

## Before Nietzsche: Spinoza's Concept of the Theistic Übermensch

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Myreen C. Raginio

**Abstract:** This paper will have three main points. The first is the theism of Spinoza's God; the second is the interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy as a humanist account rather than an atheist one; and the last will speak of the parallelisms in the philosophies of Spinoza and Nietzsche that will lead one to conclude that Spinoza's philosophy has elements similar to Nietzsche's Übermensch. It will aim to provide a thorough examination of Spinoza's God and its impersonal implications which will be later on used to defend the aforementioned proposition. This paper however, will focus on Spinoza's philosophy on bondage and freedom to prove the connection with Nietzsche's Übermensch.

**Keywords:** Spinoza, Nietzsche, Übermensch, theism

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“When a man is prey to his emotions, he is not his own master.”

Man is finite and oftentimes this finitude leads to the conception that the existence of an infinite being is a necessity. This instance can be clearly seen in *Deus ex machina* philosophies like that of Descartes<sup>1</sup> wherein the existence of an infinite and omnipotent being is necessitated as a presupposition to the first certainty of the cogito. In this philosophy, the existence of the infinite is justified in the fact that man which thinks is finite and therefore this man cannot be the cause of himself. There ought to be an infinite uncreated cause to cause the existence of the finite – thus it is clearly seen in this philosophy that the existence of the infinite is necessitated as a scapegoat for without the infinite, the finite cannot be.

Another instance wherein man's finitude leads to the necessary existence of the

infinite can be seen in the philosophy of Berkeley,<sup>2</sup> where he had discussed valid knowledge as well as the existence of external realities in *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge* and *The Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, respectively. In his famous words “*esse est percipi*” or “to be is to be perceived”, Berkeley naturally equates the perceiving mind to be that of an infinite mind that is capable of being present in all places at all times. If the finite mind were to be the only existing mind, this philosophy will fall under much greater criticisms – larger in number and graver than its present criticisms – for a mind that is not infinite to cause the existence of external realities through perception will certainly be absurd for reality would then be entirely relative. Thus, then in this philosophy, the infinite mind is once more made out to be a necessity.

These qualities of infinity, supremacy and omnibenevolence<sup>3</sup> are what are commonly attributed to God. God is infinite, God is supreme, and God has the omni-qualities. Common notions of God are anthropomorphic, one may then say. God for many is like man only with better, more perfect qualities.

The leading concept of a God is that of the Judeo-Christian orientation: an all good and all powerful God who also loves mankind. Thus, then when a God, not containing these attributes is introduced, the label of “atheism” is given. And one of the deemed “atheistic” Gods is Spinoza’s God.

“*Deus sive natura*” – God or nature; this pronouncement of Benedict de Spinoza had elicited various reactions. It was a concept of much peculiarity that, Spinoza and all who adhere to his philosophy have been branded as heretics. The dogmatists viewed this statement as meaning to interchange God and nature loosely. This was addressed by Spinoza to be a misconception however. In his letter to Henry Oldenburg<sup>4</sup>, Spinoza clarified that he did not identify God with nature. He meant to say that the universe is a mode under two attributes of thought and extension – but these are not God’s only attributes – there is an infinity of them that is not present in our world. This does not go against the universal understanding of God, then: that He is a being of infinite qualities – or in this case, attributes. God has not been reduced to mere corporeal matter when *deus sive natura* is pronounced for this means that God is *natura naturans* – nature in the process of creating, becoming – it is being in progress: nature naturing. It is not static and does not merely speak of the created (and therefore eliminates the creating nature of

God); it is nature as a free cause – nature viewed as active. “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.”<sup>5</sup> The dogmatists’ adamant protest with *Deus sive natura* arises from the misconception of what was meant by nature. They deem nature to mean as *natura naturata* – nature viewed as passive. Contrary to *natura naturans*, *natura naturata* is nature as created. It is “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.”<sup>6</sup> Here, Spinoza speaks of nature as the corporeal matter – that which the God in *Deus sive natura* as *natura naturans* has created. There is yet no sign of atheism, despite the peculiarity of the conception of Spinoza’s God once the meaning of nature that is identified with God is clarified. What then causes this label to be placed? Apart from objections with *Deus sive natura*, objections on Spinoza’s pantheism (which is really more panentheism) result to an accusation of atheism.

