

INTERPRETING SPINOZA

Critical Essays

EDITED BY

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INTERPRETING SPINOZA

The philosophy of Spinoza is increasingly recognized as holding a position of crucial importance and influence in early modern thought, and in recent years it has been the focus of a rich and growing body of scholarship. In this volume of essays, leading experts in the field offer penetrating analyses of his views about God, necessity, imagination, the mind, knowledge, history, society, and politics. The essays treat questions of perennial importance in Spinoza scholarship but also constitute new and critical examinations of his worldview. Scholars of modern philosophy will welcome this volume as a collection of some of the very best recent work done on Spinoza's philosophy.

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Method of citation

Where references are by author and year of publication, full reference information may be found in the Bibliography.

The following abbreviations have been used in referring to Spinoza's writings:

DPP	<i>Descartes's "Principles of Philosophy" (Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae, Pars I et II, More Geometrico demonstratae)</i>
E	<i>Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata)</i>
Ep	<i>Correspondence (Epistulae)</i>
G	<i>Spinoza Opera</i> . 4 vols. (vol. 5, 1987), ed. Carl Gebhardt. Hildesheim: Carl Winter
ST	<i>Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand)</i>
TdIE	<i>Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)</i>
TP	<i>Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus)</i>
TTP	<i>Theological-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)</i>

References to the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the *Political Treatise*, and the *Theological-Political Treatise* are by chapter and, within chapters, sometimes also by the section numbers introduced in the Bruder edition of Spinoza's works and reproduced in many subsequent editions.

Some of the essays in this volume also employ further abbreviations for citations; they are explained within the notes of those essays.

References to the *Correspondence* are by letter number.

References to *Descartes's Ethics* begin with an Arabic number denoting the Part, and use the following common abbreviations:

- a Axiom
- c Corollary

d	Definition (when not following a Proposition number)
d	Demonstration (when following a Proposition number)
da	Definitions of the Affects (located towards the end of <i>Ethics</i> , Part 3)
p	Proposition
s	Scholium (Note)

For example, “E 1p14d.c1” refers to *Ethics*, Part 1, Proposition 14, Demonstration and Corollary 1.

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Introduction

Charlie Huenemann

Spinoza selected a seal for his correspondence that was both clever and fitting. It was a design with his initials, a stemmed rose, and the word "*Caute*," or: *with caution*. We might suppose that he took this as a motto for himself, to act always with caution; but since his own name connoted the rose (*espina* is Spanish for "thorn"), it is more likely that he was advising his correspondents to handle him with caution. He had fascinating visions to offer – but beware the thorns! And his readers soon were pricked by them, as they discovered that Spinoza denied many things thought to be necessary for a civil life: free will, the traditional distinction between good and evil, heaven and hell, and the existence of a benevolent creator. Spinoza became known as an impious atheist, and philosophers over the next two centuries were both attracted and stung by what he wrote.

Philosophers in more recent times have found Spinoza to be thorny as well, perhaps not so much because of his heretical views, but because of the sheer difficulty of his great work, the *Ethics*. It seems that, in his attempt to lay out his thought as clearly as possible, with sharp definitions, axioms, and demonstrations, Spinoza made his philosophy well-nigh ungraspable. It is not at all unusual to hear a well-intentioned reader despair, "I know there is something powerful in there, but I can't quite get hold of it." Still, more and more philosophers have found their way into this deductive fortress, and have written about what they have found there in increasingly clear and precise ways. This volume of essays, we hope, adds to this broad, communal effort of excavation and interpretation, not only of the *Ethics*, but of his treatises on theology and politics as well. There are indeed many powerful things in Spinoza's philosophy, and we can make sense of a great many of them.

One great virtue of this collection of essays is that they provide penetrating discussion of three important domains of Spinoza's philosophy: metaphysics, psychology, and politics. Furthermore, while these essays were written independently for this volume, several interesting connections can