



## El problema de Spinoza

*Irvin D. Yalom , José M. Alvarez Flórez (Translator)*

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El 10 de mayo de 1940, las tropas nazis de Hitler invaden los Países Bajos. Desde febrero de 1941, a cargo del cuerpo de la expedición encargado del expolio, el Reichsleiter Rosenberg se apresura en llegar a Ámsterdam para confiscar la biblioteca de Spinoza. ¿Qué misteriosa fascinación puede ejercer, tres siglos después, la obra del filósofo judío sobre el ideólogo nazi Rosenberg? ¿Quién fue aquel hombre, excomulgado en 1656 por la comunidad judía de Ámsterdam y expulsado de su propia familia?

A través de una figura como Spinoza, Yalom utiliza los recursos de análisis psicológico y de la intriga para hablar del miedo, de Dios y la fe. En la línea de su bestseller *El día que Nietzsche lloró*, esta nueva novela de Irvin Yalom, a una vez incisiva y palpitante, nos mantiene en vilo frente a la gran incógnita que plantea *El problema de Spinoza*.

## El problema de Spinoza Details

Date : Published February 19th 2013 by Ediciones Destino (first published 2012)

ISBN :

Author : Irvin D. Yalom , José M. Alvarez Flórez (Translator)

Format : Kindle Edition 391 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Fiction, Psychology, Historical, Historical Fiction, Novels

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# From Reader Review El problema de Spinoza for online ebook

## BlackOxford says

### The Very Refuse of Thy Deeds

The ethical principles of justice and charity are the enduring legacy of Judaism. Through countless generations of the Jewish community, they have been transmitted to Christianity and Islam, and through them to the world, as the essential foundations of what most of us can agree is civilized society.

Yalom recognizes this Judaic contribution to human existence. He also recognizes that without the cultic and social loyalty of Jews throughout the centuries, such a contribution would not have survived as more than the short-lived refuse of tribal convention. It is the perennial insistence, one might say obstinance, of the community that has been necessary to provide "a light to the Gentiles."

Yalom also recognizes the philosophical problem created by the success of the Jewish community. His tale, in fact, follows two threads of this problem. The first thread is represented by the life of Baruch Spinoza, a 17th century Jewish philosopher. Spinoza accepted the ethical demands of justice and charity but rejected their cultic and social matrix. Consequently he was excommunicated, one might say unjustly and certainly with little indication of charity, from the Jewish community. This is the philosophical problem presented by an ethical community: must it be willing to contradict its own teaching in order to ensure its ability to teach?

The second thread is also connected with the success of the Jewish community. This success has always been achieved in the face of enormous historical forces aimed at destroying Judaism and its contributions - most recently the insanity of European fascism. Yalom uses a fictionalised biography of the leading Nazi theorist, Alfred Rosenberg, as his protagonist to make a point: an important reason for anti-Semitism is the very survival of Judaism, both as a religious community and as a dominant component of European culture. In Yalom's narrative Rosenberg's virulent anti-Semitism is made problematic by the attested devotion of the German poet and national symbol, Johann von Goethe to the Jew, Spinoza. Goethe as well as Rosenberg are themselves the product of Jewish culture.

These two issues are the components of the eponymous Spinoza Problem as presented by Yalom. On the one hand the Jewish community is a necessary condition for achieving what it has accomplished - a relatively civilised society. On the other hand this same community attracts destruction from within and without itself because of what it has achieved. Yalom does an outstanding job of articulating this problem, actually a paradox, as the existential condition of Judaism. He subtly compares this 'Jewish problem' with a parallel problem in the psychiatric community: are there neuroses, for example the fanatical anti-Semitism of an Alfred Rosenberg, which should be 'excommunicated' as beyond hope of correction?

