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.

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For Michael
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CM Spinoza’s *Cogitata Metaphysica*, the appendix to his *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae*, cited by part and chapter.

CPR Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, cited by volume and page number from the Academy Edition (*Akademie Ausgabe* or *Ak*) of Kant’s collected writings.

Abbreviations and translations

G  Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, cited by volume and page number from Ak.

KV  Spinoza’s *Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand*, cited by book and chapter.


MM  Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, cited by volume and page number from Ak.

TdIE  Spinoza’s *Tractatus de Intellectus Emandatione*, cited by paragraph number from *Benedicti de Spinoza Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carolus Hermannus Bruder (Leipzig, 1843–6), volume ii.

TP  Spinoza’s *Tractatus Politicus*, cited by chapter and paragraph number from Spinoza’s *Opera Posthuma*, ed. R. W. Meijer, 1677.


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.
Acknowledgments

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.

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