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The Relation Between Spinoza's Monism and Kabbalistic Monotheism

By

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Introduction

Early modern philosopher Benedict de Spinoza was born in 1632 to a Portuguese-Jewish merchant family in Amsterdam. Spinoza was raised in a strict Jewish community until he was 23, which was when he was excommunicated, described as *cherem* in Hebrew. Almost a decade later, he wrote one of his most famous works, *Ethics*. He discusses many things in this book, but the focus here is on his theory of G-d¹, or, monism. This is an exploration into Spinoza's theory through the lens of the theory of G-d Spinoza grew up learning: Kabbalistic monotheism. I examine where his ideas were rooted for the first twenty-three years of his life to better understand how they differed later in his life.

This paper has 5 sections: 1) An Introduction to the context Spinoza was living in, 2) A description of Spinoza's monism and monistic pantheism, 3) A description of Kabbalistic monotheism, 4) A comparison of the two, and 5) A conclusion describing how my understanding of his theory has shifted now that I understand where he came from.

Spinoza's Context

To be raised in a Jewish community in Amsterdam in the 17th century was to experience the revitalisation of lost traditions. During the Spanish Inquisition, Jewish people in the Iberian Peninsula were not allowed to practice their religion; if they did, it was in secret, and without instruction. Many of the time-honored traditions were lost, and once people were "free" to practice their religion, they had to relearn their own religious practices, trying to weed out what was theirs from the influences of Iberian Catholicism. An example of this is the way they

¹ In the Jewish tradition, anytime the name of G-d is written someplace that could be thrown away, it is written with a dash instead of an "o". This is because G-d deserves the respect of not being discarded in any sense of the word. I am Jewish, so I will be abiding by this rule. Moss, A. (2004, August 30). Why Don't You Spell Out G-d's Name?

celebrated Purim. Purim is, in a very basic sense, a celebration of the story of the Jewish people almost being killed, but ending up being saved by a poor Jewish man named Mordecai, and his beautiful niece Esther. The Jewish people of Amsterdam in the 17th century could be found praying to Saint Esther in this celebration. Saints are not found in the Jewish tradition, so this is an obvious Iberian Catholic intrusion (Nadler, 2001, p. 49).

As early as the mid-sixteenth century, Portuguese conversos, or marranos, began fleeing the Inquisitions in Spain and Portugal to go to the Netherlands. Conversos and marranos were the descendants of Jewish people that had outwardly converted to Christianity during the Inquisition, but were suspected of practicing Judaism in private, without large gatherings, or leaders (“Christian-Jewish Relations,” n.d., Para. 1). There are two myths about how and why Jewish people settled in Amsterdam specifically, but the truth is that many Portuguese merchants migrated up from Antwerp (a southern country), because Amsterdam had greater business and economic opportunities. People also migrated to the Netherlands to escape religious persecution and to live in a place without a uniform religion (Nadler, 2001, pgs. 43-44). In 1579, there was a kind of constitution for the United Provinces of the Netherlands called the Union of Utrecht; in article 13, it was stated that every person should have freedom of religion, and no one should be persecuted based on how they choose to worship the divine.

The reality was much less tolerant. In the last decades of the sixteenth century up to the middle of the seventeenth, the only religion that was actually allowed to be practiced in most cities and provinces was the Dutch Reformed Church, or Calvinism. In 1604 and 1605, the cities Alkmaar and Haarlem allowed Jewish people to practice Judaism openly, but Amsterdam didn’t allow this until 1619. Even when Amsterdam did allow Jews to practice openly, they had

restrictions on their economic and political rights. There were also rules against Jewish people going to certain social activities with Christians, and rules against intermarriage.