### Spinozism is not Atheism

There have been numerous criticisms of Spinoza as well as plentiful interpretations. A common label of Spinoza’s philosophy is pantheism – a doctrine defined by Merriam-Webster as equating God with the forces and laws of the universe. This is understandable for on the surface, one may interpret Spinoza’s God as an equation with the forces and the laws of the universe inasmuch as God is *Deus sive natura* where *natura* is *natura naturans*. But a more accurate label had

emerged: panentheism. Panentheism, unlike pantheism, maintains a distinction between the divine and non-divine and the significance of both.<sup>7</sup> In pantheism, there is no distinction between the divine and the universe – they are equal – while in panentheism, the divine and the universe are ontologically different. A more simplistic explanation of panentheism is “all-*in*-God”. Panentheism then is a more accurate label of Spinoza’s philosophy inasmuch as the world, according to Spinoza, is only a mode of the substance (God) under the two attributes of thought and extension. This is similar to saying that the world is indeed within God and yet God is still greater than the world for the world is only a mode under two attributes – not the substance itself.

Amidst these two predominant labels, however comes another more controversial label argued by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi. Jacobi equated Spinozism with pantheism, fatalism, and atheism.<sup>8</sup> Here one might bring to light a contradiction: why is pantheism in the same group as atheism? Jacobi had argued that Spinoza’s doctrine was pure materialism inasmuch as all nature and God are said to be nothing but extended substance.<sup>9</sup> According to him, this line of thought will eventually lead to atheism in that the holiness of God will be absent due to His reduction to mere matter. This was of course opposed. According to Mendelssohn, whom he had a correspondence with regarding Spinoza in particular and philosophy in general in *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*,<sup>10</sup> there is no actual difference between pantheism and theism – saying further that the difference is only nominal. To this I will elaborate further and endeavour to provide not only a

sufficient but also a convincing demonstration.

Picture parallel lines wherein one line represents a realm where there is no infinite, necessary, and Supreme Being and the other line represents the presence of one. These lines are the same inasmuch as they are both lines or as defined in analytic geometry, a set of points whose coordinates satisfy a given linear equation. But these lines are said to be parallel and therefore can never intersect, nor meet at any point. This parallel aspect then gives the distinction as well as the separation of these two lines. Just like theism (the line wherein there is an infinite, necessary, and supreme being otherwise known as God) and atheism (the line wherein there is no such being), the two concepts cannot and will never meet albeit being the same (i.e. being about God). This is a known fact for theism and atheism are contradictories. One speaks of God, the other non-God. How will this analogy support Mendelssohn’s claim that there is no actual difference between pantheism and theism, one might ask? To this I answer, these separate lines, as defined in analytic geometry, are a set of points. Taken analogously, these sets of points may be thought of as the sub-categories of theism and atheism respectively which make up theism and atheism per se. Like the correspondence of Jacobi and Mendelssohn wherein there is a general topic and a particular argument, theism and atheism are the general topics while the particulars are the sub-categories. Naturally, the sub-categories must be in line with the framework of the general topic. The framework of both categories has been stated previously.

In general, theism is a belief that there is a God (but for the sake of this argument, what God means will not be subjected to one meaning alone) while atheism is a belief that there is none. The sub-categories for these then will be as follows.

For theism, there are numerous sub-categories: polytheism, pantheism, monotheism, and finite godism.<sup>11</sup> There are possibly more than these, but these are the most dominant. In all these beliefs, there is the existence of a God. It may refer to the existence of only one God (like that of monotheism and pantheism) or many (like that of polytheism and finite godism) – it still remains that there is a common denominator in these beliefs and this is the existence of God.

For atheism, there are still sub-categories but these sub-categories may be better referred to as classifications or degrees. In a lecture delivered by Alfredo P. Co before the Graduate School of the Divine Word Seminary, three classifications of atheism were given: philosophical, moral, and philosophical-moral.

