

**SPINOZA (THE ROUTLEDGE
PHILOSOPHERS) BY MICHAEL DELLA
ROCCA**



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Review

'In his Spinoza, Michael Della Rocca has performed a service for those seeking a thorough, accessible and engaging overview of Spinoza's life and philosophy. ...unquestionably the best general introduction to Spinoza's overall philosophy since Henry Allison's Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction, published over twenty years ago.' - Times Literary Supplement

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'An absolutely fantastic book. Della Rocca has succeeded in making Spinoza's notoriously difficult thought accessible to a general audience without sacrificing any of the conceptual complexity and rigors that makes Spinoza such a good philosopher.' - Martin Lin, University of Toronto, Canada

'This is an exciting, interesting, and highly-readable book on Spinoza. Della Rocca offers a bold thesis: that Spinoza's philosophy results from persistently applying the principle of sufficient reason to absolutely everything - so, in short, there can be no dumb luck, no brute facts. Della Rocca successfully uses this thesis to illuminate the basics of Spinoza's philosophy, and to extend several scholarly discussions in new and interesting directions. His book will instruct both beginning and advanced students of Spinoza.' - Charles Hueneman, Utah State University

About the Author

Michael Della Rocca is Professor and Chair of Philosophy at Yale University. He is the author of Representation and the Mind Body Problem in Spinoza, and our numerous articles in early modern

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Renowned for his metaphysics, Spinoza made significant contributions to understanding the human mind, the emotions, moral philosophy, and political philosophy.

Beginning with an overview of Spinoza's life, Michael Della Rocca carefully unpacks and explains Spinoza's philosophy: his metaphysics of substance and argument at the center of his whole system that God is the sole independent substance; his account of the human mind and its relation to the body; his theory that human beings tend towards self-preservation and his most famous work, the Ethics, including the problem of free will; and his writings on the state, religion and scripture.

Della Rocca concludes with a chapter on Spinoza's legacy and how modern philosophers, Hume, Hegel, and Nietzsche, responded to Spinoza's challenge. Ideal for those coming to Spinoza for the first time as well as those already acquainted with his thought, Spinoza is essential reading for anyone studying philosophy.

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Most helpful customer reviews

26 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

A must read for anyone interested in Spinoza

By spinoza

I've been a student of Spinoza's work for over 30 years now, and I can almost say without hesitation this is the best general study of Spinoza I've encountered. I say "almost" only because there have been so many other really, really good books on Spinoza appearing in the past decade, so using "best" here is not done lightly. Among these books are Steven Nadler's important studies of Spinoza, as well as--heaven forbid--more accessible, popular works by the likes of Rebecca Goldstein, Antonio Damasio, Jonathan Israel, and Matthew Stewart (*The Courtier and the Heretic*), not to mention the veritable cottage industry of scholarly articles on Spinoza's thought. The only reason I can think of for Della Rocca's lucid tome not getting more attention is it coming from an academic publisher without the same distribution clout and marketing savvy as the heavyweights. It is certainly not because of the work itself, which is highly recommended for both those new to Spinoza as well as for scholars versed in the Spinoza literature.

Unlike the other mentioned works, this is a real work of philosophy focusing squarely on elucidating the essence of Spinoza's thought. What makes it different from other philosophical studies, however, is its eminently readable style. Della Rocca takes pains to make Spinoza's thought intelligible to the non-specialist, and in so doing helps us to understand why Spinoza is so important and relevant for us today. Unlike other studies of Spinoza, Della Rocca begins not by telling us how "difficult" Spinoza is, but rather by letting us know that, armed with a few key concepts, Spinoza is not only accessible, but also intellectually fascinating to read. Della Rocca dives right in with the first chapter by carefully outlining the key concepts in understanding Spinoza's "project"--concepts such as the principle of sufficient reason (or PSR), Spinoza's naturalism, and intelligibility. As the previous reviewer notes, Della Rocca's exposition goes far in helping the reader to "get it", to reaching that "a-ha" moment of understanding the genius of a great thinker. In so doing Della Rocca is not simplifying, or dumbing down, Spinoza's thought for the reader; rather, he is providing us with a profoundly insightful interpretation that closely follows Spinoza's own thinking. This makes reading Della Rocca's study itself a delightful meditation on one of the three greatest thinkers of the modern era (along with Kant and Hegel).

Spinoza indeed represents the intellectual foundation for the modern era, and for this reason making the effort to understand him is time well spent; as Hegel so correctly noted, all modern philosophy begins with Spinoza. If a beginning philosophy student were to ask me what five introductory books she should read, Della Rocca's study of Spinoza would be one of them.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent and thoughtful interpretation of Spinoza

By Paul Brandon Rimmer

Excellent and thoughtful interpretation of Spinoza. I don't think his philosophy bottoms out in intelligibility, or that Spinoza's PSR works quite the way Della Rocca claims, but Della Rocca makes a compelling case for his interpretation, and links it closely to all aspects of Spinoza's philosophy. I found Della Rocca's discussion on Spinoza's philosophy of mind especially useful, and it helped clarify certain confusions I had about Spinoza's views on minds vs ideas.

12 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

I finally get it.

By JC

Critics compared the works of the philosopher William James to those of his novelist brother, Henry, thus: "William James writes like a novelist, and his brother writes like a philosopher." It was not intended as a compliment to Henry, nor to philosophers. Well, for the most part, Michael Della Rocca - Chair of Philosophy at Yale - does NOT write like a philosopher. And what's equally important is that he offers a key - the "Principle of Sufficient Reason" - which has made understanding the core of Spinoza's philosophy much clearer for me.

I would have given the book 5 stars except for those instances when Della Rocca (a philosopher himself, after all) falls back on the jargon. But those are few and have not deterred me from enjoying the book. If you are interested in, but struggling with, understanding the thinking of the ultimate rationalist, I recommend this book.

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