

Introduction

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Spinoza's fame—or notoriety—is due primarily to his posthumously published magnum opus, the *Ethics*, and, to a somewhat lesser extent, to the 1670 *Theological-Political Treatise*. Few readers take the time to study his early works carefully. If they do, they are likely to encounter some surprising claims, which often diverge from, or even utterly contradict, the doctrines of the *Ethics*. Consider just a few of these assertions: that God acts from absolute freedom of will,¹ that God is a whole,² that there are no modes in God,³ that extension is divisible and hence cannot be an attribute of God,⁴ and that the intellectual and corporeal substances are modes in relation to God.⁵ Yet, though these claims reveal some tension between the early works and the *Ethics*, there is also a clear continuity between them.

Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* over a long period of time, which spanned most of his philosophical career. The dates of the early drafts of the *Ethics*, as documented in his earliest letters,⁶ seem to overlap (or almost overlap) with the assumed dates of the composition of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* and the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, and precede the publication of Spinoza's 1663 book on Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy*. For this reason, it seems that a study of Spinoza's early works (and correspondence) could illuminate the nature of the problems Spinoza addresses in the *Ethics*, insofar as the views expressed in the early works help us reconstruct

¹ CM I 2 | G I/238/6, 15. Cf. CM II 9 | G I/266/12.

² KV I 2 (First dialogue) | G I/30/31.

³ CM II 5 | G I/258/32.

⁴ CM I 2 | G I/237/30.

⁵ KV I 2 (First dialogue) | G I/29/26.

⁶ See Eps. 2 and 4.

the development and genealogy of the *Ethics*. Indeed, if we keep in mind the common dictum “nothing comes from nothing”—which Spinoza frequently cites and appeals to—it is clear that great works like the *Ethics* do not appear ex nihilo. In light of the preeminence and majesty of the *Ethics*, it is difficult to study the early works without having the *Ethics* in sight. Still, I would venture to say that the value of Spinoza’s early works is not at all limited to their being stations on the road leading to the *Ethics*. A teleological attitude of such a sort would celebrate the works of the “mature Spinoza” at the expense of the early works. However, we have no reason to assume that on *all* issues the views of the *Ethics* are better argued, developed, and motivated than those of the early works. In other words, we should keep our minds open to the possibility that on *some* issues the early works might contain better analyses and argumentation than the *Ethics*.

The mid-nineteenth-century discovery of the two Dutch manuscripts of Spinoza’s *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* proved to deliver a crucial impetus for the study of the formation of Spinoza’s thought and his early works. The publication of Meinsma’s seminal 1896 study and collection of sources, *Spinoza en zijn kring*, was followed in the twentieth century by the important books of Jacob Freudenthal (*Spinoza: sein Leben und seine Lehre*, 1904), Stanislaus von Dunin-Borkowski (*De jonge de Spinoza*, 1910), I. S. Révah (*Spinoza et Juan de Prado*, 1959), and Henry Méchoulan (*Amsterdam au temps de Spinoza*, 1990). These crucial tomes, alongside scrupulous philological works by Filippo Mignini, Fokke Akkerman, and Piet Steenbakkers and more recent studies by Yosef Kaplan on the seventeenth-century Jewish community of Amsterdam, placed the field on solid ground. Nevertheless, there is still much regarding Spinoza’s early biography and thought that is shrouded by the veils of ignorance and ideology. Specifically, we seem to have little solid knowledge of the reasons for the ban placed on Spinoza in July 1656, and of Spinoza’s intellectual development in the following years. Regrettably, much of the discussion of Spinoza’s attitude toward Jewish philosophy and thought has been motivated and masked by ideologies and counter-ideologies. On the one hand, we encounter the still-common narrative, which could be dismissed as simple ignorance were it not the outcome of deeply entrenched prejudices, of Spinoza’s ascent from the fundamentalist philosophy of the rabbis to the enlightenment of Cartesianism. In fact, the major medieval Jewish philosophers—Maimonides, Gersonides, and Hasdai Crescas—openly advocated views which hardly any Cartesian would dare entertain due to their heretic perception in the Christian context. On the other hand, we find the ideological construct of “Philonic philosophy” by Harry A. Wolfson, who virtually effaced any difference between Spinoza and his medieval predecessors (as well as between the various medieval philosophers themselves) in an attempt to provide a counter-narrative to Hegel’s Christian historiography of the history of philosophy. Thus a careful, thorough, and ideology-free examination of

Spinoza's critical dialogue with Jewish sources is still a desideratum, awaiting the formation of a critical mass of scholars equipped with the required philological and philosophical skills.