In the early seventeenth century, there were internal theological and political conflicts in the United Provinces. Christian denominations were always fighting to gain more power over all of the other denominations. In the United Provinces, the two that had the largest disagreements were Calvinists and Remonstrants, both of which were Protestant movements. Calvinists believed in the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564). In a basic sense, they believed in predestination (or that everything has been destined by G-d), the sovereignty of G-d, and would not tolerate any divergence from doctrinal orthodoxy (Slick, 2017). Remonstrants followed the teachings of Jacobus Arminius, who denied predestination (Nadler, 2001, p. 45). This disagreement quickly bled over from being a religious dispute into a political one. Eventually, in the Synod of Dort of 1618-1619, the Calvinist Church expelled the Remonstrants, which really strengthened the intolerant aspects of Calvinism, resulting in any kind of deviance from orthodoxy being even more unacceptable than before (Nadler, 2001, pgs. 45-46). So when Jewish people were given official recognition in Amsterdam in 1619, they were given it on the condition that they uphold a very strict observance of Jewish law. Their recognition could be taken away if they were seen as letting their religion stray into the other religions around them (namely Christianity), or not being serious about their religion, which must have left them with a strong devotion to being cautious, and keeping a low profile.

The Jewish people of Amsterdam needed a way to maintain discipline and enforce conformity in order to stay afloat, so they used a form of punishment called a *cherem* (excommunication). *Cherem* is punishment by denying the offender a part in community life,

usually only for a couple of days, but sometimes weeks, and more rarely months, or years. Between 1622 and 1683 the Amsterdam Portuguese community used this tactic thirty-six times, and threatened to use it fifty other times to show the community what not to do. For the most part, even after being banned, the person would be let back into the congregation. Usually, if the person just apologized, and paid a fine, he would be let back into the community. The seriousness of the offense dictated how much the person would be denied a part of community life (Nadler, 2001, p. 47). It could go from a denial of eye contact to a denial of being allowed to participate in the community as a whole. There were different kinds of offenses that were punishable, which were attached to each specific community's rules and regulations. There were religious rules that would result in punishment if broken, such as attendance at synagogue, organization of a *minyan* (the grouping of 10 or more people required to say specific Jewish prayers), observance of holidays, and the purchase of kosher meat (meat that was blessed by a rabbi). There were ethical regulations, such as gambling, or public lewd behavior. There were social regulations like marrying in secret (i.e. without parental consent, and not in the presence of a rabbi). Some other examples of things that could get someone excommunicated are: making public statements that ridicule what other members of the community (especially the rabbi) say, printing a book without permission, having theological discussions with gentiles (non-Jewish people), Jewish women cutting the hair of gentile women, and writing letters to Spain containing anything about the Jewish religion. (Nadler, 2001, p. 48)

The point of the *cherem* was to enforce social, religious, and ethical conduct that was becoming to a proper Jewish community, and didn't offend the political-religious powers in Amsterdam. The Jewish community in Amsterdam was founded by the descendants of

conversos, who had just recently been reintroduced to the traditions and norms of Judaism. The fact that they were cut off from Jewish texts for so long might have made the Jewish community feel insecure about its practices, making them overcorrect, and feel the need to be rigorously observant. They also had to reassure their Dutch hosts that their community was orthodox and controlled.

All of that being said, there were Jewish people that stumbled in being observant Jews, but they weren't threatened with or punished by a statement of excommunication as scathing and permanent as the one issued to Spinoza:

The lords of the *ma'amad*, having long known of the evil opinions and acts of Baruch de Spinoza, they have endeavored by various means and promises, to turn him from his evil ways. But having failed to make him mend his wicked ways, and, on the contrary, daily receiving more and more serious information about the abominable heresies which he practiced and taught and about his monstrous deeds, and having for this numerous trust worthy witnesses who have deposed and born witness to this effect in the presence of the said Espinoza, they became convinced of the truth of this matter; and after all of this has been investigated in the presence of the honorable *chachamim* [a council of wise elders], they have decided, with their consent, that the said Espinoza should be expelled and excommunicated from the people of Israel. By decree of the angels and by the command the holy men, we excommunicate, expel, curse and damn Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of God, Blessed be He, and with the consent of the entire holy congregation, and in front of these holy scrolls with the 613 precepts which are written therein; cursing him with the excommunication with which Joshua banned Jericho and with the curse which Elisha cursed the boys and with all the castigations which are written in the Book of the Law. Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night; cursed be he when he lies down and cursed be he when he rises up. Cursed be he when he goes out and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the Lord shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law. But you that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day. (Nadler, 2001, p. 40)

