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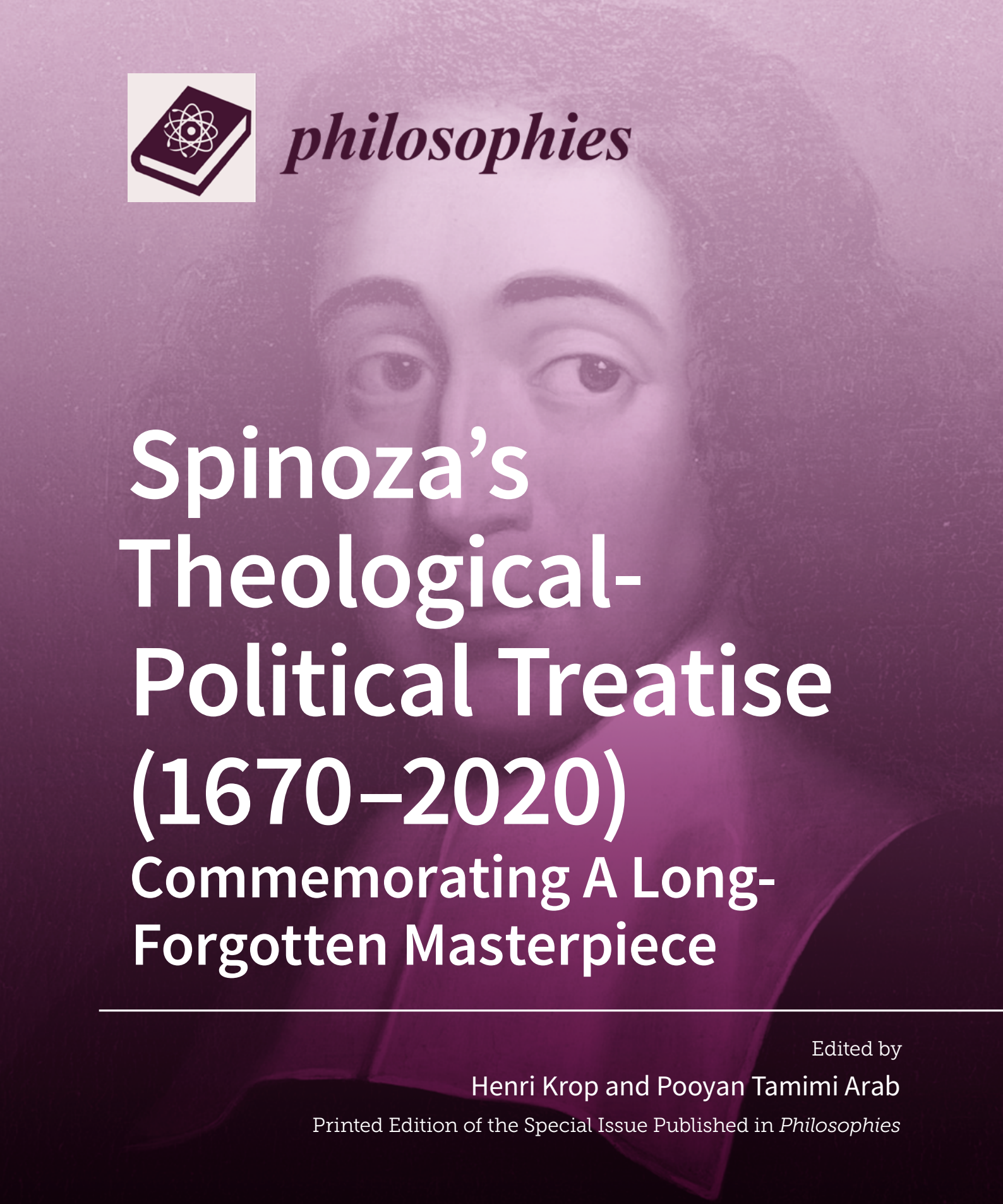

Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise (1670–2020)

Commemorating A Long-Forgotten Masterpiece

Edited by

Henri Krop and Pooyan Tamimi Arab

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Editorial

Spinoza's Theological–Political Treatise (1670–2020). Commemorating a Long-Forgotten Masterpiece

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1. Introduction

In entitling this Special Issue of Philosophies, commemorating the publication of the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (hereafter TTP) 350 years ago, 'a long-forgotten masterpiece', we acknowledge our debt to Edwin Curley, who in the 1990s wrote two papers called 'Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece' [1,2]. The title raises three questions, which this introduction will try to answer. Why, after three decades of intense interest, was the widely diffused TTP forgotten for so long? Why did scholars begin to study the TTP once again after 1850? And finally, why was the TTP acknowledged as a philosophical masterpiece from the 1960s onwards, and one which is still worth studying?