What Yalom is not so good at appreciating is the theological significance of the problem - from psychiatric as well as Jewish perspectives. He makes it clear through comments by his narrator that for him theology is equivalent to superstition, that the scientific attitude of men like Spinoza and his successors in the Enlightenment (especially Kant) make theology not only silly but dangerous. Theology, for Yalom, is the creating of God in the image of man, and should be stopped because it then tries to impose this image as true. Psycho-analysis is the alternative to superstition and as such is a rational substitute for theology.

Yalom obviously has a point. Theology has as often as not been used to justify whatever structure of power happens to be in place - males, believers, monarchists, democrats, fascists, clerics and other assorted bullies

from the era of Socrates to the era of Trump. But then the same could be said of much of psychology and sociology, not to mention the hard science directed toward commercial or military superiority. All human inquiry, not just theology, is affected by what is perceived as human interests. There is no disinterested inquiry, nor should there be in a world that has problems to solve.

Yalom misses this point, although it is implicit in his formulation of the novelistic situation. Justice and charity, even supposing we can agree on a single definition of what they might be, are incommensurable on the face of it. This is a fundamental problem. The two criteria (or virtues, or values) are contrary, although not necessarily contradictory, aspects of what philosophers call the Good. As such there is no rational way to make a 'trade-off' between these two criteria of the Good in any real situation. Until the two terms can be somehow reconciled, justice and charity remain abstract and ethically sterile.

The role of theology is precisely to create such a reconciliation between contrary Goods. It does this not by creating an image of God in human form, but by probing for a 'bigger' criterion of the Good which includes both justice and charity, in the manner say that Relativity Physics includes Newtonian Physics as a special case, or the way in which Euler's Theorem unifies radically different universes of numbers in mathematics.

The image that theology creates, therefore, is not of humanity writ cosmically large, but of individual human beings unified with each other in community. The greater the number of people involved, the more difficult the problem of unification, and the closer one comes to that unachievable asymptote, theologically termed 'God'. The problem being addressed in theology is precisely that raised as paradox by Yalom: the status of the individual in a community and the status of a community in a larger community.

Theology, done right, doesn't attempt to be interest-free but interest-inclusive. The image created by theological investigation is also, therefore, not that of any random or arbitrary human being but the specific human being called by Emmanuel Levinas the Other. This Other, whether a person or another community, is the principal locus of divine revelation and, consequently, of the concrete meaning of justice and charity. More theology, more sweeping up of the refuse that is humanity, not less, is the solution to the Spinoza Problem.

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## Owlseyes says

(Alfred Rosenberg talks to psychiatrist and friend, Friedrich Pfister)

"I have to confess that you're the first psychiatrist I've ever met. I know nothing about your field"

"Well, for centuries, psychiatrists have primarily been diagnosticians and custodians for hospitalized psychotic, almost incurable patients, but all that has changed in the last decade. The change began with Sigmund Freud in Vienna, who invented the talking treatment called psychoanalysis, which permits us to help patients overcome psychological problems. Today we can treat such ailments as extreme anxiety or intractable grief or something we call hysteria-an ailment in which a patient has psychologically caused physical symptoms like paralysis or even blindness. My teachers in Zurich, Carl Jung and Eugen Bleuler, have been pioneers in this field. I'm intrigued by this approach and will soon be starting advanced training in psychoanalysis in Berlin with Karl Abraham, a highly regarded teacher".

"I've heard some things about psychoanalysis. I've heard it referred to as another Jewish

intrigue. Are your teachers all Jews?

"Certainly not Jung or Bleuler"

"But Friedrich, why involve yourself in a Jewish field?"

"It will be a Jewish field unless we Germans step in. Or put it another way: It's too good to be left to the Jews"

I know 'Bento' Spinoza --the excommunicated Jew, of Portuguese descent--had a great impact on Yalom, who, in fact, visited his places in Holland. But the narrative, so far, results a bit disconnected going backwards and forwards: 17th century (for Spinoza) and beginning of 20th century in Estonia and Germany to follow this (Nazi) character called Alfred Rosenberg.

