

Kato, Y., and Sakamoto, K. (2020). Between Cartesianism and orthodoxy: God and the problem of indifference in Christoph Wittich's *Anti-Spinoza*. *Intellectual History Review*, 32(2), 239–57.

Verbeek, T. (2005). Wittich's critique of Spinoza. In T. M. Schmaltz (ed.), *Receptions of Descartes: Cartesianism and Anti-Cartesianism in Early Modern Europe* (pp. 103–16). Routledge.

RELATED TERMS

Descartes; Freedom (Metaphysical); Geometrical Method; God; Naturalism; Principle of Sufficient Reason; *Theological-Political Treatise*; Will

197. WOMEN

SPINOZA'S REMARKS ON WOMEN are disappointing. In his **TP**, he declares that daughters should never be permitted to assume the throne (TP6.37). In **democracies**, Spinoza insists, women, like servants or criminals, should be excluded from civic participation (TP11.3–4). Some commentators interpret him to exclude women only by virtue of their social conditioning or historical circumstances (Lloyd 1994; Lord 2011). Yet, Spinoza defends his exclusion of women at some length, arguing, in contrast to his feminist contemporaries, that women's inferiority must be explained by nature rather than custom. Other interpreters thus contend that Spinoza unequivocally denies women's **equality**, although this appears to contradict his understanding of **human nature** and rationality (Gullan-Wuhr 2008; Sharp 2012).

In the *Ethics*, however, Spinoza seems to allow for equality of women and men with respect to **virtue** and intellect. He maintains that marriage “certainly **agrees** with **reason** . . . if the **love** of each, of both the man and the woman, is **caused** . . . mainly by **freedom** of the **mind**” (E4app20). If women can love from freedom of mind, they can exercise virtue, understood as **acting** from reason. Spinoza also claims that the first man and first woman “agree completely” in nature (E4p68s). Since, for Spinoza, we agree in nature only insofar as we exercise reason (E4p35), we can understand his retelling of the Genesis story to depart from many of his contemporaries insofar as it represents women and men as intellectual equals.

Nevertheless, Spinoza deploys some derogatory stereotypes, which dissociate women and femininity from the idea of virtue. He characterizes compassion toward nonhuman **animals** as “womanly [*mulierī*],” associating femininity with emotion, irrationality, and the nonhuman (E4p37s). He invokes common misogynist stereotypes, such as the “gossip [*garrula*]” who cannot control herself (E3p2s) and the faithless mistress who “prostitutes herself to another” (E3p35s); he refers to the “inconstancy and deceptiveness of women” (E5p10s). To be clear, these figures of vice appear alongside masculine ones. Moreover, these vicious characters are sometimes invoked as cultural representations rather than as descriptions (e.g., E5p10s), so it is unclear whether Spinoza endorses them.

Given that his argument for women's natural inferiority is in tension with his anthropology and other principles he establishes in his *Ethics*, the interpreter is forced to speculate about whether Spinoza's exclusion of women is a practical concession to the **prejudice** of his age or whether it represents his considered view. Genevieve Lloyd points out that, since minds are necessarily limited in the same ways that **bodies** are, the systematic social limitations on women (and other disadvantaged groups) must be understood to constrain their capacities (Lloyd 1994, 162). Social differences yield distinctions in mental and corporeal capacity. More recent feminists have found in Spinoza's view that the powers of minds and bodies reflect the character of the social and political systems in which they are embedded possibilities for an empowering political theory. Perhaps ironically, feminists interpret Spinoza's denial of sexual equality to entail the necessity of transforming unequal relationships of **power** (Gatens 1996, 2009a).

Hasana Sharp

KEY PASSAGES

E4p68s; E4app20. TP11.3–4.

RECOMMENDED READING

Gatens, M. (2009). *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Gullan-Wuhr, M. (2008). Spinoza and the equality of women. *Theoria*, 68, 91–111.

Lloyd, G. (1994). *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics*. Cornell University Press.

Lord, B. (2001). "Disempowered by nature": Spinoza on the political capabilities of women. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 19(6), 1085–1106.

Sharp, H. (2012). Eve's perfection: Spinoza on sexual (in)equality. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 50(4), 559–80.

RELATED TERMS

Agreement; Animals; Democracy; Equality; Human Nature; Perfection; Power; Prejudice; Reason; Virtue