

*Spinoza and Spinozism*. By STUART HAMPSHIRE. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.  
Pp. lviii + 206. Price £40.00.)

Studies of Spinoza, both scholarly and introductory, have abounded in the 54 years since the publication of Stuart Hampshire's *Spinoza: an introduction to his philosophical thought*. Taking both analytic and continental approaches, and recently given a new historical perspective in Jonathan Israel's 2001 *Radical Enlightenment*, studies of Spinoza have increasingly recognized the importance of this previously marginalized thinker and his major work, the *Ethics*, to the history of philosophy and to contemporary philosophical problems. Hampshire's 1951 text remains a fresh and engaging introduction to Spinoza's metaphysical system that manages both to interpret Spinoza in historical context and to address the relevance of the *Ethics* to current concerns in philosophy of mind, ethics and politics. Following Hampshire's death in 2004, Clarendon Press has reprinted the 1987 edition of *Spinoza: an introduction to his philosophical thought* along with two of Hampshire's essays on Spinoza, 'Spinoza and Spinozism' (written 2001-04) and 'Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom' (originally published 1960).

Written across six decades, and to different purposes, the three pieces vary in tone, topic and approach. *Spinoza* (173pp) is an introductory text, written as the first volume in a series of Pelican paperbacks on major philosophers aimed at the non-specialist reader. It remains a clear and comprehensive guide for undergraduates and those new to Spinoza – and despite Hampshire's claim that every interpreter of Spinoza 'either has been, or ought to have been, uneasily aware of some partiality in his interpretation' (p. 175), his own book is refreshingly non-partisan for the

contemporary reader, having been written outside of the influence of the major studies by Bennett, Curley, and Deleuze that have since come to dominate.

The essay in which he makes this claim, 'Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom' (24pp), is Hampshire's attempt at an unprejudiced textual study of Spinoza's ideas of freedom and action. Unlike *Spinoza*, it assumes some familiarity with Spinoza's work.

Presented last in the book, it is a subtle study that argues for the relevance of Spinoza's idea of freedom to moral and political philosophy today, based on Hampshire's conviction that that at certain points in philosophy of mind Spinoza is 'nearer to the truth ... than any other philosopher ever has been' (p. 176). Political thought continues to cling to Mill's definition of freedom, Hampshire suggests, despite the fact that 'the philosophy of mind upon which he based it is discredited' (p. 199). A Spinozan definition of freedom – which, as Hampshire recognizes, is much richer than the simplistic characterization of it as 'understanding the causes of my action' – can lead to a theory of action, emancipation, and society that is consistent with current thinking in psychology and with the spirit of Millian liberalism. Within Spinoza's determinism Hampshire finds a defensible conception of individual freedom based on reason: the increasing power of thought to act according to true sequences of ideas. Freedom can remain the ultimate value in politics, provided it is understood in terms of reflective activity about thinking – or philosophy itself.

Some will think that the radical nature of Spinoza's political thought is lost in Hampshire's use of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as an alternative foundation for liberal values. But Hampshire's account is valuable in placing Spinoza at the centre of Enlightenment political thought rather than on the periphery. Hampshire

attempts a similar move in 'Spinoza and Spinozism' (38pp) with respect to the sciences, suggesting that Spinoza's thought is compatible with recent developments in theories of evolution, complexity, and genetics. While the case for connecting Spinoza's naturalism with modern science is subtly and persuasively argued, this essay is let down by its problematic interpretation of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Though it was written last of the three pieces it is presented first in this collection, setting a tone which is fortunately not carried through the rest of the book; interpretive mistakes made in 'Spinoza and Spinozism' are 'corrected' in the earlier *Spinoza and the Idea of Freedom*. Hampshire puts appropriate emphasis on *activity* as opposed to *cognition* as the primary way that living organisms encounter the world for Spinoza, but says that activity involves *meaning* (p. xxiv), wrongly importing a theory of intentionality into Spinoza's concept of action. Spinoza wants to dispense with the idea of intentional action as part of the illusory apparatus around the false belief that human beings have abilities distinct from the rest of nature. For Spinoza, all beings have 'minds' (i.e., ideas of their bodies) and all beings have the capacity to act, though to differing degrees. Bodily actions are not the result of meaningful intentions; they are part of the necessary unfolding of God's nature, as are the ideas that correspond to them. Thus Hampshire is wrong to state that Spinoza's term 'idea of' could be translated as 'representation of' or 'meaning of' (p. xxxvii). The idea of an action is not its representation, symbol, or meaning; *it is that action* expressed in the parallel attribute of thought. All talk of representation belongs, for Spinoza, in the realm of illusion.

These interpretive problems are curious given Hampshire's careful treatment of these themes in the main text. This inconsistency is presumably evidence of the maturing of

Hampshire's thought between 1951 and 2004, but is also indicative of the disjointed nature of this book as a whole. This might have been a coherent collection showing the development of one philosopher's thinking about another, and revealing the older Hampshire's replies and revisions to questions and arguments made by the younger. Unfortunately, while each of the three pieces is valuable in its own right, the book as a whole lacks coherence and a sense of purpose: it does not strongly suggest either that the pieces are in dialogue, or that they represent the maturing of Hampshire's thought. A scholarly editorial introduction would have been useful to communicate the point of this collection and the place of Hampshire's work on Spinoza in the context of his other philosophical writings. As it stands, the main text and two essays seem disconnected, a matter not helped by their differing layout and pagination. The main text, *Spinoza*, has been reproduced exactly from the 1987 Penguin edition, with Penguin's formatting and pagination, while the two essays that flank it are formatted in a shared style that differs from that of the main text. Because *Spinoza* starts on page 1, 'Spinoza and Spinozism', the essay preceding it, must be paginated in roman numerals as if it were a long preface, which it is not. (There is, in fact, a separate preface, written by Hampshire, also in roman numerals.)

There is much of value in *Spinoza and Spinozism*, but little of it comes from the joint publication of these three pieces. It is natural and interesting that the mature Hampshire should challenge and revise his earlier interpretation. A better-conceived book might have drawn attention to the contrasts and developments in his understanding. Nonetheless, Hampshire's book offers valuable insights into both Spinoza's thinking and his own, and encourages us to consider Spinoza in light of contemporary questions in philosophy, politics, and science.

*University of Dundee*

BETH LORD

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