Most of the essays in the current collection stems from two jointly organized conferences that were held in the fall of 2011 at Johns Hopkins University and the *École normale supérieure de Lyon*. The aim of the conferences, and of this collection, was not to provide a systematic commentary on the corpus of Spinoza's early works, but rather to bring together scholars from several continents, with diverse philosophical orientations and scholarly interests, in order to stimulate the study of Spinoza's early works. For this reason, I have not hesitated, as editor, to allow some degree of overlap among the topics of the papers, especially since they display well-distinguished attitudes. The scholarly literature on the early works of Spinoza is quite limited (especially in English), and it is my hope that the current volume will stimulate interest and further study of this argument-rich, bold, and imaginative corpus. Our aim here is not to summarize the achievements of a certain research agenda, but rather to re-launch one.

The twenty studies assembled in this volume differ significantly in their scope. Some concentrate on a single work by the young Spinoza, while others discuss a broad selection of texts. In the first of these studies, **Edwin Curley**, a leading scholar and translator of Spinoza for several decades, addresses an early work of Spinoza's that is not available to us (and perhaps never existed at all!). In his *Dictionary* article on Spinoza, Bayle claimed that Spinoza had composed (but never printed) a defense of his departure from the synagogue, which included many of the things that subsequently appeared in his "pernicious and detestable" *Theological-Political Treatise*. Curley attempts to determine what this work might have contained, assuming that it existed.

In 1979 **Filippo Mignini** published a groundbreaking study that contested the then commonly assumed chronology of Spinoza's development, and argued that the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (= TIE, first published in Spinoza's 1677 *Opera Posthuma*) had been written by Spinoza before the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*.⁷ Over the past thirty-five years, several editions and translations of Spinoza's early works have appeared, along with a number of studies concerning the formation of his philosophy, and a great majority of these have followed this seminal essay, either in its entirety or in partial form.⁸ In his current contribution (Chapter 2 of this volume), Mignini provides additional evidence in support of the anteriority of the TIE, and further develops his general interpretation of it, by focusing on Spinoza's notion of "fiction."

⁷ F. Mignini, "Per la datazione e l'interpretazione"; see also F. Mignini, "Nuovi contributi."

⁸ S. Auffret-Ferzli, "L'hypothèse d'une rédaction échelonnée."

Two studies address the crucial notion of truth in the TIE. According to **Alan Nelson** in Chapter 3, though the TIE emphasizes the project of attaining true ideas, it proposes that the final goal, the “highest good,” is to perfect one’s nature through the “knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature” (TIE §13). In the first part of his chapter, Nelson draws out connections that Spinoza seems to be making between true ideas and the unification of the mind with the whole of Nature, or God, and points out the Cartesian background of these connections. The second part of the chapter traces the development of these themes in the *Ethics*. The goal of the *Ethics* is again to achieve union with God, but now this is to happen through an intellectual love of God, which is “the very love of God by which God loves himself” (E5p36) and *one and the same* as God’s love of men (E5p36c). The mind’s being a true idea of the body, however, appears to be inconsistent with unification with God, because the mind is affected by other finite things. In Chapter 4, **John Morrison** suggests a thorough and systematic new interpretation of Spinoza’s concept of truth in the TIE (and the *Ethics*), according to which an idea of x that is contained in S ’s mind is true, if and only if, (1) it represents x ’s essence (and perhaps properties) but nothing else, and (2) it is contained in S ’s inborn idea of her own essence, or was deduced by S from ideas contained in her inborn idea of her own essence.