Philosophical Atheism advances an argument proving the non-existence of God or disproving the existence of an Absolute Being. This form of Atheism is of two kinds. A philosophical atheist may prove lengthily that there is no God or disproves the existence of God and yet may privately live a religious life. Or one who proves that there is God or refutes the proof of the non-existence of God and yet privately lives a Godless-life.<sup>12</sup>

In the above excerpt, one may understand a philosophical atheist as a partial atheist wherein the lifestyle and the philosophical orientation are not in harmony. The atheism

is only one side of the coin, and not the whole coin itself.

The second form of atheism is more complex and “unique”, as stated by Co.

Moral atheism on the other hand, is a unique form of atheism. A moral atheist does not advance an argument yet one easily feels that his atheism prevails. This type is also of two kinds. The first does not prove the non-existence of God and the whole life of this moral atheist is lived without God. His philosophical writing is silent and does not point to any form of absolute being. The second is the actual experience of meaninglessness, the experience of abandonment and the feeling of detachment from God. This we may call an existential form of atheism.<sup>13</sup>

In the moral form of atheism, the moral/personal life of the person is in focus. It no longer concerns itself with the rational implications of the existence or non-existence of God but with the experience itself. Here, one may say that the moral atheism is more absolute for it does not even bring into question the atheistic belief. However, it is also less credible for it is a blind belief on the non-existence of God.

The philosophical-moral kind of atheism, then can be assumed to be a combination of the first two, and this is rightly so. The third kind of atheism, according to Co, is the genuine kind for it not only blindly believes and lives atheism, but also rightly seeks *why* there is no God. Philosophical-moral atheism is genuine inasmuch as it is atheism in all aspects – the whole coin and not just one side of it.

Apart from these classifications, atheism is also commonly associated with materialism and naturalism.<sup>14</sup> Materialism in general is the

view that the only thing that exists is matter,<sup>15</sup> while naturalism is the system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws.<sup>16</sup> In these two, the existence of God is given no place since the concept of God is not material in typical theism and the natural causes and laws become the replacement of the function of God in the world.

In the demarcation between theism and atheism, two terms earlier introduced resurfaced: pantheism and materialism. In a way then, both Jacobi and Mendelssohn were right when they claimed that pure materialism would lead to atheism, and that pantheism and theism have no actual difference, respectively. However, if one were to trace down Jacobi's words, he also stated that Spinozism is equated with "pantheism, fatalism, and atheism". There is a contradiction now therefore. One may then be moved to ask if pantheism is synonymous with materialism. If the pantheistic nature of Spinozism were once more procured as *Deus sive natura* where *natura* is *natura naturata*, then yes, one may say that the pantheism of Spinoza is leaning close to materialism for the nature identified with God is the material kind, but it has already been stated that nature in *Deus sive natura* is the active kind. Therefore, Jacobi's assertion in the first place, is wrong. Even Mendelssohn is not that accurate for Spinozism is properly panentheism and panentheism, rightly belongs to theism as well; more so even since panentheism actually recognizes the distinction of the divine from the non-divine, unlike pantheism which qualifies everything as divine. Thus, Spinozism is not atheism for it is panentheistic and panentheism is theism. Any further objections to the theism of Spinoza's philosophy may be coming from

its stark difference from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Spinoza was branded as a heretic after all and this was due to his deemed "atheism". But as what was already said before, there is nothing atheistic in Spinoza's God, inasmuch as God or nature is still an infinite, necessary, and creating being.

### Nietzsche as a Humanist

When Nietzsche is mentioned one automatically associates the word atheism with him. This is so because of his famous pronouncement found in his work entitled *The Gay Science*: "God is dead."

Nietzsche's atheism is most usually construed in his attacks on the Christian conception of God as well as other-worldly, moralistic, and super-sensory images of God. Nietzsche interprets belief in such conceptions as a scapegoat for man, his denial of life's realities. Man needs something to lean on, something which provides apparently plausible explanation for his suffering.<sup>17</sup>

Although it is not wrong to ascribe atheism to Nietzsche's philosophy insofar as he had viewed God as a mere mental construct, a different view will be endeavoured to be undertaken in this paper. Instead of looking at Nietzsche's philosophy as a form of atheism, this paper will aim to show a more optimistic side of the philosophy of Nietzsche by hermeneutically reading his philosophy with the lens of humanism.

