

Immanence.

Responding to Henry Oldenburg's request to clarify his views about the relation between God and Nature (Ep. 71), Spinoza writes: "I favor an opinion concerning God and Nature far different from the one Modern Christians usually defend. For I maintain that God is, as they say, the immanent, but not the transitive, cause of all things" (Ep. 73 (IV/307)). In the *Ethics*, Spinoza does not define the notion of *causa immanens*, but we can easily retrieve the precise meaning of the term by scrutinizing E1p18d in which Spinoza proves that "God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things [*Deus est omnium rerum causa immanens; non vero transiens*]." The proof relies on two claims Spinoza established earlier in the *Ethics*: that all things are "in" God (E1p15), and that God is the "efficient cause" of all things (E1p16c1). Thus, an immanent cause is an efficient cause whose effect is in the cause, while a *causa transiens* is an efficient cause whose effect is not in the cause. (In the secondary literature, the relation of *being-in* is commonly referred to as 'inherence'; notably, Spinoza himself uses the terminology of 'inherence' only once (Ep. 12 (IV/61)).) The same distinction also appears in KV, where Spinoza discusses God's causation in the context of a taxonomy between the various kinds of efficient causation. The second division in this taxonomy reads: "God is an immanent cause and not a transitive cause, since he does [*werkt*] everything in himself, and not outside himself" (KV 1.3 (I/35)). The terminology of 'external'/'internal' cause seems to denote the very same distinction (see KV 2.26 (I/110)). In HG, Spinoza suggests that the Hebrew verbal structure *התפעל* (*hitpael*) signifies immanent causation (Ch. 12 (I/342/22)).

In some popular literature, -- e.g., in the exchanges surrounding the *Pantheismusstreit* of the 1780s -- Spinoza's God was said to be "in the world." This understanding of the relation denoted by 'in' is different from, and in fact opposite to, Spinoza's use of the term. For Spinoza, the *in-another* relation is one of a certain asymmetric ontological and conceptual dependence (what is in another cannot be and be conceived without the other). Thus, Spinoza argues that all things are (or, if you

wish, the world, qua the totality of all finite things, is) in God, but he never claims that God is in the world, or in all things, insofar as God is not dependent on the totality of finite things.

Spinoza was fully aware of the fact that his view of God as “inseparable” from nature (see, Ep. 6 (IV/36) and Ep. 73 (IV/307)) was opposed to the beliefs of his Christian contemporaries. Nevertheless, he suggested that both within Judaism and Christianity there are anticipations of his view: “That all things are in God and move in God, I affirm, I say, with Paul, and perhaps also with all the ancient philosophers, though in another way—I would also be so bold as to say, with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as we can conjecture from certain traditions [*traditionibus*], corrupted as they have been in many ways” (Ep. 73 (IV/307)). Spinoza’s mention of corrupted ancient Hebrew traditions here is plausibly a reference to the Kabbalah (which literally means *tradition* and was widely considered as corrupted ancient wisdom), within which panentheistic views – i.e., views which assert that the world is in God, but does not exhaust God -- were extremely common.

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Key passages: KV 1.3 (I/35); E1p18; HG Ch. 12 (I/342); Ep. 73 (IV/307); Ep. 60 (IV/271)

See also *Causa sui*; Cause; God; Kabbalah

For further reading:

Carriero, John. “On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza’s Metaphysics.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995): 245–273.

Garrett, Don. "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument." In Koistinen and Biro (eds.), *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, 127–158. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2003.

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