Michael LeBuffe’s contribution (Chapter 5) addresses the provisional morality of the TIE. According to LeBuffe, the young Spinoza proposes that even as we work at emending the intellect we should live by certain rules, which we must assume to be good. We should accommodate ordinary ways of speaking and living to the extent that we can without compromising our project. We should enjoy pleasures in moderation. Finally, we should seek instrumental goods only insofar as they are necessary for health and social acceptability. In order to explain shifts in Spinoza’s views about the way that we should live while we pursue the good, LeBuffe traces developments in his accounts of ideas and of the relationship between the philosopher and society. The final essay to concentrate on the TIE is by **Mogens Lærke**, who studies Leibniz’s engagement with this work. In May 1678, Leibniz wrote from Hanover to his friend Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus: “Surely you do not ignore that the posthumous works of Spinoza have been published. Among them there is a fragment *On the Emendation of the Intellect*, but he stops exactly at the place where I expected the most” (A II, i, 413). This short passage constitutes the only direct evaluation of Spinoza’s TIE by Leibniz that we know of. It was the result of his first (and last) reading of the text, which had taken place some four months earlier, shortly after the son of a certain Abraham Arendt brought Leibniz a copy of the freshly printed *Opera Posthuma*, which had been sent directly to Hanover from Amsterdam by one of the editors of the work, Hermann Schuller. At that time, Leibniz read the TIE attentively, underlining and writing short marginal comments in his copy of the work. Leibniz’s evaluation of the TIE in the

letter to Tschirnhaus expresses disappointment, and one wonders what exactly it was that Leibniz so eagerly expected to learn at the point where Spinoza's text breaks off with a *reliqui desiderantur*. In Chapter 6, Lærke attempts to answer this question by reconstructing Leibniz's reading of the TIE on the basis of his marginal notes and the context of his engagement with Spinoza's philosophy in the latter half of the 1670s.

Five of the chapters concentrate on the *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (= KV). This early work of Spinoza's was neither published in his lifetime nor included in his *Opera Posthuma*. Two manuscripts of the Dutch translation of the work were discovered in the nineteenth century, and ever since it has attracted the attention of scholars interested in Spinoza's philosophical development. **Daniel Garber** studies the Cartesian nature of this work in Chapter 7. Spinoza is best known for the monism of his *Ethics* and his account of mind as identical to body. However, Garber argues, he took quite a different view in the KV. Although in many ways Spinoza's early view of mind and its relation to body shows many affinities with the view that he was later to take, Garber argues that in the KV Spinoza held that the mind is a thing (a mode, though not a substance) genuinely distinct from the body. More generally, Garber argues, in the KV Spinoza is much more directly engaged with debates coming out of Descartes and early Cartesianism than he would be in the *Ethics*, where the influence of Hobbes is stronger. **Colin Marshall**, in Chapter 8, studies Spinoza's mostly neglected account of reason in the KV. That account, Marshall argues, has at least four features that distinguish it from that of the *Ethics*: in the KV, (1) reason is more sharply distinguished from intuitive knowledge, (2) reason deals with things as though they were "outside" us, (3) reason lacks clarity and distinctness, and (4) reason has no power over many types of passions. Marshall argues that these differences have a unified explanation, consisting of a principle that Spinoza accepts in both works and a central change. The principle is that "whatever we find in ourselves has more power over us than anything which comes from outside," and the change is that the objects of reason are common things/common notions. Understanding this, Marshall claims, sheds light on the psychological and epistemological motivations behind Spinoza's mature doctrines.

In Chapter 9, **Russ Leo** shows that Spinoza was a careful reader of Calvin and of Reformed Orthodoxy. Throughout the KV, Spinoza used and transformed Calvinist concepts and terms. This suggests that Calvinism acted as another crucible for Spinoza's mature thought. Moreover, it shows that, in his attempt to address a larger, ecumenical audience, Spinoza was willing to enter into debate with Calvinists and Anti-Calvinists alike during the vibrant and volatile theological-political milieu of the 1640s and 1650s. Chapter 10 by **John Carriero** focuses on chapter 16 of part 2 of the KV. His contribution scrutinizes Spinoza's odd notion that the will is not a "real thing" but rather a "being of reason." Spinoza develops this claim by comparing the will to a universal.