We don't know exactly what Spinoza did to be given such an intense punishment, but the wording of the proclamation is enough to make you realize that Spinoza must have done more than just depart from Judaic behavioral norms. There are many theories, but the one that is most likely, and what most scholars think, is that Spinoza was saying things that were considered heretical to both Jewish people and Christian people. In 1659, an Augustinian monk named Tomas Solano y Robles made a report to the Spanish Inquisitors about Spinoza, saying the two met on a recent trip to Amsterdam. Spinoza, according to Tomas, said that he used to be observant of Jewish law, but had changed his mind, and was kicked out of his synagogue because of his views on the soul, the law, and G-d. (Nadler, 1999, p. 130) Scholars infer the things Spinoza was saying based on his later works. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza denies that the human soul is immortal, in his later work, *Theological-Political Treatise*, he says the first five books of the Hebrew Bible were not of divine origin, and that the Jews were not the "chosen people" (Nadler, 1999, pgs 131-132). Excommunicating Spinoza was not only a way to show the Jewish people that breaches in orthodox Judaism were not tolerated, but was also to show that the community of Jews in Amsterdam was not a place for heretics of any religion.

Spinoza was excommunicated in 1656 at the age of 23. Before his excommunication, Spinoza was well-versed in Jewish traditions and scholarship. There are different ways Jewish people think of G-d, and therefore different ways Spinoza could have been taught about G-d. The Jews of 17th century Amsterdam could think of Him in the traditionally Jewish sense, or the Kabbalistic, mystic sense, it really depended on which community they were in, and what the rabbis of that community taught. Spinoza was a part of the synagogue that joined *Talmud Torah*. There were four different rabbis in that synagogue, only three of which were teachers. There

was the head rabbi, Rabbi Mortera, who was traditional, the rabbi that preached once a month named Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, and the lowest-ranking rabbi, Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, believed in the Kabbalah (Nadler, 1999, pgs. 51-60). Spinoza learned under each of these men at different points in his life, so he was exposed to both traditional and Kabbalistic thought from a very young age. In 1677, shortly after he died at 44, one of his most famous works, *Ethics*, was published. There are many ideas on the nature of humans, and how we should act in this book, but the idea I am mainly focusing on here is Spinoza's monism. Since he was well-versed in both the traditional and Kabbalistic notions of G-d by the time he wrote his theory, and he was interested in a more philosophical approach to G-d, I have decided to focus on the Kabbalistic notion.

Spinoza's Monism

A description of Spinoza's monism should begin with a generalization of who/what G-d is, and what we are within that idea for Spinoza. He sees G-d not as being separate from nature, but actually *being* Nature (with a capital "N"). Everything that we have ever thought about G-d has been a projection of ourselves and our imaginations. G-d is the universe, rationality, existence itself, truth, and all that already is and can possibly be. In Spinoza's view, the best way to understand G-d is not to study what we call "holy writings," but to understand the way the natural world works.

Spinoza's *Ethics* is split into five different parts, but I am mainly focusing on parts one and two: *Concerning G-d* (Spinoza, Shirley, & Feldman, 1992, pp. 31-62). Spinoza looks at G-d in a much more systematic way than 17th century Jewish people in Amsterdam did, and in order

to understand the references I'm making, it's best to understand the system he is using. He begins with eight definitions describing the way things are, then moves on to seven axioms that are taken to be true, no proof necessary. Propositions are ideas derived from the definitions and axioms, and they are numbered.

