

concrete over the abstract and valuing the ideal (the just, the good, the true, and the beautiful) over the actual (58). Long's attempt to navigate a deconstructive *via media* between binaries is laudable, but he occasionally ends up subtracting from—rather than sublating—the significance of opposing concepts. Of course, such is the risk one must take to engage in a “dialogical poetics” of authentic speaking and attentive listening (73). As Long would suggest, the real litmus test of the truth within his writing awaits actualization by the reader who continues the political project which Long has inherited from Socrates and Plato.

This book packs 205 fascinating pages (including bibliography and index) into a slim, solidly bound, gloss-wrapped, hardcover volume featuring playful medieval cover art of the two namesake philosophers. Within its pages, Long—despite some ambiguities of its manifold textual purposes—offers his readers lively re-interpretations of philosophical classics that promise to rejuvenate the political agency of anyone willing to submit oneself to the dialogical practices of philosophy.

ANDREW VAN'T LAND *University of Kentucky*

Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy

STEVEN NADLER, Ed.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014; 248 pp.; \$105.95 (hardback)

doi:10.1017/S0012217315001134

The timeliness of the edited volume *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy* should not be understated. For instance, the Portuguese Jewish congregation in Amsterdam has recently held a public discussion to reconsider Spinoza's excommunication, issued in 1656. Also, it is clear that we are in the midst of a renaissance in Spinoza studies. Especially in the disparate philosophical movements in France and Italy since the mid to latter half of the 20th century, Spinoza is cited as an ally, an uncanny contemporary, and a friend. Louis Althusser finds in Spinoza a model for his own rethinking of the political-historical; Gilles Deleuze finds in Spinoza a paradigm for his concept of the body without organs; Antonio Negri finds in Spinoza a model for a materialist ontology of revolutionary practice. What is it of Spinoza that calls to us in the present to recognize him as one of our own?

Given the eminence of Spinoza for us today, it is important to ask if we have the hermeneutical resources to do justice to Spinoza's philosophy. Both Slavoj Žižek and Stephen Nadler have commented that there seem to be as many Spinozas as there are readers of Spinoza. Each of us brings our own preconceptions and historically contingent questions to bear on our interpretation of his philosophical commitments. Yet Nadler's point (in the Introduction to this volume) that Spinoza is a sort of ‘Rorschach test’ extends beyond the contemporary and reaches back into the history of his reception.

In the history of Spinoza's reception, there have been at least two main problems. The first is that most interpreters did not have full access to his texts. Since Spinoza's complete works have now become readily accessible (and are for the most part available for free online) and have been translated into many different languages, this first problem has arguably been overcome. The second problem is that Spinoza is approached without a proper understanding of his philosophical heritage. It is this second problem that

Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy addresses and does much to solve. Without claiming to be exhaustive, it sheds valuable light on Spinoza's often tenuous but never negligible dialogue with the tradition of Medieval Jewish philosophy. It also has the virtue of relating this tradition to Plato, Aristotle, neo-Platonists, as well as thinkers within the Islamic tradition such as Avicenna and Al-Farabi. The essays, each written by a prominent scholar in Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy, illuminate different threads of this dialogue while converging on themes which, historically, have proved to be of central importance for Spinoza's reception. It thus enriches our comprehension of the historicity of Spinoza's thought and problematizes any purely modernist interpretation. Perhaps this enrichment will help us to understand why Spinoza is still so important.

Each of the main works and some of the letters of Spinoza's corpus are treated in this volume. To varying degrees, each part of the *Ethics* and the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* are dealt with. The *Theologico-Political Treatise*, especially its most 'scandalous' claims about reason and revelation, is treated by multiple authors. The *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* is given an extended analysis by Jacob Adler, and Yitzhak Melamed gives a careful reading of Spinoza's famous letter on the infinite.

Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy surveys the most important themes in Spinoza's philosophy. The essays show how Spinoza's ethical and political philosophy responds to a long-standing and complex tradition. The question of the freedom of the will and Spinoza's determinism are dialogued with the works of Crescas, Gersonides, Maimonides, and Avicenna. The question of the masses and power, the relation between religion and political authority, and the way reason corrodes the stability of regimes is taken up brilliantly by Steven Frankel. The question of providence, the good life, and the role of intellect therein are consistent themes throughout the text, but Stephen Nadler's essay in particular does us a great service in showing how there is in Spinoza providence without teleology. Spinoza's most important contributions to metaphysics and epistemology are also treated extensively. Adler provides an excellent analysis of Spinoza's relation to the theory of acquired intellect put forth by Alexander of Aphrodisias and dialogues it with the views of Gersonides, and Crescas. Spinoza's critique of revelation is historicized by Rudavsky's analysis of the significance of Abraham ibn Ezra's conception of biblical hermeneutics. Julie Klein's essay in particular provides a sustained analysis of the history of these and related concepts involving in her analysis thinkers such as Aristotle, Crescas, Gersonides, and Maimonides. Theological issues such as the nature of the infinite and of God are deftly treated not only by Melamed's essay already mentioned but also by Kenneth Seeskin, who shows that Spinoza's infamous appendix to the first part of the *Ethics* is a response to and continuation of a long standing tradition.

This volume provides the reader with a window into Spinoza's philosophical and theological inheritance. It provides insight into the questions and answers of a tradition that he, in his way, took much from but also at times abandoned. Recognizing how he interpreted the complexities of Medieval Jewish philosophy helps us come to a greater understanding of: 1) the particularity of his contribution to philosophy broadly construed, 2) his importance for contemporary philosophy, and, perhaps, 3) why it is in our own time that the rescinding of his excommunication is worth considering.

It is with all this in mind that *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy* is a timely and optimal reference point for the future of Spinoza studies. This volume is ideal for students and scholars both within and, like Spinoza, beyond the academy.

CLAYTON BOHNET *Gonzaga University*