Spinoza's Book of Life

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Printed in the United States of America.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Smith, Steven B., 1951–
Spinoza's book of life : freedom and redemption in the ethics / Steven B. Smith.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-300-10019-1 (cloth : alk. paper)
1. Spinoza, Benedictus de, 1632-1677. 2. Free will and determinism—History—17th century. 3. Ethics, Modern—17th century. I. Title.
B3999.F8865 2003
170—dc21 2003002244

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Preface

This is not the book I had initially set out to write. My aim was to complete a study of the influence of Spinoza on Jewish thought and political theory from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Writing a book on Spinoza's *Ethics* was the farthest thing from my mind. And yet it became apparent as I began to think about this project that I could not let go of Spinoza, or perhaps more accurately, he would not let go of me. *Spinoza's Book of Life* is the result of that exchange.

Why a book on the *Ethics?* Despite an illustrious tradition of scholarship stretching back for over a century, there was a time up until the recent past when it was fashionable to treat Spinoza with something wavering between condescension and contempt. A reviewer of my *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* tells the story of how shortly after World War II, a young American scholar sent an article on Spinoza to a leading Anglo-American journal of philosophy and was told by the editors, "We are not now and never will be interested in Spinoza."[1] For those of a positivist bent, the very idea of a system of deductive metaphysics was anathema to the empirical and skeptical spirit of modern philosophy. For others, his idea that God is the immanent cause of all things carried an odor of cloying religiosity running contrary to the secular spirit of the age. Today, fortunately, much of this has changed. Not only has there been an increased appreciation for the place of Spinoza in the history of thought, but his novel reflections on a wide range of themes, from the importance of the body, to the centrality of

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power, to the psychological foundations of moral beliefs, have prompted renewed interest in and respect for his ideas. New editions and translations have also made his work more accessible to contemporary readers. Even if Spinoza has never quite made the A-List, it is no longer possible to treat him, as he once was, as a "dead dog."

The present study takes the form of a selective commentary on leading themes and problems of the *Ethics*. It does not purport to be a detailed line-by-line commentary or a comprehensive analysis of Spinoza's background and influences. Both such types of work already exist. Much of the recent literature on Spinoza typically falls under the genre of what might be called analytical philosophy of history.[2] Although there is much to learn from this kind of writing, it tends to judge Spinoza as a contributor to certain contemporary philosophical problems and research programs that are not strictly his own. Not surprisingly, his arguments are often found to be faulty, unjustified, and confused. It is a premise of this work that it is precisely in those places where Spinoza's thinking is most clearly at variance with our own that we have the most to learn. I am not interested in the *Ethics* because it helps to confirm contemporary opinions and points of view, but because it challenges them. The *Ethics* can teach us something about the foundations of modernity, of which it is a cornerstone.

This book differs from other studies of the *Ethics* in a couple of respects. My earlier book focused almost exclusively on Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), his major work of political philosophy. The relation between the *TTP* and the *Ethics* has often baffled readers. The standard treatment of this question has been to consider Spinoza's politics as a kind of appendage, almost an afterthought, to his scientific and metaphysical interests. My own view attempted to reverse this conception by making a case for the primacy of political philosophy

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or the "theologico-political problem" in Spinoza around which all of his later philosophical reflections tended to gravitate. The present work more or less continues this line of thinking. While I do not argue that the *Ethics* is a piece of political philosophy in the manner of Hobbes's *Leviathan* or Locke's *Civil Government,* there is most definitely a politics in the *Ethics* that is broadly supportive of the liberal democratic framework set out in the *TTP.* The critique of supernatural teleology, the analysis of the passions, and the celebration of freedom as the highest human end all bear marked affinities with the works of Machiavelli, Descartes, and Hobbes, of whom I make opportunistic use throughout this study. It is, above all, the *Ethics* as a work of practical philosophy that I want to stress.

What this book maintains is that the *Ethics* and the *TTP* form parts of a complex whole. The *TTP* is a book mired in the world of biblical criticism, history, and contemporary politics. It was addressed to a general, if learned, audience that would play an important role in the future shape and destiny of public life. The *TTP* was a founding document of liberal democratic theory as well as the first sustained reflection on the status of Judaism within this new theologico-political regime. The *Ethics* by contrast is a work written "in geometrical manner." It appears to pay scant attention to anything that cannot be deduced or inferred from human reason alone. If the *TTP* was intended as an exercise in public philosophy, the *Ethics* is an intensely private, deeply introspective book. While the *TTP* examines the theological and political dimensions of human freedom, the *Ethics* is concerned with the moral and psychological conditions of liberty. The one examined the external, the other the internal dimensions of freedom. Together both works constitute a comprehensive account of the problem of freedom.

In the *TTP* Spinoza distinguishes between two kinds of books. There are "hieroglyphic" books, his chief example being

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the Bible, that require elaborate and painstaking historical reconstruction if they are to make sense. To understand such works, one requires knowledge of the language in which the text was written, information about the context and circumstances of its composition, and the character of its author. Then there are "intelligible" books, such as Euclid's geometry, for which historical information about the author and the work is extraneous and the understanding of which requires only an ability to follow a chain of reasoning from premise to conclusion. The *Ethics* was clearly intended by its author to be an intelligible work after the manner of Euclid. Yet the apparent clarity of the intention is partially undermined by the work itself. Underlying the formal propositional architecture is a highly impassioned work rich with irony, rhetoric, sarcasm, and reference to first-person experience—scarcely the model of the pure philosopher unsullied and unruffled by the emotions. We cannot read the *Ethics* as we could a mathematics textbook. It is not a work in which the author disappears into the text, but a work that bears its author's distinctive voice and cast of mind on every page. The *Ethics* is, then, neither a purely hieroglyphic nor a purely intelligible work but a hybrid of the two. To understand it, one needs to be, to varying degrees, philosopher, historian, and political theorist.

The *Ethics* is a strange book and its strangeness is not diminished even after careful study. Despite Spinoza's aspiration to a kind of mathematical certainty, the *Ethics* is not as self-contained as it first appears. It is a rambling, discursive, and discordant work. Almost nothing human is alien to it. As the title of this book suggests, the Spinoza to appear here is not the grim determinist or Stoic necessitarian made out by many of his critics and some of his friends. He is instead an exponent of the joys of life and all that it entails. Above all, the *Ethics* teaches us to

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embrace the world rather than flee from it, to regard freedom as a blessing rather than a curse, and to find pleasure in those things that tend to increase our sense of power and agency. The work, in short, is one of the touchstones of the modern idea of individuality. If Nietzsche was right—and I believe he was—that all philosophy is essentially autobiography, then the *Ethics* is the deepest expression of the soul of its author. It provides the fullest statement of Spinoza's views on freedom and the moral responsibility of the individual. Among other things, Spinoza's *Ethics* is the closest thing we have to an intellectual autobiography of this strange and elusive man.