The definitions we need to look at are self-causation, substance, attribute, mode, finitude, and G-d. Some of these words are present in today's vernacular, but they are defined differently by Spinoza. To be self-caused is to have an essence (meaning what a thing is, or its nature) of existence. The nature of a thing that is self-caused is existing. A substance is something that is self-caused, and to conceive of it, we don't need a conception of what has caused it, because it has caused itself. Attributes are what we can perceive as the essence of a substance; its defining characteristics we have the capacity to understand. A mode is caused by something else, and can be conceived of through a conception of the cause. Modes are states of a substance, come from that substance, and are understood through having a concept of that substance; modes are also known as affections of (from) a substance. Substances have an infinite number of modes. To be infinite is to be without boundary; to be a finite thing is to have limits realized by something of the same nature (for example, the physical, extended world can only be limited by something in the extended world). And last but definitely not least, there is a definition of G-d. G-d is the only substance, and He has infinite attributes with an eternal and infinite essence. (Spinoza, Shirley, & Feldman, 1992, pp. 31)

Spinoza's argument for G-d being the only substance is laid out clearly in William Charlton's article "Spinoza's Monism" (1981). Spinoza tries to prove the necessary existence of G-d (the substance) by first proving that there can't be two substances with the same attribute,

moving to the idea that the essence of anything that is a substance is existence, then explaining that existing is in the nature of a substance with infinite attributes, and lastly proving that there can't be a second substance. (Charlton, 1981, p. 503)

There can't be two substances with the same attribute (Propositions 5 and 8, Scholia 2) (Charlton, 1981, p. 503). To understand this, we have to move through a couple of the propositions preceding the fifth one. Two substances that have different attributes have to have nothing in common (Pr. 2). Our conceptions of separate attributes cannot be the same for both substances, because that would involve having a conception outside of one substance to help define the other, which would also limit the substance. Having conceptions of the same attributes for two substances means there are two things of a kind, making it possible for them to be finite in some way. If there were more than one substance, the way they would be distinguished would be from differences in attributes, or differences in affections (Pr. 4). Since the substance's affections are a part of the substance, and the substance is prior to its affections, Spinoza just disregards the affections and moves to thinking of the substance itself. If the substance is a true idea, it is conceived in itself, and it isn't distinguishable from another substance because we run into the substances being distinguishable by a comparison between the two again, which just doesn't work. And, as for distinguishing two or more substances by different attributes, they couldn't have the same attributes, or they'd be indistinguishable.

The second point is that the nature of everything that is a substance is to exist (Propositions 7-8, Scholia 2) (Charlton, 1981, p. 503). Since the substance is self-caused, its essence, or its nature, or an attribute of it, involves existence (Pr. 7). It also has to either exist as finite or infinite, but it can't be finite, because the only way it would be finite is if it was limited

by something of the same nature, meaning another substance. And if this second substance (a self-causing thing) existed, that would mean that an attribute of it was existence as well. So then we'd have two substances with the same attribute of existence, which isn't possible, because two substances can't have the same attribute. (Pr. 8)

Existing is in the nature of a substance with infinite attributes (Charlton, 1981, p. 503). In proposition 11, Spinoza is describing why G-d's existence is necessary. If G-d didn't exist, his essence wouldn't involve existence, and that would mean that existence doesn't exist, which is absurd. A thing necessarily exists if there is no reason for it to be impossible to exist. If the reason isn't within G-d (meaning His essence includes not existing), then the reason could be outside of G-d (or the one substance), meaning there would be another place outside of the one substance, which would necessarily be a second substance. If there was another substance, though, it wouldn't have anything in common with G-d, so it couldn't prove or annul G-d's existence. This brings us back to the reason for G-d not existing being within His essence, which gives us a contradiction. Therefore, G-d necessarily exists.

Lastly, there can't be a second substance (Proposition 14) (Charlton, 1981, p. 503). If there were a second substance, it would have the attribute of existence in common with the substance with all possible attributes (G-d), which would mean there would be two substances with the same attribute.