Only by the middle of the book we get to connect the dots: Alfred has a sort of admiration for Spinoza too; he's greatly involved in Hitler's life trajectory.

So far, too much biographical work being made on both sides: Spinoza and Alfred; but the dialogues sometimes are obviously psychological, as if in a counseling room; I mean, you can easily spot the author: Yalom, a the psychiatrist.

Unless a great leap ---I'm not asking for a quantum leap!---of the narrative happens I'm still reading with a 3,5 stars in mind. Maybe, a 4, for the historical unraveling.

Meanwhile I've been battling in my own mind with this thing I know from Yalom himself: born of a Jewish cradle, yet not feeling that much religious since a young age\*.

~~{You, dear reader, dare not to think of a "Yalom problem"....; not even "The Yalom problem"}~~

I'll keep on reading...even if it will take me closer to the Portuguese writers of old (center, in first photo: du Bocage).

Maybe the best of the book, for me, resides in the last two parts, the Epilogue, and the post-epilogue clarification called "Fact or fiction, setting the record straight"; the latter giving details on the sources of the novel and those parts which were "invented".

As to the Epilogue I got very pleased with the true Spinoza and the ban-lifting by the state of Israel. Spinoza, one philosopher admired by Ben-Gurion.

Regarding the fiction Spinoza my balance is quite negative. Yalom had him "converted" to Epicurus; and I still doubt the real Spinoza was ever one Epicurean man.

(preparing his next speech...)

The book offers, throughout, abundant data on Hitler's life, and the epilogue approaches with detail the Nuremberg trials. Alfred Rosenberg (IQ 124) portrait is really sad, though truthful; he's depicted as the "intellectual high priest of the master race...and the doctrine of hate", who "never" denied the charges he was upon.

I am not sure whether this parallel approach ever benefited Spinoza. I had great expectations; yet some were somewhere thwarted by those voluminous "Nazi chapters".

Despite the aforementioned, ...long lives Spinoza.

(Spinoza up, Alfred down. I prefer this cover, cannot tell why....)

(Dutch Portuguese Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo arguing for the lifting of the ban on Baruch Spinoza, Dec. 6, 2015. (Cnaan Liphshiz))  
in: <http://www.jta.org/2015/12/10/news-op...>

\*check on Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death, by Irvin D. Yalom

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## Narcissus says

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## Hamêd says

A estrutura narrativa da obra é também assaz interessante: Yalom alterna capítulos em que narra a vida de Espinosa na Holanda, começando em 1656 até 1666 (ano, para o pensamento judaico, da chegada do Messias) com os que revela a ascensão social e política do anti-semita Alfred Rosenberg desde a terra natal na Estónia onde se encontrava em 1910 até ao dia em que morre no cadafalso em 1946. Por outro lado, também é interessante verificar como o autor, por força da sua profissão, coloca os dois personagens

principais em claras sessões de psicoterapia fazendo de Franco (o único amigo judeu que restaria a Espinosa), o psicanalista enquanto o mesmo papel é desempenhado por Friedrich Pfister em relação a Rosenberg. E é através destas dialéticas que nós também vamo-nos apropriando do pensamento e a personalidade de cada um.

Entretanto, acompanhamos o *cherem* (excomunhão judaica) de que Espinosa foi alvo, por força dos seus pensamentos e palavras contrastantes com a religiosidade dos livros sagrados, a sua adaptação a uma vida solitária e fora da comunidade, ao mesmo tempo que vamos conhecendo a ascensão das ideias anti-semíticas numa Alemanha afundada numa crise económica e social.

Este livro, pese embora as partes ficcionadas, é claramente um excelente documento histórico!

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## **Kalliope says**

I should have known better.

I should have known that this would not be a book for me.

My interest was to learn more about Spinoza. Coward that I am, I thought that a semi-fictional approach to the Dutch thinker would be a smooth way to approach him. The book seemed also to offer an original angle. What would be the link between this 17C Dutch thinker, also Jewish, and a Nazi ideologue?