2. Forgetting a Masterpiece (1670–1700)

The TTP's early reception is well-documented [3–7]. This reception was facilitated by the book's instant succès de scandale and wide diffusion. As we read in letter 30 of the Correspondence, Spinoza, in October 1665, felt the need to interrupt the writing of the Ethics to engage in the theological–political controversies of his day and to defend the freedom of philosophizing and, more broadly, 'of saying what we think', against the brutality of the ministers. After Spinoza finished his work, the publisher took great pains to avoid censorship ([8], pp. 275–285). For example, he, gave all eight first editions a fake title page. However, in July 1674 the TTP was finally repressed together with Lodewijk Meijer's Philosophiae S. Scripturae Interpres (1666), also anonymously published, and Hobbes's Leviathan. As stated, all these books undermined the 'Christian religion'. According to Jonathan Israel, this prohibition did not have to wait until the downfall of the Grand-Pensionary Jan de Witt's 'Regime of True Freedom' in 1672. Well before this year public authorities had confiscated the TTP [9]. Moreover, although the manuscript was already being clandestinely circulated in 1671, a Dutch version was withheld from publication until 1693/4 because, as Spinoza feared, it would provoke the civil authorities [10].

Notwithstanding this ban by the Court of Holland, the TTP was widely available to European readers in the Latin original or in the French, English, and ultimately the Dutch translation of the late seventeenth century. In 1736 it was stated that 'sein Tractatus theologico-politicus ist noch oft zuhaben' [11]. Israel praises the 'extraordinary adroitness of Rieuwertsz', Spinoza's publisher, which resulted in an 'impressive diffusion for a clandestine work' ([8], pp. 280–281). The many refutations show that the TTP indeed was widely read.

A main target of the critique is the philosophy 'hidden' in the TTP. The Cartesian Lambertus van Velthuysen (1622–1685), for example, who during the 1650s and 1660s published many theological–political pamphlets, argued that the TTP implied 'atheism', because the anonymous author's denial of a providential God emptied the notion of moral obligations and legal prescriptions by teaching the necessity of all things. Moreover, Spinoza's philosophical naturalism puts all religions on a par, which implies that the Bible

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is basically equal to the Qur'an with respect to its essential relevance, which is its moral teaching [12]. The Dordrecht merchant and early Spinoza correspondent Van Blijenbergh also argued that Spinoza's conception of religion is a natural one, inspired by Machiavelli, which makes religion 'subjected to the interest and humour' of the sovereign [13]. Quite naturally, the publication of the Opera Posthuma led to a change of focus. Why study the TTP, where Spinoza's philosophy is still hidden, if the Ethics made a fully developed version of his thought available? Already in 1685, Pierre Poiret had denounced the 'arch-atheist' Spinoza without taking serious notice of the TTP. In 1690, the Leiden theologian Christophorus Wittichius did not mention the TTP at all in his Anti-Spinoza [14,15]. For more than a century Pierre Bayle (1646–1706) determined the fate of the TTP. Although the entry 'Spinoza, Benoit de' is by far the longest in the Dictionaire historique et critique, it rarely discusses the TTP. In remark E, for example, Bayle argues that the TTP does not present Spinoza's real ideas. According to the TTP all religion—true or false—takes for granted an Invisible Judge, who punishes the wicked and rewards the virtuous, but that is not Spinoza's considered view of virtue, he observed. In remark R, Bayle shows himself unimpressed by Spinoza's analysis of miracles. The whole argument in chapter 6 is a petitio principii, given Spinoza's definition of God as an infinite blind force producing all things in nature. Therefore, Spinoza's 'systematic atheism' is discussed with exclusive reference to the Ethics [16].