The necessary existence of G-d has been proven here, and within that, we see that existence is His essence. He is the only infinite substance, with infinite attributes. Spinoza refers to G-d as Nature that continuously creates itself, and His modes as nature which has been created by Nature. Human beings are modes of G-d, because we are caused by Him. If G-d is

Natura naturans (Nature naturing), then humans are *Natura naturata* (created nature). And whatever exists is an expression of G-d's power of existence, so we are expressions of G-d's power. We exist as nature/modes within and because of Nature/G-d/the only substance.

Spinoza begins his proof of a monistic pantheism right after proving the necessary existence of G-d. Proposition 15 states that there can be nothing outside of G-d. Everything that exists is in G-d, and nothing can exist, or even be conceived of, without G-d. G-d is the only substance that can exist (Proposition 14), and modes cannot exist without being in something else, and conceived of through something else (namely, a substance) (Definition 5). So, modes cannot exist without G-d, or outside of the divine nature. "All things that are, are either in themselves or in something else." (Axiom 1) (Spinoza, Shirley, & Feldman, 1992, pp. 32) Since there's only one thing that can be in and of itself (substance), and modes are in and of the substance, the only things that exist are Nature/G-d/the only substance and nature/modes. With that, Spinoza proves that nothing can exist outside of G-d, meaning everything that exists is G-d, or an aspect of Him.

Spinoza takes on the difficult task of describing the essence of G-d. Through his description, he proves both the necessary existence of G-d, and that everything in existence is either G-d, or an aspect of Him. Spinoza's process is an intricate system of logical proofs, while the process of Kabbalistic thinkers is a mystical interpretation of the world around them. They are not trying to prove the existence of G-d with human logic, they are just describing what we can perceive of what G-d is, and how we are from Him. Much like Spinoza's axioms, the Kabbalists believe G-d just is; there is no need to prove His existence.

Kabbalistic Monotheism

Kabbalah is a Jewish mystical movement that emerged in medieval Europe, but is evident in accounts *long* before then. The biblical account states that, at the beginning of sixth century B.C.E, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of G-d, and Jewish mysticism adopted that account as their model of what G-d was. Early Jewish mysticism had two branches: *ma'aseh merkavah*, and *ma'aseh bereshit*. *Ma'aseh merkavah* has to do with any account of the nature of the divine, more specifically Ezekiel's; some even go as far as describing the body of G-d in terms humans can understand. *Ma'aseh bereshit* is an interpretation of the account of creation in Genesis in the Old Testament. Between the third and sixth centuries A.D., *Sefer Yetsirah, The Book of Creation* was composed. It spoke of how G-d created the world with the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and the ten *sefirot* (which will be explained in-depth later). By the end of the twelfth century A.D., Kabbalah had started to develop, using the ideas from earlier Jewish mystics.

(Matt, 1996, pgs. 3-6)

For Kabbalists, the essence of divinity, or G-d, is found in everything. There is nothing existing that hasn't come into being from G-d, there is nothing existing outside of Him, and so, all things are linked to one another by their connection to G-d. G-d was *Ein Sof*, the infinite and unknowable G-d before any self-realization. When there was nothing, *Ein Sof* created a spiritual realm, which was G-d. "Then Beginning emanated, building itself a glorious palace...a palace called G-d." (Matt, 1996, pgs. 52-53) *Ein Sof*, or the Creator, is infinite (boundless), and it is "the perpetuation of existence" (Matt, 1996, p. 27). Nothing can be added or subtracted from it. *Ein Sof* is called an endless reservoir of divinity, and it is the cause of causes, or the source of everything (Green, 2006, p. 34). It is unknowable by any mind, and it is utterly transcendent. If

existence were to cease, *Ein Sof* would still be, because existence is an action of *Ein Sof*, and if an action is nullified, the actor isn't necessarily nullified (Matt, 1996, p. 39). G-d and *Ein Sof* are the same light, it's just G-d is a beginning with no end, and *Ein Sof* has always been and will always be.

