

Wiep van Bunge. *Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship*.

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 215. Leiden: Brill, 2012. xiv + 256 pp. \$146. ISBN: 978-90-04-23137-5.

*Spinoza Past and Present* collects twelve essays by Wiep van Bunge, the author of *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (2001), which (except one) have either been previously published or are based on material previously published in Dutch, English, and French. I think we can group the essays into three broad thematic clusters. The first three essays discuss Spinoza's philosophical context. The opening essay examines the relevance of Spinoza's Jewish background to understanding his philosophy. Van Bunge argues for the unique nature of Spinoza's departure from the congregation and recommends that his Jewish background should not keep us from seeing the profound influence Hobbes and Descartes had on him. Chapter 2 focuses on Spinoza's substance monism and asks, given the extremely close connection between attributes and substance, why not conclude — as some Cartesian critics claimed Spinozists should — that there are as many substances as there are attributes? According to van Bunge, seventeenth-century Dutch Spinozists failed to present philosophically elaborate answers to this problem. Chapter 3 discusses different early modern aspirations for a moral philosophy whose truths would be as certain as those of mathematics and observes that Spinoza accomplished what

nobody else did: he actually composed an ethics demonstrated in geometric manner.

The next five essays revolve around topics relevant for Spinoza's theological and political thought. Chapter 4 traces the egalitarian tendencies of the Collegiant circles, which may well have had an impact on Spinoza. Chapter 5 aims at clarifying Spinoza's position in the early Enlightenment by observing that unlike some others, he did not think that Moses and Jesus used religion in a fraudulent way to ensure political ends. Chapter 6 argues that different aspects of Spinoza's philosophy form a consistent whole, part of which is political science designed to show how to create secular states strong enough to allow us to collectively promote wisdom that liberates us. Chapter 7 argues that although Spinoza recognizes the specific historical context out of which scripture arose and claims that only philosophy aims at truth, there is still good reason to see the gist of the Christian moral message as compatible with the socioethical views of the *Ethics*. Chapter 8 explores the playwright Vondel's role in the theological debates of the 1660s in which Spinoza, too, took part.

The rest of the book discusses the reception of Spinoza's thought. The ninth essay places the well-known outrage caused by the *Theological-Political Treatise* within a larger pattern of censorship that makes one reconsider the degree of intellectual freedom in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Chapter 10 traces the nineteenth- and twentieth-century developments in Dutch Spinozism and concludes that, despite the fact that many scholars (such as Hubbeling, De Dijn, and Klever) have shared what may be called existential motives in approaching Spinoza, it has no stable identity. Nor, chapter 11 argues, is there a stable identity to the so-called Radical Enlightenment: even though it was, as Jonathan Israel has most notably emphasized, a secularizing phenomenon, van Bunge also wants to draw attention to genuinely religious concerns expressed by Spinozist radical Dutch Protestants. The final essay provides an outline of Spinoza's reception from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first, focusing especially on the impact Spinoza has had on French philosophy since the 1960s.

This is a work of solid and lucidly written scholarship, and van Bunge offers balanced and informative assessments of discussed topics. One of the especially attractive features of the work is its wide range of references to Dutch, German, and French scholarship. I find many of the chapters interconnected, but an introduction tying them together and giving an overview of the defended theses would, I think, have nevertheless been welcome. Moreover, I would have been eager to read a more extensive account of the recent Anglo-American Spinoza scholarship in the final essay (the issue is now mainly addressed in a short footnote). But these are minor points. I highly recommend the book to all those who want to obtain a more nuanced picture of Spinoza's historical and philosophical context and of the influence of his thought.

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