A second target of the early critics was, not surprisingly, Spinoza's theological–political argument. The Dutch Cartesian Regnerus van Mansvelt (1639–1671), for example, stated that the TTP is a theological–political work of fiction and runs counter to all facts in falsely observing that Amsterdam gave unrestrained freedom, i.e., license, to all religions, since the city government constantly took measures to repress Roman Catholicism and other sects [17]. In La Religion des Hollandois, the Swiss minister Jean Baptise Stoupe (1651–1673) conversely argued that the TTP reflected the theological–political practice in the Dutch Republic. Although the young republic had a 'religion de l'état', as with all states, it granted such a comprehensive freedom to all religions ([18], p. 32) that even the printing of Socinian books, which undermined the basic truths of Christianity, was stimulated. Therefore, the Dutch state was only in name Reformed ([18], p.83). The Dutch presence in Japan, which the Japanese authorities only permitted if there were no outward signs of Christianity, such as the possession of Bibles, praised in TTP chapter 5 as an exemplary symbiosis of political prudence and pure religion ([18], pp. 105–110), shows, according to Stoupe, that the Dutch authorities did what Spinoza advised them to do: reduce religion to a mere political instrument.

Other critics denounced the TTP for linking politics and religion in such a way that no real liberty resulted—an argument, which some commentators echo today. Jacob Thomasius for example, stated that the TTP not only 'licentiously inundates philosophy', but also theology with falsehoods. This will endanger the souls of the citizens and cause dissent and conflict [19]. Johannes Museaus (1613–1681) argued in the same vein. Political authority, he observed, is instituted by God not only to prevent rebellion and civil war but also to establish the foundations of civil happiness. To that end a public religion is established, which includes the basic truths about God that all men naturally know. This is the religion the public church preaches, the public school teachers, and public law codifies. A Christian government provides for a liberty of philosophizing, for the unhindered search for truth, but prevents the spread of errors and invites scholars to refute falsehoods [20]. A well-instituted confessional state, Musaeus argued, does not square with Spinoza's ideas on this issue.

The last example is Henry More, who in his famous Epistola Altera (1677) underlined the rationality of Christian religion and Christian politics. According to Spinoza, prophecy and revelation are natural phenomena, based on the imagination ([21], p. 569). This implies a complete irrationality of Holy Scriptures. However, according to More it is obvious that 'we rightly assume that Scripture agrees with reason, being dictated by the Holy Ghost and we know God by means of natural light'. The consequence of Spinoza's thinking, in

contrast, is that the divine or natural law is a human fabrication, which through its lack of rationality would require sheer obedience and charity ([21], p. 585). In opposition to Spinoza, More thus stated that natural law is in fact-based upon reason and not merely on power. By natural reason we know certain moral principles, to which both citizens and governments must conform. No government can undo them, just as no sovereign can undo the axioms of geometry. Therefore, the sovereign may be called 'the interpreter' of the divine law and Scripture, but this power is restricted by reason and nature. Spinoza, by making this power unlimited, is a 'perfidious and hence sordid flatterer of the highest powers' ([21], p. 593). More saw in the TTP a specimen of vain speculation, which endangered existing political-religious practices.

It is Bayle, who first separated theology and politics. In the *Pensées diverses sur la comète*, Bayle, alluding to the preface of the TTP, argues that 'the Christian religion of love' did not result in the moral improvement of man. Based on this argument, he severed the traditional link between atheism and immorality. As is well-known, Hobbes and Locke, on the contrary, excluded atheists from toleration, because of the serious danger they purportedly posed to social order. However, Bayle thought that religion is irrelevant to man's conduct and that different religious doctrines do not necessarily imply a different morality. He gives the example of predestination. Although endorsed by Protestants and Muslims and rejected by Roman Catholics, they all act in the same manner. This implies, Bayle argues that religion does not necessarily make a man morally strong. An atheist, such as Sultan Mahomet II, committed horrible crimes, but Nero, who had a 'general sense of the Deity', did so too [22]. As a rule religion is even a threat to public morality and political society, because theologians deal with religious differences as if they were a political issue; an atheist prince would have caused less harm to the French Protestants than the most Christian king, Louis XIV. Bayle alludes here to the final observations in the last chapter of the TTP. On the other hand, an ordered society of atheists is at least theoretically possible, and history provides ample proof of virtuous atheists such as Epicurus and Spinoza, the 'greatest atheist ever' in the Modern Age ([3], pp. 23–33). Accordingly, there should be no hyphen between theology and politics [23].

