



The Enlightenment



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Baruch Spinoza 1632-1677 - A Trailbreaker for Modern Humanism

By Adriaan Mak

During his relatively short lifespan this pioneer naturalist philosopher tried to work quietly on putting down in writing his thoughts about human life and the world we live in. He therefore expressed his ideas in scholarly Latin, a language he studied purposely to communicate with scholars only. It was not beyond the Calvinists to put liberal minded folks on the scaffold. Spinoza had been born in a moderately wealthy multilingual Sephardic Jewish Portuguese merchant family, one of many immigrant families that had arrived around the end of the 16th century in Amsterdam to escape persecution elsewhere.



Baruch Spinoza

Although this city might be thought of as somewhat tolerant, a haven for such as Rembrandt and other artists, nevertheless, orthodox Calvinism ruled supreme. Jews were barely accepted as long as they held to the same legalistic traditions that characterized Calvinism. The similarly orthodox leadership of the Portuguese Jewish community agreed. They would not tolerate any form of godless rationalism. This spelled trouble for young Spinoza, who was soon found out, branded an atheist, and in 1656 condemned by the Portuguese Jewish leaders by a writ of *Cherem*, meaning "a person to be destroyed" (see: Exodus 22:20) – a strong term which in 17th century practice amounted to shunning and excommunication.

Spinoza left Amsterdam and became known in the small world of 17th century science as a specialist in mathematics and optics. He rejected an offer of a professorship at Heidelberg University, because he received no guarantee of true academic freedom. Hence he spent the rest of his life earning a meagre living as a lens-grinder, producing optical instruments. Meanwhile he kept writing various treatises on topics such as Descartes' ideas, theology/politics, including many letters to other philosophers especially Leibniz, and finally his major opus: *Ethics*. His early death was probably caused by silicosis: the result of years of inhaling glass dust while fabricating lenses.

Spinoza, a quiet and friendly man, found friends among others who were either cast out of their religious communities or desired freedom of thought. *(Continued on page 2)*

(Baruch Spinoza Continued)

For Modern Humanists the following stands out:

- 1) Spinoza rejected dualism: the idea that there is a realm of the spirit and a realm of matter; likewise humans were not separated as being a soul and having a body. Among philosophers he is referred to as a monist.
- 2) He rejected the ideas of hell or heaven. What irked orthodox Calvinist preachers and Jewish rabbis alike, was that Spinoza saw them as manipulators, such as some Moslem Imams, using such notions to keep their followers in submission.
- 3) Spinoza saw that prejudice, superstition and ignorance lay at the roots of the Abrahamic religions.
- 4) To him, books including those held as holy sources of divine wisdom, are products of human minds.
- 5) The wrath that descended on him from the Amsterdam rabbis came also from his remarks that there are no beings specially chosen by God. Such superiority should be immediately rejected.
- 6) Spinoza spelled the word Nature with a capital. To him, this word denoted all there is.

What may confuse people who perhaps unconsciously carry the notions of dualism (body and soul, spirit and matter) is that Spinoza used the words Nature and God interchangeably. To him this god was not a Holy Ghost, but one with the earth, the sun, moon, stars and planets, and all that these might contain, including plants, animals and humans, as a body.

Note: The descendants of the Sephardic Jewish merchant community, as well as the initially far less wealthy Ashkenazi Jewish population contributed greatly to the cultural and intellectual life of Amsterdam. Of the nearly 80,000 Jews of Amsterdam (approximately 10% of that city's inhabitants in 1941), over 64,000 were rounded up by the Nazis and ended their lives in the death camps. This ripped the heart out of not just the city but the whole country. The baroque Portuguese Synagogue built in 1665 in the very centre of Amsterdam is well worth a visit.

Source: *Spinoza: A Life* by Steven Nadler. For another current Jewish opinion about Spinoza see: <http://www.reformjudaism.org/secular-jew-who-transformed-judaism>

A Humanist Alternative to A.A.'s Twelve Steps

A human centered approach to conquering alcoholism

by B.F. Skinner

Several people have told me that they turned to Alcoholics Anonymous for help but have been offended by its heavily religious character. In view of this, I have proposed a humanistic alternative to A.A.'s "The Twelve Steps." I sent this version to Alcoholics Anonymous, suggesting that they offer it as an alternative for nonreligious members. I was not suggesting that they abandon their own twelve steps. I was told, however, that it would be impossible to change their practices without a majority vote of all

Alcoholics Anonymous and was assured that many atheists and agnostics have found the original twelve steps helpful. Humanist counselors may, nevertheless, find an alternative version useful. Below are listed both "The Twelve Steps" of Alcoholics Anonymous and my suggested alternative:

THE TWELVE STEPS

1. *We admitted we were powerless over alcohol... that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
3. *Made a de decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of **God** as we understood **Him**.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
5. *Admitted to **God**, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to have **God** remove all these defects of character.*
7. *Humbly asked **Him** to remove our shortcomings.*
8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*
9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*
11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with **God** as we under-stood **Him**, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Note: *God is mentioned 7 times in the above.*

THE HUMANIST ALTERNATIVE

1. *We accept the fact that all our efforts to stop drinking have failed.*
2. *We believe that we must turn elsewhere for help.*
3. *We turn to our fellow men and women, particularly those who have struggled with the same problem.*
4. *We have made a list of the situations in which we are most likely to drink.*
5. *We ask our friends to help us avoid these situations.*
6. *We are ready to accept the help they give us.*
7. *We earnestly hope that they will help.*
8. *We have made a list of the persons we have harmed and to whom we hope to make amends.*
9. *We shall do all we can to make amends, in any way that will not cause further harm.*
10. *We will continue to make such lists and revise them as needed.*
11. *We appreciate what our friends have done and are doing to help us.*
12. *We, in turn, are ready to help others who may come to us in the same way.*

B.F. Skinner, a Harvard Professor of Psychology, was 1972 Humanist of the Year.