In the first part of the chapter, Carriero contrasts Spinoza's conception of a (physical) individual as a determination of the universe's basic geometrical, kinetic, and dynamic invariances with an Aristotelian conception of an individual constituted by various interrelated "perfections" that are capable of two modes of existence, one in the individual and another in the mind. As Carriero argues, Spinoza's thesis that the will is not a real thing concerns what might be thought of as the ontology of power and cuts more deeply than the themes usually associated with Spinoza on the topic of free will, namely those concerned with freedom, determinism, and the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Spinoza's fundamental claim concerns what a power (such as the will) *is*—that is, a certain determination of the universe's invariances, which implies that the will is *not* some "compartmentalized" power that we bring to the universe's causal table.

The last essay focusing on the *Short Treatise* is Chapter 11 by **Valtteri Viljanen**. In this chapter, Viljanen traces and explicates the rather consistent essentialist thread that runs through the KV. This allows us not only to better understand the work itself but also to obtain a firmer grasp of the nature of its author's whole philosophical enterprise. In many ways, the essentialism we find in the *Short Treatise* is in line with Spinoza's mature thought; but there are also significant differences, and discerning them throws light on the development of his philosophy. Viljanen argues that, while Spinoza's notion of essence remained rather stable throughout his career, its ontological status underwent some notable changes, being in the *Short Treatise* less independent of actual existence than in the later works.

Chapter 12 by **Frédéric Manzini** poses the question: "When was Spinoza not young anymore?" As Manzini points out, there is much discussion about whether Spinoza's system was the same in his early works as in his *Ethics*. Manzini suggests that Spinoza's coming of age—philosophically speaking—can be assigned to a single, crucial moment, namely the incompleteness of his 1663 book, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, which presumably attested to Spinoza's decision to abandon, rather than reform, Cartesianism. Chapter 13 by **Tad Schmaltz** studies the conception of eternity in Spinoza's early period. There is some scholarly controversy over whether Spinoza endorsed a durational or non-durational account of eternity in the *Ethics*. There is also the unresolved question of whether the sort of eternity that Spinoza attributes to substance in this text is the same as the sort of eternity he attributes there to certain modes of substance (such as "infinite modes" and the human mind). Schmaltz suggests that we can make some progress on these difficult interpretive issues by considering the connection of the *Ethics* to two 1663 texts by the young Spinoza: the *Cogitata Metaphysica* (appended to Spinoza's book, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*) and the so-called "Letter on the Infinite." According to Schmaltz, these texts indicate that, on Spinoza's considered view,

substance is eternal in a non-durational sense, but that modes can be eternal only in a durational sense.

For German and British Idealist readers of Spinoza, the key to his metaphysics is its alleged “acosmism”—that is, its denial of the reality of the “world” of finite things. In Chapter 14, **Karolina Hübner** examines and challenges the oft-repeated Idealist argument that what leads to the unreality of finite things is the fact that the differentiation of finite individuals as finite requires negation, whereas what genuinely exists is purely positive. The chapter investigates how Spinoza understands the nature of negation, its role in constituting finite things, and its relation to both divine and human thought; it also examines several possible but ultimately unsatisfying arguments on both sides of the controversy, arguments that focus on divine omniscience and divine attributes. In conclusion, Hübner suggests that Spinoza’s early *Metaphysical Thoughts* offers unparalleled insight into his conception of negation, showing in particular that its account of “beings of reason” presents a powerful argument against the Idealist. Chapter 15 by **Oded Schechter** traces the development of Spinoza’s theory of the three (or four) kinds of cognition. While previous scholars have paid some attention to the minor changes in the description of each of the kinds of cognition, Schechter goes further, and shows that the nature and function of the threefold distinction changes from one work to another. The TIE relies on the distinction as part of its attempt to find the *proper method* for philosophizing. In the KV the kinds of cognition are presented as different *manners of conduct*, while in the *Ethics* the three kinds of cognition constitute distinct *manners of existence*. Relying on this crucial observation, Schechter explains Spinoza’s enigmatic claims in the conclusion of the *Ethics* about the eternity of our minds.

