



The Philosophy of Spinoza

Joseph Ratner, Baruch Spinoza

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Selections usually need no justifications. Some justification, however, of the treatment accorded Spinoza's *Ethics* may be necessary in this place. The object in taking the *Ethics* as much as possible out of the geometrical form, was not to improve upon the author's text; it was to give the lay reader a text of Spinoza he would find pleasanter to read and easier to understand. To the practice of popularization, Spinoza, one may confidently feel, would not be averse. He himself gave a short popular statement of his philosophy in the *Political Treatise*.

The lay reader of philosophy is chiefly, if not wholly, interested in grasping a philosophic point of view. He is not interested in highly meticulous details, and still less is he interested in checking up the author's statements to see if the author is consistent with himself. He takes such consistency, even if unwarrantedly, for granted. A continuous reading of the original *Ethics*, even on a single topic, is impossible. The subject-matter is coherent, but the propositions do not hang together. By omitting the formal statement of the propositions; by omitting many of the demonstrations and almost all cross-references; by grouping related sections of the *Ethics* (with selections from the *Letters* and the *Improvement of the Understanding*) under sectional headings, the text has been made more continuous. It is the only time, probably, dismembering a treatise actually made it more unified...

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