(Source: The Humanist, July/August, 1987)

Niqab: Another Alternative

By Raheel Raza

As a Muslim mother who never saw a niqab when I was growing up in Karachi, Pakistan, I am astonished to see Canada's judiciary caving in to Islamists who have nothing but contempt for Canada's values of gender equality.

I write this as a Muslim Canadian who does not have any specific political leanings. But in the 25 years I have called Canada home, I have seen a steady rise of Muslim women being strangled in the pernicious black tent that is passed off to naïve and guilt-ridden white, mainstream Canadians as an essential Islamic practice.

The niqab and burka have nothing to do with Islam. They're the political flags of the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, the Taliban, al-Qaida and Saudi Arabia.

Now I learn I have not only to fight the medieval, theocratic adherents of my faith for a safe space for myself, I have to battle the Federal Court of Canada as well, which has come out on the side of these facemasks.

The ruling concerns the case of Zunera Ishaq, a 29-year-old woman who emigrated to Canada from Pakistan in 2008. After previously showing her face to an immigration official in 2013 when taking her citizenship test, she refused to take part in the citizenship ceremony because she would have to show her face while taking the oath of citizenship.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government rightly banned face masks at such ceremonies, but this was found to be unlawful by the Federal Court.

With all due respect, let me introduce our Canadian judges to their Pakistani colleague in the jihadi badlands of Peshawar.

In November 2004, the Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court (PHC), Tariq Pervaiz Khan, ordered female lawyers not to wear face veils in courtrooms, saying they couldn't be identified, nor assist the court properly while wearing veils. He scolded the niqabi women, saying, "You are professionals."

Covering the face is not a religious requirement for Muslim women. The injunction in the Qur'an is for modesty (for men and women).

Some Muslim women interpret this as covering their head with a scarf or chador.

A scholar of Islamic history, Prof. Mohammad Qadeer of Queen's University, Kingston, wrote in the Globe and Mail in March, 2006: "The argument about concealing one's face as a religious obligation is contentious and is not backed by the evidence."

He added, “in Western societies, the niqab also is a symbol of distrust for fellow citizens and a statement of self-segregation. The wearer of a face veil is conveying: ‘I am violated if you look at me.’ It is a barrier in civic discourse. It also subverts public trust.”

The federal Liberals and NDP are treating Canada’s niqabis as a latter day Rosa Parks, fighting for justice.

This is vote-bank politics that is, as my friend Tarek Fatah calls it, “sharia Bolshevism”.

There is just one way forward: The next government must legislate the complete ban on wearing face masks in public, not just to expose the hypocrisy of the Islamists, but for the sake of our security as well.

Raza is President of the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, author of ‘Their Jihad ... Not My Jihad’ and an international activist for women’s rights.

Source: ‘Ban niqab, burka in all public places’, Raheel Raza, Toronto Sun, September 15, 2015

Why Teachers Drink

Humorous student answers to examination questions

Q. Name the four seasons.

A. Salt, pepper, mustard and vinegar.

Q. How is dew formed?

A. The sun shines down on the leaves and makes them perspire.

Q. What guarantees may a mortgage company insist on?

A. If you are buying a house they will insist that you are well endowed.

Q. In a democratic society, how important are elections?

A. Very important. Sex can only happen when a male gets an election.

Q. What are steroids ?

A. Things for keeping carpets still on the stairs.

(Shoot yourself now, there is little hope).

Q. What happens to your body as you age?

A. When you get old, so do your bowels and you get intercontinental.

Q. What happens to a boy when he reaches puberty?

A. He says goodbye to his boyhood and looks forward to his adultery. (So true).

Q. Name a major disease associated with cigarettes.

A. Premature death.

Q. What is artificial insemination?

A. When the farmer does it to the bull instead of the cow.

Q. How can you delay milk turning sour?

A. Keep it in the cow. (Simple, but brilliant)

Q. How are the main 20 parts of the body categorised (e.g. The abdomen)?

A. The body is consisted into 3 parts - the brainium, the borax and the abdominal cavity. The brainium contains the brain, the borax contains the heart and lungs and the abdominal cavity contains the five bowels: A,E,I,O,U

Q. What is the fibula?

A. A small lie.

Q. What does 'varicose' mean?

A. Nearby.

Q. What is the most common form of birth control?

A.. Most people prevent contraception by wearing a condominium.

Q. Give the meaning of the term 'Caesarean section'.

A. The caesarean section is a district in Rome .

Q. What is a seizure ?

A. A Roman Emperor.
(Julius Seizure).

Q. What is a terminal illness ?

A. When you are sick at the airport. (Irrefutable).

Q. What does the word 'benign' mean?

A. Benign is what you will be after you be eight.

Q. What is a turbine?

A. Something an Arab or Shreik wears on his head. Once an Arab boy reaches puberty, he removes his diaper and wraps it around his head.

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