (scientific, religious, moral, or poetically artistic) interpretations, his philosophy served as the source of many trends in modern culture.

If in the 'kingdom of truth' (i.e., in the realm of pure intellect) not the slightest confusion of philosophy with theology is permissible, then in the field of language (in the territory of imagination) Spinoza actively and consciously practiced this mixture. Many of the propositions of his philosophy he expounded, so to speak, in a 'parallel translation' into a theological language. Besides, Spinoza inherited his own philosophical vocabulary from the scholastics who had carried out a deep 'theologization' of its semantic core. In metaphysics it was difficult to avoid theological connotations, even if Spinoza would have wished for it.

## **5. Conclusion**

Spinoza's language strategy was a double-edged sword. It made an adequate understanding of the text extremely difficult, but it contributed a lot to the popularity of his philosophical doctrine. Eventually, Spinoza's calculation

was justified: if you express your thoughts in the language of the crowd, people “will give a favourable hearing to the truth (*ad veritatem audiendam*)” [1, vol. 1, p. 12]. But to *hear* truth does not mean to *understand* it. Between language and understanding, between imagination and intellect in general there is an abyss. “For we know that those activities by which imaginations are produced happen according to other laws, wholly different from the laws of the intellect...” [1, vol. 1, p. 37]. Spinoza freely changes the common meanings of words; a new wine is poured into old wineskins. This is also the case with the word ‘God’: behind this religious name, Spinoza has a logical-mathematical concept of infinity, called to become the ‘most perfect method’ of knowing the nature of things.

## References

- [1] B. Spinoza, *The Collected Works*, E. Curley (ed.), vol. 2, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 1985–2016, 247.
- [2] F. Bacon, *The New Organon*, L. Jardine & M. Silverthorne (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, 42.
- [3] H.A. Wolfson, *J. Philos.*, **23(10)** (1926) 268–273.
- [4] L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Free Press, New York, 1952, 5.
- [5] L. Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, G. Schmidt (ed.), Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1983, 291.
- [6] L. Akselrod, *Spinoza i materializm*, in: *Spinoza: pro et contra*, A. Maidansky (ed.), RHGA, St. Petersburg, 2012, 540–566.
- [7] S. Feldman, *Spinoza*, in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, D.H. Frank & O. Leaman (eds.), Routledge, London, 1997, 546–565.
- [8] H.F. Hallett, *Mind*, **51(203)** (1942) 223–243.
- [9] M.D. Wilson, *Midwest Stud. Philos.*, **8(1)** (1983) 181–191.
- [10] H. De Dijn, *Deus, Intellectus and Voluntas Dei*, in *The Continuum Companion to Spinoza*, W. van Bunge, H. Krop, P. Steenbakkens & J. van de Ven (eds.), Continuum, London, 2011, 196–199.
- [11] J. Carriero, *The Ethics in Spinoza’s Ethics*, in *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory*, M.J. Kisner & A. Youpa (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014, 20–40.
- [12] R. Dedekind, *Was sind und was sollen die Zahlen*, Vieweg Verlag, Braunschweig, 1888, 17.
- [13] É. Balibar, *Spinoza et la Politique*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2005, 20.
- [14] M. Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2007, 52-53.