Dr. Yalom, (Emeritus in Psychiatry at Stanford), also seems to have a strong following of enthusiastic readers.

The structure is certainly effective. Chapters alternate between Bento Spinoza and Alfred Rosenberg. This is a similar structure to the very different book, *Evening in the Palace of Reason: Bach Meets Frederick the Great in the Age of Enlightenment*. Swinging between one and the other keeps the reader entertained awakens his curiosity in the story. The pursuit of the supposed link between these two figures certainly adds dynamism to the reading.

And yet, I was not convinced nor satisfied.

The most valuable was what I learnt about Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1949). Originally from Latvia, he lived and studied in Moscow but eventually moved to Germany. In Munich he met Hitler early on. This was in 1919 when the Austrian was still little known. During Hitler's imprisonment after his attempted coup in 1923, Rosenberg was appointed the Leader of the National Socialists. As he had very strong notions both on race and religion, he became one of the main theoreticians of the movement. It seems he was, however, not well liked by the other Nazi cronies (and this provides rich ground for a psychoanalyst). This did not prevent his playing a key role during the times the Nazis were in power. He was accused and sentenced to death during the Nuremberg trials.



It seems he also had an obsession with Spinoza and even if the Jewish community, through the most severe of the 'cherems', had expelled the philosopher, Rosenberg could not reconcile that even if Spinoza had rejected his religion, that he was nonetheless a Jew.

The book fleshes this out in a mixture between psychoanalysis and historical fiction. Yalom has invented a couple of characters who serve as his mouthpieces. Through these he questions his two protagonists. Or rather, he certainly puts Rosenberg in the couch, in whom he detects inferiority complexes arising out of his childhood, but is more respectful of Spinoza. The Dutch thinker is given another chair and allowed to formulate many questions.

I found the Spinoza sections the most unsatisfying. Almost all the attention is given to his (non) religion and his conflict with the Jewish community. The task to bring Spinoza alive is not easy. Having been expelled from his community when he was in his twenties, so that not even his brother or sister could approach him, we now know very little about his life.

Clues about other aspects of his thinking, apart from the religious one, are scant. The historical settings are also not believable. Apart from the titles of the chapters with dates, inclusion of a few names of places, and the detail that Spinoza eats Dutch cheese (really!), one has no sense that we are transported neither to a particular place nor back in time.

Whether we are in Germany in the second quarter of the 20C or in Holland in the 17C, the voices are the same. They are all coming out of a ventriloquist sitting next to a couch.

Ah, and don't ask me what was the connection, or 'Problem', between the two figures. Tenuous indeed.

I was very close to abandoning the read, but my own neurosis prevented me.

May be I should visit a shrink.

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## **Ana says**

This is not my first book by Yalom and it will definitely not be the last. I love his style – it's fluid, it molds on every type of subject and it somehow incorporates scientific or historical information in such a way that you don't even realize anymore which is fact and which is fiction. I learned a lot from his books and he is a man to be listened to when it comes to psychological problems or philosophic questions about life. Unlike us, the rest of the human population that reads his books, the man has done his research.

"The Spinoza Problem" is probably his best book so far when it comes to the life and ideology of certain men that had a great impact on our world. I have also read by him "When Nietzsche Wept" and "The Schopenhauer Cure" and though they were amazing books (both I rated 5 stars and would've rated them 10 if GR provided that), this one right here managed to surpass that. I find it thrilling that an author can surpass his own works, and Yalom proves that even when it comes to a philosopher that didn't come out too much to the world, he can still put his story up together and give it to us in a form simple enough to understand but complicated enough to make us wonder.