3. The Forgotten TTP (1700–1850)

The decline of the confessional state, which had made theology of state interest, and the ensuing separation of Church and State during the French Revolution, made the theological–political issues the TTP addressed increasingly irrelevant. Eighteenth-century survey works hardly mention the TTP. In the fourth volume of his Historia Critica Philosophiae (1742–1767), Johann Brucker, for example, called Spinoza an 'eclectic philosopher', who based his system on the idea that God is the same as the Oneness, or in the Greek phrase Hen kai Pan. He devoted only a few lines to the TTP, writing that people, who cannot 'stand the reins of religion' are attracted by the TTP and 'the conclusion that all religion is superstition is based on the premise that all prophecy is a form of "fecund human imagination"'. This idea is key to his reading of the divine law [24]. Another example of this benign neglect is J.H. Zedler's entry 'Spinoza' in volume 39(!) of his Grosses Universal-Lexicon. It provided many bibliographical details about Spinoza's life and works. Regarding the TTP, it only says that the book attracted 'the lovers of freedom of the press and the freedom of religion', because it contained Spinoza's atheism in a carefully hidden form [25].

The last example is the Encyclopédie of Diderot and d'Alembert. In the 22 columns devoted to Spinoza, by far the most attention given to a modern philosopher in the Encyclopédie, the author reproduces Bayle's entry almost word by word and calls Spinoza's philosophy a système monstrueux, full of deceitful ambiguities. The TTP, the author says, scandalized Europe but it was only an 'essai de ses forces' and in the Ethics he went much further. The TTP came from Spinoza's 'obscure retreat' and dealt with 'religion in itself, and in the practice it had in civil government', but only the doubtful origin of the Bible

books is outlined. Religion and politics, the other main topics of the TTP, are not dealt with [26] [1].

The so-called Spinoza Renaissance did not change the TTP's fate. In 1785, the 'Counter-Enlightenment' philosopher, F.H. Jacobi, had Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Hernn Moses Mendelssohn published. The book only once mentions the TTP, unlike the Ethics, the Correspondence, the Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione, and even the Cogitata Metaphysica, which are frequently referenced. Although the first German translation of the TTP appeared in 1787 as the first volume of Spinoza's Philosophical Works under the title Ueber Heilige Schrift, Judenthum, Recht der höchsten Gewalt in geistlichen Dingen und die Freyheit zu philosophiren, the translator argued that the TTP is mainly of historical interest. Spinoza, 'a pious, but also enlightened man' put forward many ideas, which contemporary enlightened theologians at last share and this version will make the reading public aware that the TTP is the source of many ideas now current [27].

Textbooks of the first half of the nineteenth century confirm this idea. Hegel, for example, who attributed to Spinoza a decisive role in the history of philosophy, showed little interest in the TTP. He only stated that the TTP made Spinoza famous and that it preceded modern theology: 'all the things Christian theologians critically wrote about the Pentateuch, by which it is established that these books of Moses were much later edited—a main chapter in Protestant Theology—is already in this book of Spinoza' [28].