One might disagree with the choice of interpretation for truly Nietzsche had criticized humanism himself, saying "Humanism is nothing more than an empty figure of speech."<sup>18</sup> Yet one should also keep in mind that nihilism, which is another philosophical position commonly associated with the philosopher, was not advocated by

him. In fact, Nietzsche had also criticized nihilism, stating that “it can become a false belief, and lead individuals to discard any hope of meaning in the world and thus to invent some compensatory alternative measure of significance.” He had only studied it extensively yet he himself has been commonly dubbed as a nihilist.

This inconsistency of words and usage can be made understandable, however for even in the introduction written by R.J. Hollingdale in The Penguin Classics’ edition of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, this peculiar characteristic of Nietzsche as a writer and philosopher was noted. “At first glance, Nietzsche’s work as a whole presents a bewildering spectacle, involving a host of loose ends, themes suddenly taken up and just as suddenly dropped, and apparently glaring contradictions.<sup>19</sup>” This observation can aid in justifying an interpretation of Nietzsche’s philosophy as an account of humanism inasmuch as Nietzsche contradicting himself in writing is not alien or unusual, for in fact, his writings itself have “glaring contradictions” in them. “When he changed his mind he allowed the contradiction to stand, since out of it truth might arise.<sup>20</sup>” The earlier proposition then is now not as far-fetched.

He who reads Nietzsche, disregarding the atheism in it, will think that Nietzsche is advocating a kind of humanism. But first off, what is humanism as will be used in this paper? The British Humanist Association listed down the beliefs of humanists as: “(1) that one can live a good life without religious or superstitious beliefs; (2) that there is only one life and one should make the best of it, creating meaning and purpose for one’s self and making sense of the world using reason,

experience and shared human values; (3) that one should try to live a happy and fulfilled life and help others to do so and; (4) that the way to achieve all these is to live responsibly, thinking rationally about right and wrong, considering the consequences of one’s actions and trying to do the right thing.<sup>21</sup>” Humanism then puts emphasis on man as a human – a finite being – and his abilities to live his life as he sees fit via his own capabilities.

The first belief of a humanist is no doubt a perfect fit for Nietzsche’s philosophy. His philosophy which advocates the death of God – which is not meant literally or as meaning that before, there was an actual God, but now he is no more – is the foundation for this perfect fit. The death of God does not only equate to the absence of an infinite, necessary, and Supreme Being but also the absence of the moral implications that comes with the existence of a God. In a way, it also makes this philosophy in line with the second belief of the humanists as stated by the British Humanist Association.

The Christian God which is most commonly the reference for the talks on theism is a God that is equated to the final arbiter – or justice itself. In this worldview, morality is dependent on the existence of God. Virtue, and the living of a good life, is also pegged on the existence of God. With this in mind, Nietzsche’s question then is, without this God, will all these talks on morality, justice, and virtue cease to be significant? Will the world really be set to flames in the absence of a final arbiter? This is where Nietzsche’s humanism comes in. There is not a need for a God or any religious or superstitious belief to live a good life. In fact, man has killed God, inasmuch as the morality clause

attached to the belief of the existence of the Divine is no longer applicable to the modern world. According to Nietzsche, in the absence of these virtues essentially tied to religion and God, there is still a human value that goes beyond – deeper – than the ones founded on Christian values. This human value he speaks of is the will to power.

The will to power for Nietzsche is the main driving force in humans. By driving force, it is understood as that which instigates motion in human activity. This will to power is commonly associated with ambition, and achievement geared towards reaching the highest possible position in life. This driving force also implies egocentricity inasmuch as the concern of every individual is said to be his own elevation to the highest position possible. It is a honing of one's own mind and skills to its optimum level – in a way it is selfishness and is hard-pressed to be put in line with humanism so far as the third belief is concerned. In view of the first and second belief, however Nietzsche's philosophy is, without a doubt, humanist for his philosophy also entails a reliance on one's own rationality and one's own experience in giving meaning to the world instead of relying on the existence of a Divinity to determine life's meaning and one's purpose. The shared human value that is being spoken of in this instance is the will to power which may be viewed pessimistically, or like the view of Nietzsche's philosophy as humanism instead of atheism, optimistically.