The *Ethics* represents the perfection of modern rationalism, that is, the attempt to work out an account of nature, of the whole, from the sources of human reason. It is not only a classic document of modern rationalism; it belongs to that genre of books that brings to light the ancient quarrel between reason and faith, philosophy and revelation. This is the deepest and most serious problem to which the work is addressed. To understand the *Ethics* as Spinoza understood it is to regard it first and foremost as a reply to the author of Genesis. Yet this may seem to date the book, to locate it firmly at a moment in the Enlightenment's struggle against orthodoxy, its war against superstition. Indeed, the case for orthodoxy seems today to have been refuted by a combination of the methods of historical criticism and scientific method, both of which Spinoza himself helped to champion. Who today believes in the biblical account of miracles or talmudic doctrines about the resurrection of the dead? Yet the implausibility of these beliefs does not settle the case. For if the *Ethics* is an account of nature from the premises of reason alone, it is not clear to what experience or principle of logic we can appeal to verify those premises. Any appeal to reason to verify the principles of reason will be self-referential, hence question-

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begging. The verdict we reach on the *Ethics,* then, will be very much a verdict on modern rationalism or the Enlightenment as a whole. If Spinoza's work should unwittingly help to reveal the essential limitations of reason, this would require not an embrace of irrationalism but a reconsideration of orthodoxy.

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A Note on the Texts

The *Ethics* was not published until after Spinoza's death and was originally included as part of the *Opera Posthuma* in 1677. The standard scholarly edition of the work of Spinoza is still Carl Gebhardt's *Spinoza Opera,* 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925). Even though there is still no satisfactory edition of his collected works in English, there are at least excellent translations of individual works now available both by Edwin Curley and Samuel Shirley. Throughout this book I have used Curley's edition of the *Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), which includes not only the *Ethics* but also the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the *Short Treatise* and Shirley's translation of the *Theologico-Political Treatise.*

References to the *Ethics,* included in the body of the text, make use of the following shorthand:

I, II, etc.	part number
p	proposition
d	demonstration
s	scholium
c	corollary
def	definition
ap	appendix
pref	preface
def.aff	definition of the affects
TTP	*Theologico-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*)

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PT	*Political Treatise*
TIE	*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*
KV	*Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*
Ep	*The Letters* (*Epistola*)

References to the *Ethics* will take the form of IIIp9s to indicate the scholium to proposition nine of part three. I have also made occasional use of the Gebhardt pagination (included in Curley's edition) where the reference would be otherwise unclear, so IV, pref/207 refers to the preface to part four, page 207 of Gebhardt.

References to the *TTP* include chapter and Bruder section number followed by Gebhardt volume and page number—e.g., *TTP,* vii, 55; III/57, whereas references to *TIE* and *KV* include section numbers followed by Gebhardt volume and page number—e.g., *TIE,* xvi; II/9. References to *Ep* are given to the letter number only.

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Introduction

Who was the author of the *Ethics?*[1] Spinoza was born Bento Despinosa on November 24, 1632, in Amsterdam. His Hebrew name Baruch means "blessed." His father, Michael, was a reasonably well-to-do merchant who had arrived in Amsterdam from Portugal via Nantes sometime around 1623. While there is some dispute over the family's social standing, the fact that Michael served two terms on the *parnas,* the governing body of the Jewish-Portuguese community, fixes him as a member of the upper crust of the Amsterdam Sephardim. Spinoza's mother, Hanna, died in 1638 when he was only six years old, followed by his father in 1654. By the time he entered early adulthood, Spinoza was entirely alone except for a younger brother, Gabriel, with whom he later founded a fruit importing business under the names "Bento y Gabriel Despinosa."

Little is known of Spinoza's early life. The Jewish community in which he grew up consisted largely of Marranos, that is, Sephardic Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent who had been forcibly converted by the Inquisition and who later fled to France and the Netherlands to avoid further persecution. Spinoza received a typical Jewish education at the Talmud Torah school. His teachers included Saul Levi Morteira and Menasseh ben Israel, the latter a man of wide learning who helped to prepare for the readmission of the Jews to England. From an early age, Spinoza's intellectual gifts were noted. He was a polymath. In addition to Portuguese, the lingua franca of his community, Spanish, its literary language, and Dutch, the language of trade and commerce, he also learned Hebrew. He studied Latin at the

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school of a former Jesuit priest named Frances Van den Ende, from whom he also learned the classics of ancient philosophy, literature, and drama, as well as the works of modern political theory from Machiavelli to Grotius to Hobbes.

Then on July 27, 1656, for reasons that are still unknown, an edict of excommunication or *Cherem* was visited on Spinoza by the elders of the community. According to the language of the document that still survives in the Amsterdam Municipal Archives, the twenty-four-year-old Spinoza was henceforth to be "banned, cut off, cursed, and anathematized" by the people of Israel. No official reasons for this ban—which, incidentally, has never been rescinded—are given except for some vague references to certain "evil opinions," "abominable heresies," and "awful deeds" said to be practiced and taught by him. Indeed, not only was Spinoza himself put to the ban, but the text of the *Cherem* concludes with the ominous warning that anyone who seeks to contact him either orally or in writing, who reads anything he has written, does him any favor, or even comes "within four cubits of his vicinity" will suffer the same fate.[2]

It is still a shock to read the fiery language of Spinoza's edict of excommunication. The fact that such bans were not at all uncommon in the seventeenth century makes little difference. People could be put under a *Cherem* for a whole range of offenses, from such things as arriving at synagogue with a weapon or raising a hand against a fellow Jew, to buying meat from an Ashkenazic butcher or publicly insulting the Portuguese ambassador. Further, such bans were not intended to sever entirely the individual's relation to the community. Usually a time limit was imposed and some kind of penance in the form of a fine required for readmission. What made Spinoza's excommunication unusual was not only its permanence but that he made no effort to have the ban lifted or make amends. According to an older

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biographical tradition, he wrote a Spanish *Apology* defending his decision not to seek readmission to the community, but this work has never been found.[3] For all of his differences with the authorities, Spinoza was not an apostate. He refused to convert to Christianity, preferring to live independent of all established religious sects and attachments.