4. The TTP (1850–1960) as a Work of Circumstance

After 1850, historians began to study the TTP. The first is Kuno Fischer (1824–1907), who dealt with Spinoza in the second part of his volume on Descartes and his school. This influential history of modern philosophy was regularly reprinted during the second half of the nineteenth century and translated into English. The Jubiläum edition of 1898 called this volume Spinoza, His Life, Works and Doctrine (Spinozas Leben, Werke und Lehre) 'for the sake of brevity', because it is largely devoted to the Dutch philosopher (only the beginning 80 pages discuss other Cartesians such as Malebranche and Geulincx). Fischer's basic thesis is that Spinoza developed the 'doctrines of Descartes' and worked out their logical consequences. Spinoza transformed the dualism between finite and infinite substance into an exclusive monism in which all things express Divine Nature. His concept of God implies his naturalism. Fischer's theory about the origin of Spinozism implies that all other possible influences, mainly of Renaissance and Jewish traditions are relegated to the background ([29], pp. 260–265) [2]. Fischer dealt with all the works of Spinoza from the Short Treatise onwards. He described the TTP as 'a daring book, by which the philosopher chased away by his own people, completed his isolation' ([29], p. 147). He claimed an unmeasured freedom of thought which even Descartes did not dare to ask for and 'only after some decades the English deists were prepared to do'. In the religious part, he settled scores with the Amsterdam rabbis as he already did in his Apologia, which Fischer considered to be lost ([29], p. 308). It gave the TTP a clear anti-Jewish nature and he argues that Spinoza saw Judaism in a definitely less favorable light than Christianity. Furthermore, to plea for 'the freedom of thought' Spinoza had to enervate the cognitive claims of all religion. The TTP's political part, Fischer added, made the Treatise seem to be a work of circumstance, in which Spinoza defended the republicanism of Johan de Witt. Spinoza's real politics we find, according to Fischer, in the Ethics and the Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus), the latter because it is based upon the doctrine of the affects. In the TP, Spinoza adopted the example of Machiavelli and examined the conflicting urges for survival in the state of nature, which result in a precarious equilibrium of powers in society. In the outline of Spinoza's political teaching in this book, Fischer never mentions the TTP, which he saw as a book of mere historical interest in which Spinoza settled scores with his past.

[1] The lines on the TTP we find on p. 463.

[2] His conclusion is: 'Spinoza in no way is a Jewish philosopher'. In the fifth edition C. Gebhardt added some fifty pages of notes to actualise Fischer's work.

In 1880, the legal scholar Frederick Pollock (1845–1937) published his equally influential Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy, which is also still in print to this day. The author was a declared Spinozist who in 1920 founded the Societas Spinozana. Like Fischer he felt that the Apologia, which Spinoza wrote to renounce the synagogue foreshadowed the TTP, which makes the book a work of circumstance. Moreover, Spinoza's appeal to the state against priestcraft is 'the worldly common sense of the lay mind, which looks to the enlightened civil magistrate to deliver men from the clamor of anathemas', as the Indian heretic will do by appealing to the 'impartial arm of the British Government' for protection of his rights ([30], p. 32). Pollock also argued that the TTP is connected, via Lessing, to the school of historical—Bible—criticism. Pollock calls it a work of unsurpassed power. It is an elaborate plea for the liberty of thought and expression, which makes all charges of absolutism unsound, he argues. However, he deals with Spinoza's politics by referring to the Political Treatise. By its merely practical nature and being 'a work of conciliation' there remains an 'unexplained gap' between the TTP and the 'thorough-going speculation of the Ethics' and it is to be assessed in the light of his philosophical work ([30], pp. 360–363).

The same idea is to be found in Baruch d'Espinoza (1862, 1865, and 1871), a monograph written by the Dutch Spinozist Johannes van Vloten (1818–1883). The freedom of thought and belief argued for by Spinoza is exemplified in the city of Amsterdam and he shares with the reader the philosopher's wish to see 'our age free of superstition'. However, the concept of freedom developed in the TTP is merely a negative one. In the Ethics, Van Vloten stated, Spinoza argued for a positive concept of freedom, which is the ability 'to act in accordance with the insights of reason', i.e., the Kantian notion of autonomy, which, unlike Spinoza, Kant founded on an arbitrary metaphysics [31] [3]. We may conclude that all these nineteenth-century studies display a remarkable lack of interest in the TTP's philosophical contents.