At the beginning of everything, the ten *sefirot* emanated from *Ein Sof*. If *Ein Sof* was water flowing through all things that exist, the *sefirot* are different colored vessels through which the water can flow. Although the water will seem as though it changes color when it passes through each vessel, the water will be the same, only our perception of it will be different. In other words, the essence of each *sefirot* is *Ein Sof*. With that, *sefirot* are what G-d's actions are performed through, and the action of existence is spread through them.

Each of the ten *sefirot* have different names, and descriptions of what they represent, but ultimately, they are one true reality, which is *Ein Sof*. All *sefirah* (singular of *sefirot*) emanated in an order, starting from *Ein Sof*, and then coming from those preceding them. The first one that emanated is *Keter* (Crown), called Nothingness (*Ayin*), because of how subtle it is, and how incomprehensible it is to us. From *Keter* came *Chochmah* (Wisdom), called Being (*Yesh*), because it's the beginning of discovery and existence. It can also be called *yesh me-ayin*, or, being from nothingness. To reveal what exists, there had to be a third point, which is the feminine *Binah* (Understanding). *Binah* is considered feminine, because it nurtures and births the *sefirot* below it.

There are three realms of *sefirot*: the upper realm (*Keter, Hokhmah, Binah*), the middle realm (*Chesed, Tiferet, Gevurah, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod*), and the lower realm (*Malchut*). The *sefirot* in the middle realm come from specific upper realm *sefirot*. For example, *Gevurah*

(Power) came from *Binah*. The single *sefirah* that emanated from the other *sefirot* is called *Malchut* (Kingdom), and it represents the realm that is from *Ein Sof's* creation, which is ours. *Malchut* is how the *sefirot* can emanate to our realm. (Matt, 1996, pgs. 40-49)

Chochmah and *Binah* are called the father and mother. They maintain and renew the *sefirot*. The soul comes from *Binah*, and is also revitalized by the union of *Chochmah* and *Binah*. But, the way the soul can come to be is if *Binah* can be stimulated to act, and the only way to have that happen is through the union of *Tiferet* and *Malchut*. Their union can only happen if *they* are stimulated to act. The stimulation comes from people acting righteously. (Matt, 1996, pgs. 45-46) So, the way people act has a direct effect on G-d. If we act righteously, we help the unions of the *sefirot* come to be, and therefore we help the divine continuously create, and sustain His creation. (See Appendix for diagram of the *sefirot*)

The *sefirot* are vessels through which we can see how G-d acts, responds, feels, and how He relates intimately with the world. *Ein Sof* is a representation of the profound transcendence of G-d. G-d is all things, but all things are not G-d. The Kabbalistic G-d is impossible to *truly* comprehend, because He is so grand, and so complicated, that we are only able to understand a miniscule piece of all that He is. When studying this, there has to be an understanding that any description is just a flash of something that transcends definition.

Similarities and Differences Between Spinoza's Monism and Kabbalistic Monotheism

Spinoza's Monism and Kabbalistic Monotheism have more similarities than differences, but the differences are so major that the two end up further apart than what first meets the eye. To begin, let's go with their similarities. First of all, the things that are most similar are the idea

of a substance, and *Ein Sof*. Even though both are representations of G-d, the more specific names are how G-d will be referred to in order to differentiate between Spinoza's G-d, and the Kabbalistic G-d.

Ein Sof and a substance are both the first things that came into existence. There was no other cause or being that existed before them. And, further into this point, nothing can possibly exist outside of them, which means they determine the laws of nature. If anything were to change *Ein Sof*, or a substance, both Kabbalists and Spinozists believe that it would make them no longer be *Ein Sof* and the substance, because they would have been limited by something. This is also why *Ein Sof* and a substance can't be anthropomorphic. Being anthropomorphic means there is a human limitation put on them, which is impossible, because they are, once again, limitless. Being limitless also involves being un compelled. *Ein Sof* and a substance are both the only un compelled beings. (Astora, 2016)

There is something to be said for the fact that both *Ein Sof* and a substance have attributes and modes. For a substance, the observable attributes are thought and extension, and for *Ein Sof*, the attributes are the *sefirot*. Modes are of the substance, and the realm we exist in is of *Ein Sof*. The essence of a substance (existence) is found within modes, and the essence of *Ein Sof* is found throughout our realm.

