

Georg Hermann Schuller

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Georg Hermann Schuller was a Dutch physician and alchemist. He corresponded with both Spinoza and Leibniz and knew several other figures in their orbit (Steenbakkers 1994, p. 50). He reports a communication with Tschirnhaus saying that the latter had cleared up some misconceptions that Henry Oldenburg and Robert Boyle had of Spinoza (Ep. 63; IV/276a). He seems to have come into possession of the autographs of many of the works eventually published in the *Opera Posthuma*, including Spinoza's commentary on Boyle's experiments, the TP, and TIE. He was also later involved in publishing the *Opera Posthuma*. (See Steenbakkers 1994, pp. 60, 66ff.) In a letter to Leibniz, Tschirnhaus suggests that Schuller was present at Spinoza's death (A III 2 64; see also Steenbakkers 1994, pp. 58-60), but Schuller seems to have given diverging accounts of this.

There are five extant letters (Eps. 58, 63, 64, 70, and 72) between Spinoza and Schuller. Ep. 58 (from Spinoza) deals with Spinoza's conception of freedom and is most notable for containing Spinoza's analogy of the thinking stone. He asks Schuller to consider a stone that is compelled to move in a certain way and is conscious of only its striving to continue moving. In such a case, because the stone is conscious only of its own striving and not the external cause of its motion, it would believe that it freely moves. And so it is, Spinoza thinks, with most people: "men are conscious of their appetite and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined." (Ep. 58; IV/266)

Ep. 63 (from Schuller) is most notable for containing, first, Schuller's request that Spinoza give him an example of both immediate and mediate infinite modes, and second, Schuller requesting a demonstration (not a *reductio*) that we can only know the attributes of Thought and Extension. Ep. 64 contains Spinoza's answers. He gives as examples of immediate infinite modes both "absolutely infinite intellect" and "motion and rest," and of a mediate infinite mode "the face of the whole Universe." (Ep. 64; IV/278) He also attempts the demonstration Schuller requested. In this demonstration Spinoza makes important use of his position that we are able to cognize only what the idea of an actual existing body involves, or else what follows from that idea. But, Spinoza says, the idea of that body only expresses the attributes of Extension and Thought. Hence, we can only have cognition of the attributes of Extension and Thought. (Ep. 64; IV/277)

Ep. 70 (from Schuller) contains little of philosophical importance. But it does include Schuller's report to Spinoza that Tschirnhaus had met Leibniz and thought him "most worthy of having [Spinoza's] writings communicated to him" (Ep. 70; IV/393). Leibniz and Spinoza had at that time already corresponded (in 1671; Ep. 70 is dated 1675), but it seems possible that this letter was a prelude to their meeting in 1676. In Ep. 72, Spinoza writes that he knew Leibniz from previous letters and that "he seemed to me a man with a liberal mentality, and well-versed in every science" (Ep. 72; IV/305). Nonetheless, Spinoza judged that it was "ill-advised" to send Leibniz a copy of his writings (possibly the current draft of the *Ethics*, since according to Schuller [Ep. 70; IV/303] Leibniz had already read the TTP).

Bibliography

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