In 1915 the luminary of German neo-Kantianism Herman Cohen (1842–1918) published a long paper on the TTP. As a Kantian he already rejected moral naturalism, but the anti-Judaism of Spinoza caused Cohen to take up his pen. He accepted Fischer's two main historical premises: the TTP is a pamphlet, which both defends the republicanism of Jan de Witt and attacks the Jews, who excommunicated him, and based on these historical circumstances, Spinoza created a political-religious liberalism that is blind to religion and Judaism in particular. Although Judaism is indeed a political religion, Moses did more than create a state religion and his laws are more than the laws of a particular state [32]. Jewish religion is not created by state decree, but by prophecy, which preaches a universal morality, based on reason. Moreover, Cohen argues, Spinoza adopted the Renaissance theory of the state, which is founded in the concept of nature. In Greek philosophy, personified by Aristotle and Plato, 'nature' (physis) had the original meaning of primordial truth and justice. However, the revival of Stoic pantheism, made Spinoza return to the sophist notion of amoral power, which 'excludes the application of morality in politics'. Spinoza's preference for Christianity and his caricature of Judaism in his political-religious reality, Cohen argues, gave rise to modern anti-Semitism, which he sees in the pantheism of German idealism after Kant, which, similar to Spinoza, had to identify might and right. It is in preparing the way to modern liberalism that the cultural-historical significance of the TTP lies. Moreover, 'this great enemy' also teaches 'by his misconceptions, what is a living and personal Judaism'.

Even more influential is Leo Strauss, who exclusively wrote on the TTP and neglected Spinoza's other works. In a famous postwar article 'How to study Spinoza's Theological–Political Treatise', included in Persecution and the Art of Writing, he stated that the TTP 'has become the classic document of the "rationalist" or "secularist" attack on the belief in revelation' ([33], p. 142). However, in the twentieth century the case of revelation appears less settled than in the nineteenth century and 'the study of the Treatise is again of real importance'. In his earlier Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwis-

[3] Chapter 9 provides a more or less complete translation of the TTP's preface.

senschaft, published in 1930, he argued that Biblical science as developed by Spinoza is based on the uncritical assumption of Radical Enlightenment that revealed that religion is to be assessed merely in a rational and scientific way. Strauss presents Spinoza's TTP as the outcome of a critique of religion which started with the Greek philosophers and led him to the critique of Maimonides and demolition 'with Cartesian means of the unity of faith and reason he established' ([34], p. 183). According to Strauss, the TTP played a significant part in the establishment of the modern Weltanschauung, a legacy, which became 'doubtful' to us. Modernity originated in the Early Modern attempts to separate theology from politics. However, if religion is essentially law, as Spinoza himself argued, religion necessarily has political implications.

The contradictions in the TTP motivated Strauss to discuss the method of reading, because they are not a sign of a weak mind, but completely intentional. Therefore, we should read 'between the lines'. The book is written for a specific Christian public, who still believe in the authority of theology, i.e., the Bible and uses its anti-Jewish prejudices to free it from its Christian ones ([34], preface, p. 20) [4]. Therefore, the Tractatus is not an 'intelligent book', such as the Elements of Euclid, or the Ethics we may add, for which the author has no particular public in mind. The TTP is not a philosophical, but a rhetorical text, which prepared the way for Spinoza's philosophy ([33], pp. 150–151). Therefore, the TTP is a masterpiece of political thought.

5. The TTP as a Philosophical Masterpiece (1960–2020)

Philosophical interest in the TTP arose in France during the mid-1960s. It sprang from two sources. The first is the crisis of Christian orthodoxy. In 1966 André Malet (1919–1989), a former priest who converted to Protestantism, published Le Traité théologico-politique de Spinoza et la pensée Biblique. He argued that we should link Spinoza's religious thought with our own. Malet who introduced the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann in France, argued that many conclusions reached by TTP's philology are refuted by later research, but his method is still relevant. Spinoza realised that modern man cannot take Scripture at face value as orthodoxy did, but he did not reject the Bible as belonging to a past gone beyond repair, as 'modern rationalists' argue. Therefore, the TTP is relevant for readers who are open to Spinoza's anti-humanist religious philosophy, which teaches, similarly to Calvin, the total dependence of man on God. Spinoza teaches us to take the Biblical myths, adopted by Christianity and Judaism, seriously because they contain an eternal sense and show man looking for a beatitude, which is caused by his union with God [35].

