



A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age

Steven Nadler

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When it appeared in 1670, Baruch Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* was denounced as the most dangerous book ever published--"godless," "full of abominations," "a book forged in hell . . . by the devil himself." Religious and secular authorities saw it as a threat to faith, social and political harmony, and everyday morality, and its author was almost universally regarded as a religious subversive and political radical who sought to spread atheism throughout Europe. Yet Spinoza's book has contributed as much as the Declaration of Independence or Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* to modern liberal, secular, and democratic thinking. In *A Book Forged in Hell*, Steven Nadler tells the fascinating story of this extraordinary book: its radical claims and their background in the philosophical, religious, and political tensions of the Dutch Golden Age, as well as the vitriolic reaction these ideas inspired.

It is not hard to see why Spinoza's *Treatise* was so important or so controversial, or why the uproar it caused is one of the most significant events in European intellectual history. In the book, Spinoza became the first to argue that the Bible is not literally the word of God but rather a work of human literature; that true religion has nothing to do with theology, liturgical ceremonies, or sectarian dogma; and that religious authorities should have no role in governing a modern state. He also denied the reality of miracles and divine providence, reinterpreted the nature of prophecy, and made an eloquent plea for toleration and democracy.

A vivid story of incendiary ideas and vicious backlash, *A Book Forged in Hell* will interest anyone who is curious about the origin of some of our most cherished modern beliefs.

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