The differences begin when the attributes of *Ein Sof* (the *sefirot*) begin intertwining. A substance's attributes can't intertwine, because the substance would be limited if one of the attributes could overpower another one. Plus, in this case, if some attributes were of higher power than others, then there would be a power discrepancy, making the substance somewhat all-powerful, and somewhat not. (Astora, 2016) Spinoza's view of the substance is that there

are no mysteries in it. It is possible to have adequate knowledge of the substance, because it's possible to have adequate knowledge of Nature. But, *Ein Sof* is not knowable. One of the only things we can know about *Ein Sof* is that it is a true mystery to us mere human beings.

Spinoza also believes that people can't affect the substance, because being the direct cause of finite people isn't compatible with it's infinite nature. The substance is the first and ultimate cause, but not the direct one. In his First Appendix, Spinoza makes the point that G-d doesn't have a fixed goal, because if He were to have a goal, that would imply an end, which also goes against G-d's infinitude (Spinoza, Shirley, & Feldman, 1992, pgs. 57-62). When it comes to prayer, a substance isn't going to change the laws of nature for a measly human, so Spinoza believes prayer is pointless. Everything in Nature comes from eternal necessity, which makes prayer a futile hope of shifting necessary action. In Kabbalistic thought, however, *Ein Sof* is the direct and indirect cause of all things. Prayer connects the piece of *Ein Sof* we constantly have flowing through us and all things, helping the divine create and sustain His creation.

Before Spinoza wrote any of his books, he had the undeveloped beginnings of his theories mulling about in his head. Many scholars think his views on G-d were part of the reason he was excommunicated from the Jewish faith. (Nadler, 1999, p. 130) Specifically, prayer being pointless, and G-d being knowable are two ideas that would be particularly heretical to any devout religious person, no matter if they're Jewish or Christian. Saying G-d doesn't interact with His creations makes Him less all-powerful, and more of-this-earth. G-d being knowable means the mysteries of His existence will one day no longer be present, which goes against how both Judaism and Christianity think of Him. Spinoza's excommunication has to do with the

seeds beginning to grow in his mind that were planted by his knowledge and questioning of the Jewish faith.

Conclusion

Religion is a way of understanding the way things are, and for many, it's an introduction to philosophy. In order to understand Spinoza's theory of G-d in a deeper sense, it was necessary to go to where his philosophical thinking began. The structure of Spinoza's monism is deeply connected to Kabbalistic monotheism. Both have a higher power inside of which everything exists, and both have characteristics that come from them that ultimately lead to humans, and the natural world. The differences come into play when we start thinking about how the higher power interacts with those below it. In many ways, a substance is almost like a lone bubble, and everything inside of it is controlled by what it deems to be the natural law. On the other hand, *Ein Sof* is more interactive; existence, and wholeness emanate from it, being sustained by it's creations in a cycle. The Kabbalistic theory shows us how we exist, and who we have the capacity to be. Spinoza's theory makes us the ones completely responsible for who we choose to be, but not necessarily how we exist.

Seeing Spinoza's monism through the lens of Kabbalistic monotheism is an example of the idea that everything that has happened in our lives, and everything we've learned doesn't go away because we reject it. Spinoza's rejection of pillars of Judaic thought and his excommunication from the community didn't steer him away from creating a theory with a similar structure to the one he already knew. His denial of the religion he was raised in didn't take the knowledge he garnered from it out of his mind, but it did allow him to create a truly

beautiful theory of G-d. Although we are all sums of our past selves, we still have some control over how we exist in our futures. Spinoza touches on this idea in parts four and five of the *Ethics*, where he discusses how we can be in control, and how we can exercise our freedom. The way the Kabbalah, Spinoza's excommunication, and his theory of freedom fit together, however, is for another day, and another paper.

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Appendix