Stanislaus Breton (1912–2005), a priest, who entertained a longstanding friendship with Althusser, also argued for the actuality of Spinoza's philosophy of religion. His critique of religion in the TTP is not only destructive, but contains a theory of the imagination, which enables us to understand positive religion better. The hyphen between theology and politics does not only denote a link of the past but refers to a relation to be established in a new key ([36], p.12). Both religion and politics are interrelated practices to regulate the passions and to transcend subjective interests ([36], p. 127). However, neither Malet nor Breton answer the question as to how the TTP relates to the rest of Spinoza's philosophy.

Such an answer was provided by Sylvain Zac (*1909). In his monograph on the TTP's hermeneutics he is influenced by Strauss's idea that the TTP is directed to a public of liberal Christians in order to have them accept the 'freedom of thought', which enables man to live a truly human life, i.e., a life according to reason, by freeing them from their prejudices ([37], pp. 3, 227). However, he refuses to accept Strauss's view that the TTP is consciously inconsistent and makes use of ruses. To explain the relationship between the TTP and the Ethics, Zac adopts two premises. The first is Spinoza's 'truth does not contradict truth' and second that his philosophy is deeply religious ([37], pp. 225–229). Although in the Ethics we find truth itself, we also find 'reason' in the TTP, which Zac identifies as common sense.

[4] Strauss shares Cohen's view about the Christian bias of the TTP, but he calls it a 'Machiavellian proposal: The humanitarian end'–to solve the Jewish problem –'seems to justify every means' (p. 21).

Spinoza's philosophy is, therefore, multilayered. There is a 'philosophical religion', which is to be found in his juvenile works and in the Ethics, and a 'prophetic religion' studied in the TTP, which is also 'authentic' and leads by another way to Spinoza's supreme good [38] [5].

This suggestion inspired Lacroix and Matheron. In Spinoza et le problem du salut (1970), the Roman-Catholic philosopher Jean Lacroix (1900–1986) argued that according to Spinoza human salvation is to be attained in two ways, by philosophy and faith, which correspond with the Ethics and the TTP [39]. Alexandre Matheron (1926–2020) addressed the TTP after his Individu et communauté chez Spinoza (1969), which deals with the politics of the philosopher in a commentary on the last parts of the Ethics. Le Christ et le salut des ignorants is based on the premise that the TTP is a philosophically serious text [40]. Matheron reads Spinoza as arguing that every religion is a historical phenomenon. However, in Christianity 'the part Christ plays is to set free the essential from the accidental and to let emerge from history what surpasses history' ([41], p.8). The essential core of Christianity is the universal credo minimum, which the TTP establishes. This creed is rational both in a political and philosophical sense. It is rational in a political sense, because it makes a peaceful and civilized society possible, and the philosopher will endorse this creed, since he wants to know the Highest Truth, i.e., to know God, not only for himself, but also for other men. A philosopher, therefore, chooses a language suitable to convey his message to the public he has in mind ([41], p. 99).

The second source of the French TTP revival is the crisis of Marxism. While a Chinese translation of the TTP was published in 1963 in Beijing, under Mao Zedong, in France Louis Althusser (1918–1990) began to revise the fossilized Communist Party doctrine. André Tosel (1941–2017) added that Marxism turns to Spinoza in times of crisis [42]. In Spinoza ou le crepuscule de la servitude (1984), Tosel argues that Spinoza did not study the 'theological–political complex' in passing, but that it leads to the core of his thought [43]. The TTP is naturally linked to the Ethics, since Spinoza develops a revolutionary ontology and presents no metaphysical truths beyond historical contingence. The TTP is an introduction to true philosophy because it denounces the principal enemies of such a life. On a theoretical level this enemy is superstition and on a practical level it is 'emotional servitude'. This liberation became possible to conceive in the 'democratic and tolerant society' of the Dutch Republic.

Moreover, both Tosel and even more clearly Antonio Negri (*1933), who in L'Anomalia selvaggia (1981) dedicated a large section to the TTP, underline the pre-capitalist social structure of the Netherlands as the cradle of emancipating science and liberating practice [44]. The most influential of these 'Marxist' studies on the TTP is Etienne Balibar's (*1942) Spinoza et la politique (1985), frequently reprinted to this day and translated, among others, into English, Spanish, Polish, Persian, Turkish, and Japanese. Like Tosel he argued that there are no 'ahistorical texts in philosophy' and therefore metaphysics and politics are intrinsically linked. Balibar exposed 'liberal mystifications', which imply all kinds of dualism and transcendence, which Spinoza criticizes. Although Spinoza et la politique contains few essentially new ideas, it owes its significance to its clear style [45].

