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MEANING IN SPINOZA'S METHOD

Readers of Spinoza's philosophy have often been daunted, and sometimes been enchanted, by the geometrical method which he employs in his philosophical masterpiece the *Ethics*. In *Meaning in Spinoza's Method* Aaron Garrett examines this method and suggests that its purpose, in Spinoza's view, was not just to present claims and propositions, but also in some sense to change the readers and allow them to look at themselves and the world in a different way. His discussion draws not only on Spinoza's works, but also on those of the philosophers who influenced Spinoza most strongly, including Hobbes, Descartes, Maimonides, and Gersonides. This original and controversial book will be of interest to historians of philosophy and to anyone interested in the relation between form and content in philosophical works.

AARON V. GARRETT is Assistant Professor at Boston University. He has contributed to a number of publications and is the editor of Francis Hutcheson's *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (2003), and of *Animal Rights and Souls in the Eighteenth Century* (2000).

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Let us conceive now, if you please, that there is a little worm living in the blood which is capable of distinguishing by sight the particles of the blood, of lymph, of chyle, and the like, and capable of observing by reason how each particle, when it encounters another, either bounces back, or communicates a part of its motion, and so on. Indeed, it would live in this blood as we do in a part of the universe, and would consider each particle of the blood as a whole, not as a part. Nor could it know how all the parts of the blood are regulated by the universal nature of the blood, and compelled to adapt themselves to one another, as the universal nature of the blood requires, so that they harmonize with one another in a certain way.

(Letter XXXII – Voorburg, 20 November 1665)

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Acknowledgments

After I defended my dissertation my supervisor, Yirmiyahu Yovel, suggested that I try to answer two further questions: (1) What did Spinoza understand by the third kind of knowledge in the *Ethics*? (2) What is the relation between the *Ethics* and Spinoza's earlier work, the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*? At the time I did not realize that, in trying to answer these two questions, I would need to rethink and revise how I understood Spinoza's method and ultimately reject most of what I had written in my dissertation. My deepest thanks to Yirmiyahu Yovel for supervising my dissertation and then helping me to move well beyond it. The manuscript from which this book was built was originally called "A Worm in the Blood." My editor properly pointed out that the title was somewhat nauseating and would probably condemn the book to be shelved in the biology section of bookstores. But please keep in mind that this was the original title and my guiding theme for finding some meaning in Spinoza's method.

Many people have helped me with writing this book, only a few of whom I can list. The community of Spinoza scholars is, fittingly, one of the kindest and most thoughtful in academe, and I have benefited greatly from it. Henry Allison, Michael Della Rocca, Shelly Kroll, Justin Steinberg, Amelie Rorty, and Andrew Pyle all read the manuscript in full and provided many helpful comments. Michael, in particular, read two drafts (!), forced me to clarify much murk in the manuscript (although there is much remaining), and gave me countless specific criticisms and corrections from which I benefited enormously. All aided me greatly in turning a draft into a book.

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Abbreviations

<i>AT</i>	<i>Oeuvres de Descartes</i> , ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964–76).
<i>CM</i>	<i>Cogitata Metaphysica</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Spinoza</i> , ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton University Press, 1985).
<i>DC</i>	<i>De Corpore</i>
<i>DM</i>	<i>Discourse on Method</i>
<i>KV</i>	<i>Korte Verhandelng</i>
<i>NS</i>	<i>Nagelate Schriften</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Principles of Descartes' Philosophy</i>
<i>PWD</i>	<i>The Philosophical Writings of Descartes</i> , ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, 3 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1988–91).
<i>TIE</i>	<i>Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione</i>
<i>TP</i>	<i>Tractatus Politicus</i>
<i>TTP</i>	<i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i>

Texts and editions

All English translations of Spinoza's *Ethics* are my own except when noted. Some are taken from Edwin Curley (ed. and trans.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton University Press, 1985). Translations from Curley's *Ethics* will be abbreviated as *CW*, and this abbreviation will also be used when I make reference to his editorial apparatus and commentary. Curley's translations are far superior to mine, but I have relied on my clumsier translations to get across some of the technical oddities in Spinoza's Latin. All passages cited from the *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae*, the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, and the *Korte Verhandelinge* are from Curley's edition, and Curley's translation is used. The abbreviation *NS* in some of Curley's translations refers to variant readings from the *Nagelate Schriften*, the Dutch translation of Spinoza's works. Thanks to Princeton University Press for allowing me to cite from Curley's edition. Latin quotes will be referenced to Carl Gebhardt (ed.), *Spinoza Opera*, 6 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, 1925). Although the new French critical edition of Spinoza, Pierre-François Moreau (ed.), *Spinoza: Oeuvres* (Paris: PUF, 1999–), establishes texts which supersede Gebhardt, the edition references the standard Gebhardt page numbers. I will use the following standard abbreviations throughout: quotes from the *Ethics* will be simply referenced by part and number (i.e., "III4"). The *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* will be abbreviated *TIE* and referenced by paragraph number (i.e., "TIE 99"). Abbreviations employed in the text to refer to Spinoza's other works will be *TTP* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*), *TP* (*Tractatus Politicus*), *PP* (*Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae*), and *KV* (*Korte Verhandelinge*). All will be referenced by chapter and section numbers and when necessary Gebhardt page (abbreviated by volume and page), except the *PP* which will be referenced by proposition. Spinoza's letters will be cited in the text as "Letter" followed by a roman numeral number; i.e. Letter 30 will be cited as "Letter XXX." All translations from Spinoza's letters are from, Abraham Wolf (ed. and trans.), *The Correspondence of Spinoza* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1928),

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except when noted. Hobbes' *De Corpore* will be abbreviated in the text as *DC* followed by chapter and section numbers. Descartes' "Essay" which opens the *Discourse on Method* will be abbreviated *DM* and referenced by its sections (i.e. *DM* III). All passages from Descartes will be abbreviated *AT* and cited from the Adam and Tannery edition, Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982). Translations are from John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (ed. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1988–91).