Nietzsche has made a distinction between force (*kraft*) and power (*macht*). "*Kraft* is primordial strength that may be exercised by anything possessing it, while *macht* is closely tied to sublimation and "self-overcoming", the conscious channeling of *kraft* for creative

purposes.<sup>22</sup>" Here one sees that will to power does not reduce itself to ambition and achievement alone, for the power that is willed is deep-rooted. Rather than an ambition to achieve the highest position possible in an economic or social sense, the highest position is equivalent to an overcoming of one's own flaws, and shortcomings – it is a "self-overcoming".

This self-overcoming can be easily connected to another famous aspect of Nietzsche's philosophy: the *Übermensch* (or the Overman, the Superman, in English). All these are connected to the very core of Nietzsche's philosophy: the absence of God. The will to power is closely related to the *Übermensch* which is basically "the elevation of man to a position from which he can permanently assume the place in the world formerly occupied by God."<sup>23</sup> The *Übermensch* is Over-man, or Super-man – meaning surpassing man. Man is he who is dependent on a Higher Being; the *Übermensch* is he who relies on his own capabilities. Again, this is a clear affirmation of the first two beliefs of humanists, but this concept of the *Übermensch* is also akin to the third belief of the humanists inasmuch as one lives a happy and fulfilled life by escaping from the deemed need to depend on a Higher Being. The question of whether or not Nietzsche's philosophy can also be interpreted as allowing one to help another, on the other hand, can be answered by referring to a portion of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra's* prologue wherein the Saint and Zarathustra conversed about going back to mankind to share his enlightenment.<sup>24</sup> Here, Nietzsche writes about Zarathustra, who loves mankind as to allow them to partake in enlightenment as well, and a Saint who used to love mankind, but now hates them and

only loves God for he has lost hope in all of mankind. This excerpt may be interpreted as an implication for reaching out a helping hand to others, inasmuch as Zarathustra whom could have lived in his own enlightenment alone, “descended” to let others know that life ought not be lived behind the shadow of a Higher Being. This reaching out to inform others is a form of help: through knowledge. Zarathustra had lived a happy and fulfilled life in solitude for ten years, which he made use of to help others live the same. But the usage of this may be, as Kant would say about the mind, a mere machination or manipulation into fitting an idea to one’s own belief or opinion.

The fourth belief which speaks about deeds of right and wrong and their consequences, in other words, morality, is much more difficult to justify. In the *On the Genealogy of Morals*’ first essay *Good and Evil*, Nietzsche describes two kinds of morality: the “knightly-aristocratic” or “master” morality and the “priestly” or “slave” morality.<sup>25</sup> The former is morality based on consequences while the latter is morality based on intentions. The latter is reminiscent of Christian ethics wherein the end does not justify the means while the former can be associated with the Machiavellian tradition wherein the end justifies the means. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche criticized both forms of morality yet stated a preference for the master morality stating that although slave morality is what is rampant in the society, master morality ought to have a resurgence. In a way then, the fourth belief is partially fulfilled inasmuch as the consequences of one’s actions are taken into consideration. The life of “responsibility” and consideration of what is “right” and “wrong” however are subjected to further

study which will not be discussed any more than what has already been said in this paper for it is not relevant to the core of the paper.

Suffice it to say that enumerating some of the characteristics of Nietzsche’s philosophy has led to an otherwise clearer view of why Nietzsche’s philosophy apart from being an atheistic account is humanist. This positive view of Nietzsche’s philosophy will have its place in the synthesis of the ideas of Spinoza and Nietzsche later on. For now, one can then infer that Spinoza’s philosophy, which is theistic, is not really that far off from Nietzsche’s philosophy if viewed as humanistic rather than atheistic.