Why was Spinoza excommunicated? There is an older hagiographical literature that regards the excommunication along the lines of the trial of Socrates or Jesus. On this account, the excommunication is seen as a struggle between the free thinker and the forces of darkness, the new science against the authority of the rabbis. More recently, scholars like I. S. Revah and Yosef Kaplan have pointed to the influence of notable Marrano free thinkers like Uriel de Costa and Isaac Orobio de Castro on the young Spinoza.[4] Marxist critics have even argued that from an early age Spinoza was a social and political radical who threatened the economic interests of the parnassim, who were all heavily invested in the Dutch East India Company.[5]

Spinoza's recent biographer, Steven Nadler, suggests, plausibly, that the excommunication was a response to both internal and external considerations.[6] Internally the *Cherem* was a tool of social control designed to enforce moral conformity on a religious community that had only recently begun to reclaim its links with tradition after being driven underground by the forces of the Inquisition. Externally, there were limits to the famed Dutch tolerance. By 1656 Spinoza had already begun to taste the philosophy of Descartes and may even have begun to contemplate a commentary. Spinoza's excommunication coincided with one of the periodic campaigns against Cartesianism in the universities. Descartes's "new science" was widely believed to have atheistic implications at odds with the established Aristotelian science and the dominant Calvinist theology. The expulsion of a

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leading advocate of the new science could well have been a signal to the Dutch officials that heretics of any sort were as unwelcome in the Jewish community as among their Christian hosts.

What is clear is that from a very early time, the life of Spinoza became an object of fascination. His first biography, written by the French Protestant Jean Lucas, appeared shortly after his death.[7] The question that clearly befuddled Lucas and others is what kind of person could have forsaken the minority religion in which he had been brought up yet stand apart from the majority religion, which he refused to embrace. It was the image of Spinoza as more than an ordinary philosopher—as a kind of philosophical saint—that inspired such intense curiosity. The life of Spinoza became the model for Bayle's "virtuous atheist," who was able to live a life of exemplary piety and goodness while standing alone and aloof from all established religions.[8]

Spinoza's excommunication was clearly the most significant event in what was otherwise a life of more or less uninterrupted study. By 1661 he had left Amsterdam to escape continued hostility and settled in the village of Rijnsburg. By this time he was already acquainted with members of some dissenting sects like the Remonstrants and Collegiants, so called because they met in colleges or informal meeting houses. These groups rejected the austere Calvinist theology of the Dutch Reformed Church with its doctrine of predestination. They stressed a teaching of the "inner light" rather than official creed or dogma; they were what Leszek Kolakowski has called "chrétiens sans église."[9] There is even some evidence that he came into contact with a Quaker mission in Amsterdam and helped translate a Quaker tract into Hebrew. Just as he leaned toward latitudinarianism in theology, so was Spinoza drawn toward republicanism in politics. He identified with the freedom party in Dutch politics, which meant resistance not only to the power of the Calvinist clergy but to the monarchical designs of the House of Orange. It was in order to

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provide a manifesto for the republican cause that he interrupted his work on the *Ethics* and wrote the *TTP*.[10]

In 1665 Spinoza left Rijnsburg and moved to Voorburg, a suburb of The Hague. It was during these years that his reputation grew beyond the Dutch Cartesians like Pieter Balling and Jarig Jellesz to include a much wider European audience. His interest in optics put him in contact with the Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens, with whom he maintained a somewhat frosty relationship. He was also acquainted with Leibniz, who sought out his company, although Spinoza seems to have held him at arm's length ("I think it imprudent to entrust my writings to him so hastily. I should first like to know what he is doing in France" [*Ep* 72]). And he carried on a lengthy correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, the Secretary of the Royal Academy in London and a confidant of Sir Isaac Newton.

Spinoza's final years were spent in The Hague, where he witnessed the end of the golden age of Dutch politics.[11] The brutal murder of the brothers De Witt by a savage mob in 1672 led him to describe the psychology of the crowd as the "ultimi barbarorum." The next year he must have been gratified to receive an invitation to assume a professorship of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. Of course the idea of a highly reclusive and brittle personality like Spinoza taking up the public duties of lecturing seems in retrospect almost inconceivable. He politely but firmly turned down the offer on the grounds that his own love of peace and freedom of mind would be better assured if he remained a private person (*Ep* 48). Spinoza, who had never enjoyed good health, died on February 21, 1677, at the age of forty-four; consumption had been exacerbated by the dust created by his lens grinding.

At the time of his death Spinoza had published relatively little. The only work to bear his name on its title page during his lifetime was his commentary on Descartes's *Principles of Philoso-*

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phy (1663). The *TTP,* his major work of political philosophy, was published anonymously in 1670 bearing the name of a fictitious Hamburg publishing house. Several other works, including the *Political Treatise,* the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect,* and the *Compendium of Hebrew Grammar,* were left unfinished at the time of his death.[12] The *Ethics* was published only posthumously, largely for reasons of prudence and safety. Despite the relative tolerance of the Dutch republic, Spinoza feared persecution and set out his reasons for the delay of publication in a letter to Oldenburg:

> At the time when I received your letter of 22 July, I was setting out for Amsterdam, intending to put into print the book [*Ethics*] of which I had written to you. While I was engaged in this business, a rumor became wide-spread that a certain book of mine about God was in the press, and in it I endeavor to show that there is no God. This rumor found credence with many. So certain theologians, who may have started this rumor, seized the opportunity to complain of me before the Prince and the Magistrates. Moreover the stupid Cartesians, in order to remove this suspicion from themselves because they are thought to be on my side, ceased not to denounce everywhere my opinions and my writings, and still continue to do so. Having gathered this from certain trustworthy men who also declared that the theologians were everywhere plotting against me, I decided to postpone the publication I had in hand until I should see how matters would turn out, intending to let you know what course I would then pursue. But the situation seems to worsen day by day, and I am not sure what to do about it. (*Ep* 68)

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If this sounds like a classic case of persecution mania, it is worth remembering Henry Kissinger's dictum that sometimes even paranoids have enemies.

