

**Jacques J. Rozenberg.** *Spinoza, le spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation*. Independent 2023. 430 pp. \$38.00 CAD (Paperback 9798370405341).

There is a considerable body of literature dedicated to the works of Spinoza, encompassing various aspects such as his philosophy, his personal life, his primary sources, and his profound influence on the Jewish thought. Among these studies, Jacques J. Rozenberg's French publication entitled *Spinoza le Spinozisme et les fondements de la sécularisation* stands out. This book represents an exemplary analysis of Spinoza's philosophical and Jewish sources, and offers a comprehensive investigation into Kabbalist influences as well. Additionally, the text provides a critical exposition of Spinoza's principal metaphysical ideas, along with an examination of his impact on subsequent secular ideologies. The book's critique of Spinoza's viewpoints demonstrates originality and relevance. After a comprehensive introductory section that serves to encapsulate the relationship between Spinoza and modern secularity, the author establishes the relevance of Spinozism for contemporary philosophy. He delves into the overarching theme of Spinoza's epistemological foundations and elucidates his motivations for composing this book, which is organized into five distinct chapters.

The initial chapter functions as an additional preamble, further elaborating upon the intricate interplay between philosophy and religion within Judaism and exploring the concept of secularization. Within this chapter, Rozenberg discerns a critical distinction between the perspective of Maimonides, who seeks to conflate religion and philosophy, and certain later Jewish Averroists, particularly those of Italian origin, who draw a clear demarcation between religion and philosophy. The latter perspective posits that religion relies on dialectical proofs, while philosophy hinges on demonstrative ones.

The second chapter of this work undertakes a rigorous analysis of the theological underpinnings of Spinozism. It examines the intricate question of God's attributes as elucidated in the philosophy of Maimonides, along with the extensive discourse surrounding this matter in subsequent Jewish and Christian theological thought. Additionally, this chapter delves into the significant influence, parallels, and points of departure between the philosophies of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas and Spinoza concerning the divine and its relationship to material existence. Moreover, it explores the intriguing juxtaposition and distinctions between Spinoza's conception of the divine and that of Kabbalists, with a special focus on the concept of infinity. This chapter represents the culmination of an



extensive body of scholarship spanning numerous books and articles addressing Spinoza's indebtedness to Jewish sources and his engagement with them in the context of secular-related inquiries. Rozenberg draws upon an array of sources, meticulously synthesizing them while also contributing his own insightful perspectives, particularly in relation to Rabbi Crescas and the Kabbalistic tradition.

The third chapter of this study is dedicated to exploring the intricate relationship between God's unity and diversity. Its initial two sections undertake a comprehensive analysis of complex themes involving the interplay between finitude and infinity, as well as the definition of modes, finite and infinite as well, and their connections to Spinozist divine substance. The third section of this chapter is devoted to investigating Spinoza's perspective on monotheism. In this segment, Rozenberg engages in confronting the philosophies of Spinoza and Maimonides. He presents a concise summary of the various arguments regarding their respective viewpoints, introducing some novel arguments supporting their disparities. Additionally, Rozenberg scrutinizes Spinoza's religious standing through the lens of Maimonides' definitions of heresy and his principles of faith.

Moving to the fourth chapter, Professor Rozenberg embarks on an analysis of Spinoza's two distinct proofs for the existence of God: cosmological and ontological. This section of the book also critically assesses the robustness of Spinoza's proofs and endeavours to evaluate the philosophical implications arising from his diverse arguments. This section is the most metaphysical part of the book, and it is primarily targeted towards readers who are interested in the philosophical analysis and critique of Spinoza's philosophical thought.

The fifth chapter is divided into three primary sections. The first is devoted to a comprehensive exposition of the kabbalistic concept of *tsimtsum*, which denotes the self-imposed limitation of the divine by God himself. The second section engages in a meticulous analysis of the interplay between Kabbalistic teachings and Spinozism, particularly in relation to the notions of pantheism and panentheism. The third and final section addresses the contentious issue of the potential charge of idolatry against pantheistic beliefs.

Rozenberg asserts in the Epilogue of this book that Spinoza's conception of God markedly diverges from the traditional religious understanding. He also cites Levinas, who contends that Spinoza's critique of his native religion reaches a depth where the abandonment of Judaism was without necessitating official conversion to Christianity. This assertion is likely to assume pivotal significance in the subsequent exploration of Spinoza's viewpoints in the author's forthcoming

works.

From my perspective, this book undertakes a fresh analysis of Spinoza's metaphysical standpoint and scrutinizes his primary Jewish sources. It constitutes the initial segment of Rozenberg's more comprehensive study, which is dedicated to the exploration of Spinoza's philosophy. A forthcoming section of this study will also encompass a critical examination of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise, encompassing his sources and his critique of religion (likely the fourth book of the series). In my estimation, this forthcoming publication will assume even greater significance, as Spinoza's most profound criticism of religion and his considerable influence on subsequent philosophical thought are manifested within the Theological-Political Treatise rather than the Ethics. The author has previously published articles on this subject, thereby assuring us that this new text, along with the remainder of his project on Spinoza, will provide a novel and insightful perspective on this philosopher. We have high hopes that translating this valuable research into English and other languages will make it accessible to a wider audience.

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