### **Determinism in Spinoza’s Philosophy**

Spinozism, as was stated before, is pantheistic – “all is in God”, there is unity while the distinction between the divine and the non-divine remains. In this unity then lies an implication of determinism. The unity of God and Nature is deterministic such that all things of existence are modifications of God or nature and therefore are made out to be the aspects of one and the same thing. The mind and body for example, are modes of God viewed as the attribute of thought (mind) and extension (body). They are different in a way, yet they are only aspects of one and the same thing. “The mind is the idea of the body, and the body is constituted of various ideas of the mind.”<sup>26</sup> This is similar to saying that one side of the hammer is for hitting nails, the other for removing them. Both have different functions yet constitute the whole of the hammer. There is a hammer in the side that hits the nail; there is a hammer in the side that removes it. But of course, this demonstration is utterly simplistic and does not even address how this unity becomes deterministic. I will then

go along with the explanation from the very beginning.

According to Spinoza, there is only one substance and this substance is God. (Prop. VI & Prop. IX) A substance is “that which is in itself, and conceived through itself: in other words that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception.<sup>27</sup>” Substance then can be said to be free for “that thing is called free, which exists solely by the necessity of its own nature, and of which the action is determined by itself alone.<sup>28</sup>” God being the only substance and substance being the only thing that is free (as is made apparent by the above definitions) will lead one to ask, “What of the modes and attributes of the substance (God)? Are they not free?” To this I will answer by reiterating Definition VII of Part I of Ethics, only this time, focus will be given on the second statement: “On the other hand, that thing is necessary, or rather constrained, which is determined by something external to itself to a fixed and definite method of existence or action.<sup>29</sup>” Since all else are modes and attributes aside from substance and the modes and attributes are dependent on other things apart from itself for its existence, then all else are “constrained” – not free. Determinism is in the definition of being constrained itself – “determined by something external to itself to a fixed and definite method of existence or action.” What is it this “something external” that is referred to in this text? It is none other than the laws of nature.

If one were to only take these in at face value – or rather without much contemplation and reflection, one might argue and insist upon freedom of the modes and attributes as well sans their definitions. This may be argued by

using the history of philosophy itself. One may insist that if everything were determined to a fixed method of existence or action, history would not have the dialectical quality it has as per Hegel. For the mind would then be subjected to a uniformity of thought, considering that it too is merely a mode viewed as an attribute of thought. Yet one should understand what is truly meant by Spinoza’s determinism. Determinism does not equate to predestination in Spinoza’s philosophy, rather it simply means that everything that happens, happens through necessity. This is different from predestination for predestination speaks of fate and a fixed outcome of life. Spinoza’s determinism merely speaks of a fixed *method* of existence and action: the laws of nature. Examples wherein this determinism is manifested can be seen, through the food web. Predator and prey have a natural relationship of eat and be eaten, they cannot escape from this. An easier to comprehend example would be the demarcation between the male and the female. It is in the nature of the male to be the provider and the female to be the nurturer. This is patterned from the male and the female’s biological make up. The male provides the sperm for the creation of the offspring while the woman not only provides the egg for successful reproduction, but houses the offspring itself. The male is given the duty to provide whatever the female and the offspring need while the female is tasked to take care of the offspring. It is an inescapable relationship for it is in the law of nature itself (i.e. the biological make up). Even those who try to escape it still result to succumbing to nature. Wives who work for the family find themselves longing to be with their children, feeling guilty over not being the one to take care of them; husbands who become the caretaker of the

house and the family feels a sense of worthlessness in that he is unable to do his duty of providing for the family. One might argue that these are mere social constructs – an effect of one’s consciousness to the opinions of society – but it is not. These feelings of displeasure arise from the inside. This is internally caused. This then is the work of the God of which all of existence is in. This is the law of nature, for as was clearly demonstrated in the novel by Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie’s World*, God for Spinoza is “not an outer cause, since God speaks through the laws of nature and only through them.”<sup>30</sup> And yet it has been said that being “constrained” is being determined by something external to itself, will this not be true now then since God’s interference is internally caused? If one were to only consider this aspect of Spinoza’s philosophy and conveniently disregard the fact that for Spinoza, there is only one substance and therefore only one thing that exists through itself and in itself – a contradiction really will be apparent. Yet it is in the fact that there is only one substance that makes the inner cause being external to the constrained thing comprehensible. All else are dependent on the substance which is external to them and this substance *speaks* through laws of nature, thus making itself an inner cause, but because it only speaks through laws while still remaining self-sufficient (i.e. a substance) it remains to be external to the thing itself. The contradiction, then is eradicated.