The book is divided in chapters which alternate between two men that had a massive effect on the course of history as we know it today : Benedict (Bento, or Baruch as called by friends or in the Jewish language) Spinoza and Alfred Rosenberg. Spinoza was a philosopher and a great thinker that created a basis for a certain type of idea that involved not believing in afterlife and not believing in that irrational fear that all priests try to inflict upon their listeners that God is revengeful and wants everyone to be submissive. He believed that God was Nature, because rationally, if God was the all-powerful, all-knowing existence and Nature was all-powerful and impossible to influence, they must be one and the same type of divinity.

Personally, I completely agree with Spinoza. This is not the first time I have heard about his ideas and each time he popped up in my researches about something I would find his ideas more and more logical . What I like about him is even though he had a larger-than-life intellect and could probably swipe off of their feet every other great thinker there was, he was still a simple man, a man of his own mind, that refused to believe that only God could give the moral values a man should have. He thought that a humble man, a simple man, a “normal” man, I'd like to say, would have to live his life after a not-at-all complicated code that involved honesty, modesty, love, respect and good will towards other people. Pretty damn normal, right?!

Now, speaking of Alfred Rosenberg. He is a completely different mare. He was an antisemit that believed Jews were parasites upon our race (the Arian race, which all white people are) and that they should be sent off out of Europe so we wouldn't be contaminated anymore. Very infuriated that his name was a Jewish one and he might have been himself Jewish, he ignored everything that was good at those people and saw only evil and bad deeds, which Jews did as any other race on this planet has. By an unfortunate twist of fate, Rosenberg met the last man on this earth he should have met – Adolf Hitler. Which evidently caused them to get close because of their common stupid hate towards Jews and planted in Hitler's mind many ideas he shouldn't have had.

The book develops beautifully and flawlessly towards the ending, and I found the writing to be impeccable, with not one page I didn't want to read, not one boring description, nothing that could make me want to let it out of my hands.. except the need for sleep, food and friends.

A great book that Yalom invested a lot of soul in, a great subject he talked about and I'm pretty sure this is one of those must-reads in somebody's life.

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## Sonya says

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## Fateme Shafaei says

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## Milan Trpkovic says

Ova knjiga je vrhunski spoj svih onih oblasti koje volim da izu?avam: istorija (poseban osvrt na Drugi svetski rat), religija, politika, sociologija i psihologija. Sve to je sa?eto kroz fikciju uobli?enu u paralelnom prikazu Baruha (Benta) Spinoze i Alfreda Rozenberga (uticajnog nacistu). Autor je na odli?an na?in prikazao kako je jedan nacisti?kin um bio pod uticajem (impresijom pozitivnom i negativnom) jevrejskog filozofa, a isto tako je do?arao ?ivot Spinoze i sve njegove "golgote".

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## Andrew Pessin says

I found this initially intriguing but ultimately tedious. In fact there is NOT much of a link to go on, between Rosenberg and Spinoza; it feels like a false or inflated premise. And also, pretty much, it's a novel in which nothing happens. There's a conversation; and then another conversation; and then another conversation where they talk about the previous conversation. If you want a very light fluffy summary of some of Spinoza's views, okay; and in fact the Rosenberg character is a pretty interesting character, as a character. But the "link" which drives the novel -- Rosenberg's "obsession" with Spinoza -- can't sustain it, and the endless psychobabble that goes on as both characters get psychoanalyzed is the source of the tedium. (OK, Yalom has the credentials as a psychiatrist -- yet most of the 'analysis' going on seems pretty fluffy to me.)

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## Negar says

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## Rosie says

Adorei!