The influence of Spinoza's work was profound and immediate. He was routinely anathematized as a teacher of atheism and determinism in the century after his death. Leibniz, who as we have seen eagerly sought out Spinoza's opinions, led the pack. "He was truly an atheist," he wrote, "that is, he did not acknowledge any Providence which distributes good fortune and bad according to what is just."[13] Despite Bayle's appreciation for Spinoza's personal qualities (he described him as one of the *esprits forts*), he excoriated his philosophy in his entry in the *Historical and Critical Dictionary.* Bayle's opinion was echoed throughout the eighteenth century by Montesquieu, Hume, the authors of the *Encyclopédie,* and Kant for espousing a doctrine of cosmic determinism according to which whatever is, is just.

It was not until the end of the century that Spinoza was rehabilitated by the German Idealists as the bearer of a new kind of spirituality. The *Pantheismusstreit,* which we will consider in the final chapter, helped to canonize Spinoza as a kind of secular saint. The formal rehabilitation of Spinoza can be dated from 1785 with the publication of F. H. Jacobi's *Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza,* after which Spinoza was treated by Goethe, Schliermacher, and Novalis as the "God-intoxicated" philosopher. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spinoza was turned from a philosopher into a cultural icon on whom novelists and artists could project all the aspirations of modernity. If his thought provided inspiration for the ruthless naturalism of novels like *Cousin Bette* and *Madame Bovary,* the life of Spinoza was turned by Berthold Auerbach into a tale of secular redemption through a religion of reason. It was the very loneliness of Spinoza that turned him into an existential hero for writers who could no longer

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be orthodox but who still felt the pull of their own Jewishness. From Bialystok to the Bronx, Spinoza came to symbolize the emancipated or secular Jew, free from tradition and authority, determined to live life on its own terms.[14]

It is more recently as a moral psychologist and a student of the passions that Spinoza has been read. This view of Spinoza was canonized by Nietzsche, who read Spinoza as his own great precursor for regarding the mind, or what Nietzsche would later call "the will to truth," as the most powerful affect. In a letter to Overbeck he wrote: "I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted. I have a precursor, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza and that I should have turned to him just now was inspired by 'instinct.' Not only is his overall tendency like mine—making knowledge the most powerful affect—but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me in precisely these matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world order, the unegoistic, and evil. Even though the divergencies are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the differences in time, culture, and science."[15]

It was in this "most unusual and loneliest thinker" that Nietzsche clearly felt he had discovered a kindred spirit. Further, it is not just in what he rejects but in what he affirms that makes Spinoza's "overall tendency" a profound and far-reaching precursor of Nietzsche. For in Spinoza we find a doctrine of modern individuality, creativity, and the celebration of life as freedom. Like Nietzsche, Spinoza stands opposed to everything that represents a mutilation, mortification, or repudiation of life. As with every truly great thinker, the type of freedom Spinoza valued most was the freedom of mind. The *Ethics* is not merely a testimony to that freedom; it is an expression of it.

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I

Thinking about the *Ethics*

Spinoza's *Ethics* is by general consensus one of the most difficult books ever written.[1] This is so in part because the ideas that Spinoza sought to convey are inherently difficult. The themes of substance, attribute, necessity, and eternity are not such as to allow easy access. But Spinoza's work is made doubly difficult by the method by which he attempted to communicate these ideas. As a work written *in more geometrico,* the *Ethics* consists of formal propositions, definitions, scholia, and corollaries, all of which are said to follow from one another in the manner of a formal geometrical proof. Philosophy means for Spinoza reasoning in a deductive manner. Taking Euclid's *Elements* as its model, his work is set out as a moral geometry intended to lead the reader from a condition of moral confusion and chaos to the one true way of life. Its theme, as Leon Roth claimed years ago, is not just the True but the Good.[2]

The difficulties with the *Ethics* do not end here. Not only are there inherent difficulties with reading the book, but Spinoza's thought has proven peculiarly resistant to classification. What, exactly, has been Spinoza's achievement? Was he a medieval or a modern or, as Harry Wolfson believed, a modern with one foot still in the medieval world?[3] Was he a soulless materialist and atheist as Bayle and Hume believed or a mystical pantheist and "God intoxicated man" as Goethe, Novalis, and Emerson laid claim? Was he a ruthless determinist who believed that nothing, not even our innermost thoughts and beliefs, escaped the causal order of nature or an apostle of human freedom whose philosophy sought to liberate the mind from bondage to false

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beliefs and systems of power? A forerunner of German Idealism or Marxian materialism?[4] An individualist or a communitarian? The answer is to some degree all of the above.

Perhaps we can gain some clarity by examining Spinoza's major influences. But even here we find ourselves on no firmer ground. Like his older contemporary Thomas Hobbes, Spinoza is remarkably sparing with references to his predecessors, and when he does mention them, it is often brusquely to dismiss their various errors and fallacies. This has not stopped readers of the *Ethics* from attempting to situate the work within different intellectual contexts and traditions. According to Wolfson, Spinoza's philosophy is a kind of mélange of the works of the great Judeo-Arabic philosophers of the Middle Ages. For some, notably Edwin Curley, Spinoza belongs entirely to the world of modern philosophy, especially the Cartesian aspiration to create a "unified science" of man and nature bringing together metaphysics and morals.[5] For others, Spinoza was a product of the Marrano culture of Spain and the Iberian Peninsula who still utilized the forms of expression characteristic of a people living under the threat of persecution.[6] And for still others, Spinoza's philosophy constitutes a reworking of certain ancient Stoic moral positions.[7]

However much we can learn from historical studies of Spinoza's background, there is a sense in which he cannot be reduced to his various intellectual and cultural contexts. These may be useful for explaining this or that aspect of the *Ethics,* but all such attempts must necessarily fail in trying to make sense of the work as a whole. Spinoza was neither a renegade Maimonidean, a Cartesian, a Marrano, nor a Stoic. His work incorporates even as it transcends these various descriptions. His formal education both began and ended in the world of the Talmud Torah. This was a world deeply hostile to philosophy. The

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conflict between philosophy and religion, "Athens and Jerusalem," forms one of the essential motifs of his thought. Spinoza was himself a philosophical autodidact whose work drew on but was essentially independent of any particular tradition or school of thought. His readings in the philosophical literature were extensive but eclectic. He was an original who in the deepest sense of the term was a product of his own making.