An incessant question now has surfaced in regard to this paper. If Spinoza’s philosophy is deterministic, how can it be related to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*? This I will answer in the next section.

### **The Theistic *Übermensch* from an Impersonal God, and the Control of Passions**

Theism, as was discussed in the earlier sections of this paper, is a belief that there is a God; the *Übermensch* is a concept in Nietzsche’s philosophy which is commonly interpreted as man being beyond “human, all too human”, or as being a man who does not peg his values on religion and the existence of a God. In this paper the *Übermensch* is the manifestation of a successful enactment of the will to power – a “self-overcoming”. Combine the two then and one has a theistic *Übermensch* in which one overcomes the self in spite of the existence of a God. This theistic *Übermensch* is what is manifested in Spinoza’s philosophy. How this is so will be explained shortly.

With Spinoza’s God and theism being thoroughly discussed, one will be certain of one thing: that the God of Spinoza is an impersonal God – different from the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The impersonality of the God of Spinoza lies in the fact that God is not a separate entity from the world that governs it as an outer cause and therefore is not the type that one prays to for aid and guidance. No, the God of Spinoza is not anthropomorphic and does not radiate mercy and justice (as opposed to the Christian God). This impersonality of God in Spinoza’s philosophy is what makes it plausible to be related to the *Übermensch* of Nietzsche. The *Übermensch* is man that is free from the influence of God; and by God, Nietzsche refers to the Christian God mostly. Spinoza and Nietzsche are similar in this sense then for their non-adherence to the common conception of a God (or rather the lack thereof of its acknowledgement). But the commonality between Nietzsche and

Spinoza does not end there. Aurelia Armstrong in her paper entitled *The Passions, Power, and Practical Philosophy: Spinoza and Nietzsche Contra the Stoics* took note of the general agreement of Spinoza and Nietzsche in regards to their ethical projects. Both are described as “adhering to the idea that the quest for human perfectibility is only possible within the horizons of immanence.”<sup>31</sup>

Immanence here does not refer to divine immanence, but rather to the immanence of the main driving force of man which in Nietzsche is the will to power and in Spinoza the *conatus* which is in general, a striving to persist in its existence. This *conatus* emerged in Spinoza’s philosophy firstly in Proposition VI of the Part 3 of *The Ethics*: “Everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavours to persist in its own being.” This rings loudly of the same connotation of the will to power of Nietzsche and thus as cited by Armstrong with the use of Yirmiyahu Yovel, Spinoza and Nietzsche have a common ethics of “self-overcoming”.

It is now easy to connect Spinoza’s philosophy with Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. The *Übermensch* being the manifestation of the successful fulfilment of the “self-overcoming” and Spinoza having a philosophy on “self-overcoming” as well will lead to the conclusion that both philosophers have “practices of self-formation or self-transformation that aims at the attainment of an enhanced form of human life characterized by an affirmative attitude toward existence.”<sup>32</sup> This rings loudly of Nietzsche, yes, but of Spinoza? The following paragraph will demonstrate the consistency of this statement to Spinoza.

Spinoza distinguishes between emotion as an activity and emotion as passion. Emotion is

an activity when one is the adequate cause of the modification i.e. “a cause through which its effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived” and a passion when one is not.<sup>33</sup> These two definitions are necessary in justifying the practice of self-formation and self-transformation in the philosophy of Spinoza, inasmuch as being controlled by the passions means passivity and controlling them equates to “self-overcoming”. If the emotion is that of which we are not the adequate cause (passion), it is equivalent to living life through another’s way, but if the emotion is that of which we are the adequate cause, one takes control of one’s life and overcomes one’s own limits – the tendency towards passions. This overcoming – this control of the passions – can be equated to the *Übermensch* inasmuch as there is a reliance on one’s own capabilities, without the reliance on another (a Supreme Being). It is a show of the will to power. But this control of the passions is still theistic inasmuch as “those ideas which are adequate in the mind are adequate also in God, inasmuch as he constitutes the essence of the mind”<sup>34</sup>. These adequate ideas are the emotions. One might be confused as to how Spinoza’s philosophy is applicable to the *Übermensch* when God is interwoven into the mind itself, to this I answer with Proposition III of the Part V of *The Ethics*. “An emotion, which is a passion, ceases to be a passion, as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea thereof.” In this proposition, there is an implication of a choice – a will. It is said that Spinoza’s philosophy does not give space to free will inasmuch as everything happens through necessity, but in the case of controlling the passions – controlling the emotions per se – we are the first mover inasmuch as we are the ones who form the clear and distinct idea of the passion. “An