**Gosto muito de filosofia e gostei mais ainda da temática desenvolvida.**

**Um orgulho saber que este temerário pensador, Spinoza, era descendente de judeus portugueses, que com valentia e ousadia defendeu e viveu as suas convicções.**

A sua família, devido à perseguição durante a Inquisição em Portugal, viu-se obrigada a emigrar para a Holanda no séc. XVI. O pai, um próspero comerciante, aspirava ver o filho como um proeminente rabino, dado a sua inteligência e sede de conhecimento, no entanto a sua determinação levada à exaustão sobre a verdade de Deus levou-o a ser excomungado para sempre da Sinagoga, ostracizado e amaldiçoado. Racionalista crítico, dos dogmas da ortodoxia religiosa, defende que Deus é o mecanismo imanente da natureza, e a Bíblia, uma obra metafórico alegórico que não pede leitura racional e que não exprime a verdade sobre Deus. Este homem tinha tanto de douto como de humilde. No entanto, toda esta informação vai-nos sendo transmitida através de outra história, com um intervalo, nada mais nada menos, que trezentos anos, personagem essa, absolutamente terrífica, assassino de milhões, Rosenberg. Para seu próprio infortúnio, este, vive assombrado pelo facto de o seu Ídolo máximo, Goethe, ser um grande admirador de Spinoza. Esta obsessão persegue-o, sente-se mesmo incrédulo com tal situação. Um judeu! Raça que a todo o custo está determinado em destruir. Esta dicotomia ao longo do livro, de um lado um homem magnânimo do outro um ser execrável, é brutal. O escritor com a sua formação académica na área da psiquiatria dá também um contributo extraordinário na exploração da mente humana.

Relembro ainda, como curiosidade, a resposta que Einstein terá dado quando lhe perguntaram se acreditava em Deus: **"-Acredito no Deus de Spinoza que se revela por si mesmo na harmonia de tudo o que existe..."**.

**Sem querer impingir crenças nem desavenças, mas tão só, considerações e conhecimentos, recomendo vivamente, a quem gostar do género obviamente.**

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## Nikos Tsentemeidis says

Ε?χα διαβ?σει τον Ν?τσε αρχικ? και μου ?ρεσε πολ?. Για τον Σπιν?ζα και τα ?λλα του βιβλ?α ε?χα διαβ?σει κριτικ?ς ?τι ο Γι?λομ επαναλαμβ?νεται με σκοπ? την εμπορικ? επιτυχ?α. Πολ? γρ?γορα καταρρ?φθηκε αυτ? η ?ποψη. Το μ?νο σ?γουρο ε?ναι ?τι ο Γι?λομ γρ?φει πολ? ?μορφα, ποτ? δε βαρι?σαι και περν?ς πολ? ευχ?ριστα το χρ?νο σου.

Απ? 'κει και π?ρα, θεωρ? πως το ?ργο αυτ? ε?ναι καλ?τερο απ? τον Ν?τσε, ειδικ? αν σε ενδιαφ?ρει η φιλοσοφ?α και συγκεκριμ?να ο Επ?κουρος και ο Σπιν?ζα. Ακ?μα και στην αντ?θετη περ?πτωση σε παροτρ?νει να ασχοληθε?ς με τους δ?ο κορυφα?ους φιλοσ?φους.

Π?ρα απ? το βιβλ?ο, θεωρ? τον Επ?κουρο τον σημαντικ?τερο φιλ?σοφο ?λων των εποχ?ν, κι ας ε?ναι λ?γο ?γνωστος στο ευρ? κοιν?, ακ?μα και το ελληνικ?. ?σο για τον Σπιν?ζα ?μαθα

ενδιαφέροντα πρόγματα που δεν ξέρα, πως τι σε μια κρ?σιμη περ?οδο της Ευρ?πης πριν αρχ?σει ο Διαφωτισμ?ς, τ?λμησε ?σο κανε?ς ?λλος με τα γραπτ? του να αμφισβητ?σει τα στεγαν? της θρησκε?ας, λ?γα χρ?νια μετ? την καταδ?κη του Γαλιλα?ου απ? την Ιερ? Εξ?ταση.

Σ?μφωνα με τον Γι?λομ, ο Σπιν?ζα αποτ?λεσε μεγ?λη ?μπνευση για τον Γκα?τε, τον σπουδα?ο αυτ? Γερμαν? ?νθρωπο των γραμμ?των.

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**Maryam says**

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