To the extent that it is possible to classify the *Ethics,* it is as one of the great monuments to the modern enterprise. To be sure, modernity is an almost endlessly porous term. It can mean many things to many people. It has been defined by the rise of a scientific worldview often associated with mathematical physics, a skeptical disposition regarding religion and other traditional sources of authority, the emergence of the secular state, and the assertion of the autonomous individual as the primary locus of agency and moral responsibility. Spinoza endorses all of these features of modernity to varying degrees, although the aspect of his work to be emphasized here is his reading of human life as an adventure of self-discovery. The *Ethics* is nothing if not a testimony to the powers of human agency and the self-direction of the mind.[8]

The *Ethics* is a singular achievement written by someone who valued his own singularity. Its supreme achievement is to explore the moral and psychological postulates of freedom in a world that had been stripped, partly by Spinoza himself, of its previous theological, cosmological, and political moorings. His questions is: what place is there for human freedom in a world radically divested of divine purpose, devoid of telos, and in which human beings no longer occupy a "kingdom within a kingdom" but are rather fully articulated within a single self-contained system of nature? In this abyss of loneliness—the proverbial night in which all cows are gray—what conceivable grounds are left

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for the assertion of human dignity and moral responsibility? Despite its claims to geometrical certainty and mathematical truth, the *Ethics* conceals a deeply personal, even existential, work written out of an author's confrontation with his own solitude. In spite of its apparently selfless style and the author's injunction to rise above the limited human standpoint and embrace the perspective of eternity, the work is a celebration of freedom and life with all of its legitimate joys and pleasures.

Above all, Spinoza taught us to appreciate and value life—both our own and that of others. Accordingly he repudiated the classical depreciation of life as "mere" life. He also rejected the messianic emphasis on the world to come at the expense of the here and now. What is to be appreciated is not just the biological fact of existence, although this is not to be despised, but the consciousness of ourselves as rational beings who strive to increase our power and freedom even as we create obstacles that serve to frustrate those ends. The *Ethics* is a celebration of life, of joy and laughter, of sociability and friendship. Spinoza's philosophy culminates not in the grim and remorseless recognition of necessity, as is often portrayed, but in the enjoyment of the pleasures of mind and body working together as a unified whole that helps to secure the conditions for human autonomy. He is a tireless advocate of individual liberty in its moral, psychological, and metaphysical dimensions, and these taken together form a pendant to his liberal politics.

What Kind of Book Is the *Ethics*?

The kinds of questions raised above are made even more problematical when we ask what kind of book this is and who is its intended audience. Spinoza himself gives little by way of introduction. The title page announces only that it is a work in five parts which treats of the following subjects:

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1. Of God
2. Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind
3. Of the Origin and Nature of the Affects
4. Of Human Bondage, or of the Power of the Affects
5. Of the Power of the Intellect, or of Human Freedom

Spinoza's relative taciturnity on the purpose of the *Ethics* and its readership stands in marked contrast to the *TTP*, his major work of political philosophy. In the preface to the *TTP* he is remarkably candid about the larger aims of the work. It was written to separate the claims of philosophy from theology and to put them on entirely different footings (*TTP*, pref, 27; III/10). Philosophy is concerned with the realm of truth, theology with moral practice and obedience to God. Spinoza presents himself as protecting philosophy from those who would make reason bow to the claims of Scripture, and also protecting the sanctity of religion from the philosophical systematizers and rationalizers. Furthermore, this distinction is said to serve a political end. The goal of the *TTP* is not merely to protect theology from false systems of philosophy but to demonstrate that freedom to philosophize can be granted without any injury either to piety or to the peace and security of the state.

In addition Spinoza tells us a great deal about the intended audience for the *TTP*. In a letter written to Henry Oldenburg five years before the book was published he spoke frankly about whom he was trying to reach:

> I am now writing a Treatise about my interpretation of Scripture. This I am driven to do by the following reasons: 1. The prejudice of the theologians; for I know that these are among the chief obstacles which prevent men from directing their minds to philosophy; and to remove them from the minds of the more prudent. 2. The opinion which the com-

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> mon people have of me, who do not cease to accuse me falsely of atheism; I am also obliged to avert this accusation as far as it is possible to do so. 3. The freedom of philosophizing, and of saying what we think; this I desire to vindicate in every way, for here it is always suppressed through the excessive authority and impudence of the preachers. (*Ep* 30)

The distinction Spinoza draws here between the "prudent" reader (*prudentiorum*) and the "common people" (*vulgus*) is repeated in the preface to the *TTP*, where he refers to the "philosophical reader" (*philosophe lector*) and the "multitude" (*multitudo*) (*TTP*, pref, 33; III/12). Yet, while claiming to address the philosophical reader, in the very next breath Spinoza notes that everything to appear in the work will be "more than adequately known to philosophers." He seems to be positioning his audience between the "vulgar" or the "multitude" who live under the sway of superstition and prejudice and the true philosophers who already know what he is saying and for whom the book will be redundant. The audience seems to comprise not philosophers in the strict sense but potential philosophers, philosophers in the making, who still remain under the partial sway of theological prejudice but who can be induced by reason to reflect critically on the source of prejudice. It is a book written by a philosopher for potential philosophers out of a love for them and indeed out of a love for philosophy itself. The *TTP* is a book addressed to those who, in the words of Leo Strauss, "love to think."[9]

If the *TTP* is a work addressed to potential philosophers in order to cure them of their prejudices, the *Ethics* is a work that takes no prisoners. "I do not assume that I have discovered the best philosophy," he confidently asserts, "but I know that I understand the true one" (*Ep* 76). This sense of confidence pervades the work as a whole. The *Ethics* is addressed to philoso-

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phers pure and simple. What Spinoza means by a philosopher is addressed in a letter to William van Blyenbergh in which he alludes to his correspondent as "a pure philosopher who . . . has no other touchstone of truth than the natural intellect and not theology" (*Ep* 23). To be a philosopher means to accept the authority of reason pure and simple. A work of philosophy, as Spinoza understands it, is a work that can be understood by reason or the "natural intellect" alone. It makes no concession to time, place, and circumstance. It requires only a reader who can follow a chain of reasoning and accept unflinchingly what is found there. It will accept no argument that is not acceptable to reason. Spinoza's silence about his audience expresses the anonymity of reason itself. The *Ethics* is in the literal sense not Spinoza's philosophy at all; it is the philosophical biography of the idea of reason. In this respect the *Ethics* can truly be called a book for everyone and for no one.