emotion thereof becomes more under our control and the mind is less passive in respect to it, in proportion as it is more known to us.<sup>35</sup> Here, it is knowledge that empowers the “self-overcoming”. Does not Nietzsche’s Übermensch use knowledge in the same way?

## Conclusion

The theism of Spinoza does not hinder in its similarity to the philosophy of Nietzsche (his atheism and humanism included). Spinoza, even before the time of Nietzsche had already concocted an Übermensch – a theistic one at that. The theistic Übermensch of Spinoza lies in the fact that one who has control of his emotions takes control of his own life (for he is the adequate cause of such modification). Yet, the similarity is not absolute inasmuch as the determinism of Spinoza’s philosophy does not allow the full practice of the free will, which is central to Nietzsche’s philosophy. The *conatus* of Spinoza, however makes up for this, inasmuch as the *conatus*, like the will to power, makes one strive in his own being. This striving is also an overcoming of the self, inasmuch as one does not allow passivity to overcome him. In a world where God and nature are one, there is still a place for an Übermensch.

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<sup>1</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, ed. by Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1991).

<sup>2</sup> George Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, vol. 2, ed. by A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1949): 163-263 (Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous).

<sup>3</sup> In as much as this infinite being, in its goodness created man and the world.

<sup>4</sup> *Correspondence of Benedict de Spinoza* (Wilder Publications, 2009), letter 73.

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<sup>5</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 2, trans. by Robert Harvey Monro Elwes (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> John Sculp, “Panentheism”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring, 2013) accessed December 1, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> George Di Giovanni, “Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi”, in <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/friedrich-jacobi/>, accessed December 1, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> In reference to Spinoza stating that the world is a mode under two attributes of thought and extension.

<sup>10</sup> Published by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi without permission from Medelsohn in 1785.

<sup>11</sup> Refer to the gods of Greek mythology.

<sup>12</sup> Alfredo P. Co, “An Inquiry into Oriental Atheism”, in *Across the Philosophical Silk Road: A Festschrift in Honor of Alfredo P. Co* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2009), p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Eric Chabot, “Who is God? Comparing Atheism, Theism, Deism, Pantheism, and Polytheism: A Closer Look”, in <https://chab123.wordpress.com/2011/02/16/a-comparison-between-theism-deism-pantheism-and-polytheism-which-god-or-gods-shall-we-pick/>, accessed December 1, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Merriam-Webster.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Chabot, “Who is God? Comparing Atheism, Theism, Deism, Pantheism, and Polytheism: A Closer Look”.

<sup>17</sup> Irfan Iqbal, “Nietzsche Versus God: The Death of God and Atheism in Nietzsche’s Philosophy”, in *Al-Hikmat* 18 (Pakistan: University of the Punjab Press, 1998) p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Davis, *Humanism*. (1997) p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Great Britain: C. Nicholls & Company Ltd., 1961), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> “What is Humanism?”, in <http://www.humanismforschools.org.uk/pdfs/what%20is%20humanism.pdf>, accessed December 4, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

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<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale, (Great Britain: C. Nicholls & Company Ltd., 1961) p. 2

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 39-53.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kauffman & R.J. Hollingdale (New York: A Division of Random House, Inc., 1969).

<sup>26</sup> Karen Watson, “Baruch Spinoza, ‘Human Beings are Determined’”, in Philosophy Lander, accessed December 5, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 2, trans. by Robert Harvey Monro Elwes (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, trans. by Paulette Moller (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1994) p. 233.

<sup>31</sup> Aurelia Armstrong, “The Passions, Power, and Practical Philosophy: Spinoza and Nietzsche Contra the Stoics”, in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 44, no1 (United States: Pennsylvania State University Press): p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ethics*. Part III, Definition I.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., proof to Proposition I, Part III

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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