In his early writings, Spinoza advocates a thoroughgoing *anti-abstractionism*. As he warns readers in his earliest work, “so long as we are dealing with the investigation of things, we must never infer anything from abstractions, and we shall take very great care not to mix up the things that are only in the intellect with those that are real” (TIE §93). In Chapter 16, **Samuel Newlands** explores Spinoza’s early writings against *abstracta* and abstract thinking. He investigates whether Spinoza’s early repudiation of abstractions and abstract thinking is consistent with his ontology, and also looks at Spinoza’s only explicit argument in these texts for his anti-abstractionism. Finally, Newlands discusses the wide-ranging uses to which Spinoza puts his anti-abstractionism. **Yitzhak Y. Melamed** argues in Chapter 17 that a study of the early works of Spinoza and the early drafts of the *Ethics* shows that Spinoza experimented with various conceptions of substance and attribute that are significantly distinct from the definitions we find at the beginning of the final version of the *Ethics*. Indeed, Melamed suggests that at a certain point in his development Spinoza seems to have entertained a metaphysics free from the notion of attribute. According to

Melamed, the tensions inherent in Spinoza's account of substance and attribute were never fully resolved, even in the final version of the *Ethics*.

Ursula Renz in Chapter 18 examines the shift from Spinoza's early characterization of the intellect as "wholly passive" to his later views, according to which mental states consist in the activity of forming ideas. Following a close reading of the relevant passages of the *Short Treatise*, she argues that, in contrast to Descartes, Spinoza is not bound by any kind of systematic constraint to conceive of the intellect as either passive or active. The reason is that, according to him, there is no real distinction between the understanding and the will, or to be precise, between the activity of understanding and the activity of willing. Renz investigates the development of Spinoza's use of the notion of idea, and she contends that this development is at least partially due to Spinoza's new approach to the mental. As an overarching argument, she shows that while large parts of the conceptual or metaphysical framework remain the same in the *Ethics*, there are major shifts in the level of Spinoza's philosophy of mind and epistemology. In Chapter 19, **John Brandau** concentrates on Spinoza's enigmatic claim in the KV that entities can have varying *degrees of essence*. This puzzling claim can create the impression that Spinoza quantified essence as a mass term rather than a count term, and that entities are distinguished not by possessing distinct essences so much as by possessing distinct quantities of a homogenous "stuff," essence. In his chapter, Brandau provides an alternative explanation of what Spinoza might have meant by claiming that entities may have varying degrees of essence. He argues that Spinoza identified a thing's essence with its perfection, and that, generally speaking, an entity may have more or less essence in proportion to the quantity of its essential properties.

Pina Totaro, the author of the concluding chapter of the volume, is the co-discoverer of the manuscript of Spinoza's *Ethics*, recently found in the Vatican Library. The manuscript contains some crucial elements for a better understanding of the intellectual biography and philosophy of the young Spinoza. The Vatican manuscript is not an autograph, but a copy made by Pieter van Gent. It was brought to Rome probably by the German mathematician and philosopher E. W. Tschirnhaus, who gave the manuscript to the Danish scientist and theologian Niels Stensen. Before leaving Rome for Northern Europe, Stensen delivered the manuscript of the *Ethics* to the Congregazione del S. Ufficio with a complaint against Spinoza. After having recovered the history of the Vatican manuscript, Totaro discusses the differences between the manuscript of the *Ethics* and the printed edition in the *Opera Posthuma* (1677).

Let me conclude by thanking the Philosophy Department, the Singleton Center for the Study of Pre-Modern Europe, and the Stulman Program in Jewish Studies—all at Johns Hopkins University—and the École normale supérieure de Lyon for their generous support of the two conferences and this collection. I would also like to thank Jason Yonover for his skillful copyediting of the final manuscript of the book.