Yet the impersonality of the book and its audience can be overstated. Even if the intended audience for the *Ethics* is smaller, perhaps infinitesimally smaller, than for the *TTP,* Spinoza still wrote the book with a practical intent in mind. The perfect philosopher, like the ancient sage, is at best an ideal, a heuristic, against which any actual reader should be judged. In the preface to part four of the *Ethics* he speaks of "a model of human nature to which we may look" (IVpref/208). Although he never uses this expression again, it is clearly the idea of the philosopher or the philosophic life that he is thinking of. Presumably for such an exemplar of human nature a book like the *Ethics* would be unnecessary, but for the less-than-perfect readers who actually exist, it might actually prove useful.

Spinoza's purpose was to liberate the mind from bondage to the passions and to encourage certain traits of character that he believes will increase the stock of human happiness. Among the virtues he recommends are the qualities of *animositas* and *gene-*

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rositas—tenacity and nobility—both of which are described as aspects of the comprehensive virtue of *fortitudo* or strength of character (IIIp59). This is the highest of the moral virtues to which the book aspires. The point or purpose of the *Ethics* as a whole is clearly a pedagogic one, that is, to foster an ideal state of human character. Its goal is precisely to lessen emotional distress, or what Spinoza calls *fluctuatio animi,* vacillation of mind, which is the principal cause of so much misery and human conflict. The *Ethics* is intended as a work of moral therapy in which the reader is simultaneously analyst and patient.

In More Geometrico

Perhaps the single greatest obstacle to entering the world of the *Ethics* is cracking the style of the book. The work is presented in the form of a moral geometry. This has led many readers to wonder what is the purpose of the geometrical form and what is its relation to the content of the work as a whole.[10] Is the axiomatic method in some sense required by Spinoza's philosophy or is it a matter of choice or convenience, much like a poet's decision to write in iambic pentameter? There were certainly many styles of philosophical communication open to him—the dialogue (Plato), the treatise (Aristotle), the autobiography (Augustine), the disputed question (Aquinas), or the essay (Montaigne). Why, then, present oneself in the manner of a geometer? There has been a variety of answers to this question.

The standard view of Spinoza, the textbook image of him passed down in countless introductory courses of philosophy, is that of a relentless rationalist who sought to prescribe how the human mind could achieve clear and distinct ideas by means of the unaided intellect. The mathematical method of reasoning seemed best suited to this pursuit of truth unencumbered by reference to revelation, history, or imaginative experience. Spinoza

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Nevertheless, Spinoza's commitment to the geometrical method is often taken to be part of his residual Cartesianism.[14] Descartes certainly had a special fondness for mathematics. Like him, Spinoza is convinced that all genuine knowledge is demonstrative or deductive in form. The geometrical method is intended to provide the *Ethics* with the form of a deductive system that reasons from self-evident propositions to substantive conclusions about the nature of things. This same procedure was advocated by Descartes in the *Discourse on Method:*

> Those long chains composed of very simple and easy reasoning, which geometers customarily use to arrive at their most difficult demonstrations, had given me occasion to suppose that all the things which can fall under human knowledge are interconnected in the same way. And I thought that, provided we refrain from accepting anything as true which is not, and always keep to the order required for deducing one thing from another, there can be nothing too remote to be reached in the end or too well hidden to be discovered. (AT, vi, 19)[15]

Descartes's infatuation with geometry was part of the new science and its attempt to achieve the complete mathematization of nature. For the apostles of this science—Galileo, Gassendi, Kepler, Hobbes, and a host of others—geometry seemed the ideal language of explanation whereby the ordinary world of perceptual phenomena revealed a whole new world of particles in motion. The sense of philosophical paranoia evinced in Descartes's dreams of evil geniuses is but the expression of the growing realization that the world of sensible forms, teleological explanations of natural happenings, and geocentric universes were all a kind of immense fiction from which mankind was only gradually awakening.[16] The answer to this kind of problem was

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provided by the language of geometry, which alone could establish grounds for certainty when everything else seemed liable to systematic doubt.

Descartes's use of mathematics was itself derived from Galileo's claim that "nature is written in the language of mathematics" (*grandissimo libro scritto in lingua mathematica*). The metaphor of the "two great books," nature and Scripture, were both taken to be mirrors of the divine. For Galileo, mathematics was henceforth conceived as the language of God: "Philosophy is written in that great book, the universe, which stands continually open to our gaze. But the book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures, without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth."[17]

The model of scientific proof was accepted as authoritative not only by Galileo and Descartes but by many of their most important contemporaries. Consider the well-known story from John Aubrey's life of Hobbes: "Being in a gentleman's library, Euclid's *Elements* lay open, and 'twas the 47th Proposition of the first Book. He read the Proposition. By God, said he . . . this is impossible! So he reads the demonstration of it, which referred back to such a Proposition; which proposition he read. That referred him back to another, which he also read. And so on, until at last he was demonstratively convinced of that truth. This made him in love with Geometry."[18]

Hobbes's passion for geometry underwrites his attempt to establish a political science founded only on mathematical exposition. In *Leviathan,* geometry, which is called "the only science that it hath pleased God hitherto to bestow on mankind," is but the science of names (*Lev,* iv, 12).[19] It consists in settling on defi-

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nitions and drawing out the necessary consequences therefrom. The problem with all previously existing philosophies has been the failure to agree on certain definitions and axioms at the outset of reasoning. Consequently the result has been to doom their efforts to "cant" and other forms of useless speech. Unlike prudence or "knowledge gotten from experience," reason consists "first in apt imposing of names, and secondly by getting a good and orderly method in proceeding from the elements, which are names, to assertions made by connexions of one of them to another . . . till we come to a knowledge of all the consequences of names appertaining to the subject in hand; and this is it men call SCIENCE" (*Lev,* v, 17).

Like Hobbes, Spinoza was an amateur mathematician in comparison to Descartes. Neither left any permanent contributions to mathematical knowledge. Perhaps due to his autodidacticism, Spinoza carried the geometrical project even further than Descartes had thought possible. The Cartesian method always presupposed a dualism between a materialist theory of nature and an immaterialist theory of the mind. There is evidence, however, that Spinoza regarded the geometrical method as more than an exposition of the nuclear structure of physical reality. He saw it as a universal method that in principle encompasses not just physics but psychology, ethics, and politics. While Descartes refrained, apparently from prudential grounds, from extending his geometrical approach to controversial subjects like theology and ethics, Spinoza tells us in the autobiographical preface to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (TIE)* that all the sciences serve a single end and that politics, too, can be treated as a branch of the science of substance (*TIE,* xvi; II/9).

This view seems to fit with another of Spinoza's major tenets, namely, that there can be no kingdom within a kingdom, no quarter of reality that is not subject to the same causal laws

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and processes as everything else (IVpref/137). The uniformity of method is based on the belief that there is in the final analysis only one science capturing within its scope a diverse class of entities and activities that might otherwise appear to be irreducibly diverse. It is part of the reductive strategy of the *Ethics* to peer behind the phenomenological diversity of appearances in order to discover their foundations in the common order of nature. There is nothing in the *Ethics* to approximate Aristotle's threefold classification of the sciences into the theoretical, practical, and productive branches of knowledge. In place of this older tradition, Spinoza offers a new conception of philosophy in which the human and nonhuman alike are treated by same method. As he puts it in the preface to part three: "I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies" (IIIpref/138).

How Many Spinozas?

The conception of the *Ethics* as a work of deductive metaphysics is obviously not false. One can easily say of Spinoza what Aubrey reported of Hobbes, that he was "in love with geometry." It is under this guise that Spinoza has seemed to many a kind of protopositivist trying to reduce or replace our everyday commonsense language and beliefs with a cryptoscientific vocabulary of substance, modes, and attributes. However, the image of Spinoza as a committed positivist devoted only to what can be demonstrated by means of clear and distinct ideas is profoundly misleading. Indeed, the first person to provide this misreading of Spinoza's work was Spinoza himself. A careful reading of the *Ethics* is enough to show that it is not a purely axiomatic work, as he sometimes makes it appear. It is a work that draws on a wide range of human experiences—historical, moral, imaginative, even autobiographical—to make its case. The geomet-

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rical method, far from a logically impregnable form, is in fact a kind of rhetoric that, like all rhetoric, often conceals more than it reveals. The standard conception of Spinoza has itself come under suspicion from those who have advised that we look, in Harry Wolfson's fine phrase, "behind the geometrical method."[20] What is it that we can expect to find there?

According to Wolfson's argument, Spinoza's geometrical method is not intended as an exact representation of the structure of the universe, but as a pedagogical device for presenting philosophical arguments. Wolfson even speaks of this method as a "literary form," that is, "a peculiar piece of writing" that Spinoza adopted for expository purposes.[21] He regards this method not as expressing Spinoza's ontological commitments but as a matter of convenience for expressing complicated trains of thought in a relatively shorthand manner. As such, the geometrical form is merely the external casement in which Spinoza chose to cast his major ideas.

The choice of this method was not, however, altogether arbitrary. Wolfson accounts for this choice as a product of the peculiar circumstances in which the work was written. Because of the conditions of his exile, Spinoza lacked challenging students and friends who were prepared to ask tough questions and hold his feet to the fire. His correspondents and associates were genial laymen who lacked the ability to serve as an effective sounding board for his ideas during the developmental stages of his thinking. Spinoza's use of the geometrical method was intended as an exoteric cover in which to conceal some of his more polemical and controversial conclusions.[22]

Wolfson adds an important moral element to Spinoza's use of the geometrical method. It is not simply a matter of convenience but an important instrument of moral self-control. It grew out of a sense of caution and decorum: "In this strange environment, to which externally he seems to have fully adjusted himself, Spi-

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lia form a book of Anger and Laughter, as if it were Spinoza's anti-Bible."[29] The difference between the propositions and the scholia, he concludes, are like "two versions of the language of God."[30]

The idea that the scholia form an independent Hebrew work, if taken literally, is absurd. But Deleuze is at least half right to say that Spinoza wrote his book as an "anti-Bible," although he overlooks the way in which he modeled it on the original. Like the Torah, the *Ethics* is a book written in five parts, a Pentateuch of sorts. But the *Ethics* is much more than an anti-Bible. It takes to heart and with the utmost seriousness the Shemah, the biblical injunction known to every Jew: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One." The book as a whole can be seen as a sustained midrash on this biblical passage. What is it to think of God as One? If God truly is One—the locus of all power and perfection—how is it possible for him (or it) to create something outside of and independent of himself that would seem to limit his power and perfection? Further, if God is truly One, this would seem to make not just human beings, but rocks and birds and all of the things under the earth and in the heavens a part of this One, no longer objects with an independent existence but, literally, parts of God. He seems committed to denying the ontological status of individuals. These are the questions that inform virtually every page of the *Ethics* and from which the logic of the work unfolds.

The theme of Oneness, which in the philosophical tradition goes back to Parmenides and the pre-Socratics, for Spinoza grows out of the biblical tradition of the single God. To be sure, the God of Spinoza is set up in direct opposition to the God of Genesis. The God of the *Ethics* is not the creator of heaven and earth but is an extended substance composed of an infinity of attributes that is purely immanent throughout nature. Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* in part to free men from the historical practices

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of religion and from the revealed script upon which those practices were based. His theology, such as it is, is based on a new kind of piety with a new form of worship, the worship of nature. His formula *Deus sive natura,* God or nature, denies the transcendent status of the divine in part because he seeks to divinize the natural world. He invests nature and natural processes with an element of sublimity that makes the *Ethics* a worthy companion to Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.[31]

The Style Is the Man

The efforts to read Spinoza's choice of the geometrical method as a literary form or a pedagogical device have considerable merit. In particular they cast doubt on the element of necessity that is often attributed to this form. The idea that there is a relation of logical entailment between Spinoza's view of the world and his geometrical method is false. There are many ways of communicating truth that do not require axiomatic form. But even if there is no logical necessity in Spinoza's manner of presentation, this is not to say that his choice of this method was purely fortuitous. Even if there is no logical necessity, there is still a moral necessity to Spinoza's choice of method.

The geometrical method was for Spinoza, Hobbes, and Descartes strongly related not just to a model of knowledge but to their very ideas of the individual. It has a definite moral purpose, but it is not one of self-abnegation or self-denial, as both Hampshire and Wolfson believe, but rather of individual self-creation. The mathematical method was not for these early moderns a means of purging their philosophies of all personal touches or expressions of individuality, but was closely bound up with a vision of human beings as the products of their own making. Mathematics as a system of symbolization became the paradigm for the individual as, literally, something self-constructed.[32]

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greater degrees of adequation. Like the Torah, the *Ethics* begins with a general account of God's provenance in the world, his power and attributes, and moves quickly to an exploration of the human condition within the causal order of nature. It concludes with a soul-swelling conception of freedom as "the intellectual love of God."

It is not an exaggeration to say that Spinoza makes freedom into the core of the *Ethics*. His treatment of God, body, mind, and the passions are all written with an eye to how they illuminate the great problem of human freedom. Indeed, what distinguishes Spinoza from prior theological and philosophical thinkers is the value and shape that he accords to the idea of freedom. In contrasting the philosophies of Aristotle and Spinoza in his book *Morality and Conflict*, Stuart Hampshire had it more or less correct when he wrote: "There have been changes both in knowledge and in ways of life, which have the effect of making Aristotle's construction of moral and particularly political thought seem incorrigibly incomplete. The succinct phrase for the barrier, and for the missing element, is the concept of freedom, which is applied in individual psychology and politics."[41]

Spinoza's status as a prophet of modern freedom entailed a profound transformation and rupture not just with Aristotle and the classical tradition but with the prevailing orthodoxies, both theological and philosophical, of his own time. Unlike his greatest philosophical contemporaries, Spinoza does not equate freedom with the mastery and control of nature. There is not the kind of "prometheanism" associated with the Baconian or Cartesian quest to turn us into the masters and possessors of nature.[42] Nowhere do we find the dream of a science of universal human mastery of the kind associated with Descartes's *Discourse of Method* (AT, vi, 62). Spinoza seems less impressed with our capacity to transform nature than with our embedded-

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Notes

Preface

1. Richard Popkin, "The Excommunicant," *London Review of Books,* October 15, 1998, p. 38.
2. Among the most prominent are Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984); Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Susan James, *Passions and Actions: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

Introduction

1. The best recent biography is Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); there is still much valuable information contained in K. O. Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle* (Paris: Vrin, 1983) and Madelaine Francès, *Spinoza dans les pays néerlandais de la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Alcan, 1937).
2. For the details of Spinoza's excommunication, see Nadler, *Spinoza,* pp. 116–54; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics,* vol. 1: *The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 3–14, 76–80; Genvième Bryckman, *La Judéité de Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1972), pp. 16–31.
3. Pierre Bayle, "Spinoza," *Historical and Critical Dictionary,* trans. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), p. 292.
4. I. S. Revah, *Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado* (Paris: Mouton, 1959); Joseph Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro,* trans. Raphael Loewe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
5. Lewis Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1987), pp. 25–26.
6. Nadler, *Spinoza,* pp. 125–27, 147–53.
7. Jean Lucas, *La vie et l'espirt de Mr. Benoit de Spinoza [1719]: The Oldest Biography of Spinoza,* trans. A. Wolf (London: Dial Press, 1928).
8. Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet,* trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 214–16; see Isabelle Delpla,

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"Bayle: Pensées diverses sur l'atheisme ou le paradoxe de l'athée citoyen," *Figures du theologico-politique,* ed. E. Cattin, L. Jaffro, A. Petit (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999), p. 117–47.

9. Leszek Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église: La conscience religieuse et le lien confessional au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).
10. See Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics,* trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 1–24.
11. This story is told at length in Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
12. Bryckman, *La Judéité de Spinoza,* pp. 117–30, regards this as evidence for Spinoza's interest in returning to the Jewish community.
13. Cited in Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics,* p. 34; see also Georges Friedmann, *Leibniz et Spinoza* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), pp. 107–8.
14. Among other works in this genre, see Isaac Bashevis Singer, "The Spinoza of Market Street"; Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer;* Paul Auster, *Mister Vertigo.*
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1965), p. 92.

Chapter 1. Thinking about the *Ethics*

1. Every reader of Spinoza is indebted to, among others, Frederick Pollock, *Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1899); H. H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901); Richard McKeon, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York: Longmans, 1928); David Bidney, *The Psychology and Ethics of Spinoza* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Sylvan Zac, *L'idée de la vie dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, 1963); Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza,* vol. 1: *Dieu;* vol. 2: *L'Ame* (Paris: Aubier, 1968, 1974); Pierre Machery, *Introduction à l'Ethique de Spinoza,* 5 vols. (Paris: PUF, 1994–98).
2. Leon Roth, *Spinoza* (London: Ernest Benn, 1929), p. 234.
3. Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 1:vii.
4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), 3:283: "Of modern philosophy it may truly be said: You are either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all." Louis Althusser, in *Lire le Capital* (Paris: Maspero, 1965), describes Spinoza as "le seul ancêtre diret de Marx" (p. 128).

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1994); henceforth cited as *Lev* with reference to chapter and section numbers.

20. Harry A. Wolfson, "Behind the Geometrical Method," *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays,* ed. Marjorie Grene (Garden City: Anchor, 1973), pp. 3–24.
21. Wolfson, "Behind the Geometrical Method," p. 17.
22. Wolfson, "Behind the Geometrical Method," p. 18.
23. Wolfson, "Behind the Geometrical Method," p. 18.
24. Wolfson, "Behind the Geometrical Method," p. 19.
25. Efraim Shmueli, "The Geometrical Method, Personal Caution, and the Idea of Tolerance," in *Spinoza: New Perspectives,* ed. Robert W. Shahan and J. I. Biro (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), pp. 197–215.
26. Shmueli, "The Geometrical Method," pp. 208–09.
27. Shmueli, "The Geometrical Method," p. 209.
28. Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics,'" in *The New Spinoza,* ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 20–33.
29. Deleuze, "Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics,'" p. 27.
30. Deleuze, "Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics,'" p. 28.
31. Stuart Hampshire, "Two Theories of Morality," *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 66; the connection between Spinoza and Kant needs to be more fully explored.
32. For the relation between geometry and constructivist metaphors of knowledge, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 290–345; for the relation between the ancient and modern conceptions of mathematical concepts, see Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origin of Algebra,* trans. Eva Brann (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), pp. 117–25.
33. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination,* p. 316.
34. On the constructivist character of Hobbesian political science, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 171–77.
35. David Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry: A Genealogy of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1989).
36. Lachterman, *The Ethics of Geometry,* pp. 2–3.
37. For the source of *verum = factum,* see Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians,* trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 45–47; for the uses to which this principle has been put,

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