With accelerating postwar globalization, the TTP began to be studied outside France and indeed across the world as a foundational text of modern society and the idea of democratic self-determination. In Brazil, for example, the philosopher Marilena Chaui (*1941) turned to Spinoza to think about dictatorship after 1968 when the country underwent a repressive phase, 'focusing on superstition and violence in a work that at that time no one was focusing on—the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus' [46]. New translations of the TTP soon followed, in Arabic (Cairo 1971), Italian (Turin 1972), Spanish (Salamanca 1976), Japanese (Tokyo 1976), Hebrew (Jerusalem 1983), and Portuguese (Lisbon 1988). Academic interest flourished thanks to conferences such as one organized in 1982 around Spinoza's political and religious thought in Amsterdam by the Vereniging het Spinozahuis. The increasing attention and new translations began to replace the nineteenth-century versions, accommodating new perspectives on the TTP: in Dutch (Akkerman 1997, Klever, 1999),

[5] See also p. 109. This collection contains two essays of the 1950s: 'L'idée de religion chez Spinmoza' and 'Le problème du christianisme de Spinoza'.

English (Shirley 1989, Yaffe 2004, Israel 2006 and Curley 2016), French (Appuhn 1982, Lagrée and Moreau 1999), German (Gawlick and Niewöhner, 1979, Bartuschat, 2012), and Russian (Lopatkina 1998).

Another scholar who combined the contextual approach to the TTP with a recognition of its philosophical relevance, beyond the historical circumstances that led to it, is Yirmiyahu Yovel (1935–2018). In the two volumes of Spinoza and Other Heretics (1989), Yovel first traces the concept of immanence to the Marranos, whose exposure to multiple identities and religious worldviews eroded a fixed belief that paved the way for Spinoza's radical thought. In the second volume, Yovel presents Spinoza's politics and ethics as a coherent whole. The TTP's conception of the 'multitude', Yovel writes, is an epistemic category, which the Ethics can help explain, and should be interpreted as a 'philosophical problem', i.e., independent of the Dutch context, to be dealt with by other philosophers who embarked on 'adventures of immanence' such as Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Yovel's view of truth in Spinoza is multilayered, too, as he distinguishes how the TTP proposes an imitation of the truth through the power of the imagination, which does not strictly follow from reason but is in harmony with it. However, he is critical of attempts to bring Spinoza within the theologians' fold. Spinoza's TTP and defense of an early form of democracy should be understood, according to Yovel, from the perspective of 'pure immanence': 'As there is nothing on earth or beyond it to generate binding norms and obligations, these can only be drawn from the consent of actual human beings who set up a government to use and distribute power in the service of their natural desires' [47].

It is not until the publication of Jonathan Israel's (*1946) first of four volumes on the Enlightenment, Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750, however, that the combined historical and philosophical approach reached general audiences. Israel's publication, in 2001, led to new interest in the TTP outside the scholarly world [8]. The source of this renewed interest in the TTP came in the wake of the crises of Christianity and Marxism and a need to know how to deal with the persistence of religion in a secularizing age. Israel's answer is that the TTP, even more than the Ethics, laid the philosophical foundations of a set of values that created modernity. It is the masterpiece that criticized religious domination and the first explicit defense of democracy in political philosophy.

Radical Enlightenment's defense of an uncompromising modernization toward democratic and therefore secular values sparked debates in New York and in Amsterdam, among others, after the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center towers. If Spinoza's view of religion and politics shaped modernity as we know it, then the question of Islamic fundamentalism, which attracted much attention in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, does not revolve around a clash between 'Western' and 'Islamic' values, but between philosophy and theology generally understood. Israel places the TTP at the center of a historical development of global proportions in which reason struggles against faith: 'The true conflict is between theological thinking (whether it be Christian, Jewish, or Islamic) and the thinking of the Radical Enlightenment' [48].

This view gained popularity well beyond Europe and North America. