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978-0-521-19888-2 - Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy and the Good Life

Matthew J. Kisner

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SPINOZA ON HUMAN FREEDOM

Spinoza was one of the most influential figures of the Enlightenment, but his often obscure metaphysics makes it difficult to understand the ultimate message of his philosophy. Although he regarded freedom as the fundamental goal of his ethics and politics, his theory of freedom has not received sustained, comprehensive treatment. Spinoza holds that we attain freedom by governing ourselves according to practical principles, which express many of our deepest moral commitments. Matthew J. Kisner focuses on this theory and presents an alternative picture of the ethical project driving Spinoza's philosophical system. His study of the neglected practical philosophy provides an accessible and concrete picture of what it means to live as Spinoza's ethics envisioned.

MATTHEW J. KISNER is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of South Carolina. He has previously published articles on a variety of topics in early modern philosophy, including Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and Malebranche.

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For Michael

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Translations of Spinoza's writings most often follow *Spinoza: Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), though I often use my own translations, which have benefited from consulting *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, volume 1, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton University Press, 1985). Translations from the *Theological-Political Treatise* are generally my own, though I have taken account of Shirley, as well as Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel's *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge University Press, 2007). All translations of Kant's practical philosophy are from the Cambridge edition of the *Works of Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge University Press, 1996). Abbreviations used are as follows:

- | | |
|-------|---|
| A/B | Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), cited by page number from the first and second (A and B) editions of the text. |
| CM | Spinoza's <i>Cogitata Metaphysica</i> , the appendix to his <i>Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae</i> , cited by part and chapter. |
| CPR | Kant, <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i> , cited by volume and page number from the Academy Edition (<i>Akademie Ausgabe</i> or Ak) of Kant's collected writings. |
| CSM/K | <i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1984, 1985), volume III, trans. Anthony Kenny (1991), with marginal pagination to <i>Oeuvres de Descartes</i> , ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–74). Cited by volume and page number. |

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<i>G</i>	Kant, <i>Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals</i> , cited by volume and page number from Ak.
<i>KV</i>	Spinoza's <i>Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand</i> , cited by book and chapter.
<i>L</i>	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i> , cited by chapter, section and page number in Edwin Curley's critical edition (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994).
<i>MM</i>	Kant, <i>Metaphysics of Morals</i> , cited by volume and page number from Ak.
<i>TdIE</i>	Spinoza's <i>Tractatus de Intellectus Emandatione</i> , cited by paragraph number from <i>Benedicti de Spinoza Opera quae supersunt omnia</i> , ed. Carolus Hermannus Bruder (Leipzig, 1843–6), volume II.
<i>TP</i>	Spinoza's <i>Tractatus Politicus</i> , cited by chapter and paragraph number from Spinoza's <i>Opera Posthuma</i> , ed. R. W. Meijer, 1677.
<i>TTP</i>	Spinoza's <i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i> , cited by chapter and paragraph number from Fokke Akkerman's critical edition of the text (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999).

Spinoza's *Ethics* is cited by part and proposition using the following abbreviations:

a	axiom
app	appendix
c	corollary
d	demonstration
def	definition
DOE	Definition of the Emotions (end of Part 3)
ex	explanation
p	proposition
s	scholium

Thus, 2p49d = *Ethics*, Part 2, proposition 49, demonstration.

Spinoza's *Correspondence* is cited by letter number from J. Van Vloten and J. P. N. Land's 1882 edition of Spinoza's collected works.

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The jacket cover features the *Philosopher and Pupils* by seventeenth-century Dutch painter Willem van der Vliet. I chose this image because it represents the philosopher as social and active, rather than solitary and contemplative, as in more familiar representations of the period, such as Rembrandt's *The Philosopher in Meditation*. The present work is guided by the conviction that Van der Vliet's painting comes far closer to capturing Spinoza's understanding of the life of reason and freedom. Special thanks to the National Trust for Scotland for permission to use the image.

This book was made possible by the University of South Carolina, which has nurtured my career in innumerable ways, from providing me with opportunities to teach the relevant material to time away from teaching altogether. I am grateful to my colleagues in the philosophy department for their support during the years it has taken me to complete this book. I would like to thank the community of Spinoza scholars, who have been so welcoming and have taught me so much. In particular, Andrew Youpa has been a tireless interlocutor and a good friend. Michael LeBuffe has shown extraordinary patience in slogging through my early, often muddled, drafts, and Eugene Marshall has always been generous in taking the time to engage with my hasty e-mails. The entire manuscript was read by two anonymous referees from this press and one from another. Without their conscientious service in providing such thoughtful criticism, this work would be greatly impoverished. Kevin Elliot provided helpful comments on an earlier draft, going above and beyond the usual requirements of a colleague specializing in an unrelated area. I also received helpful comments on earlier portions of this book, often in article form, from Michael Della Rocca, Donald Rutherford, Justin Weinberg, Holly Groover, participants in a graduate seminar at the University of South Carolina, particularly Travis Reider, and a great number of anonymous referees from various journals. My work has also benefited from participants at talks and conferences where I presented portions of this work, including several sessions of the American

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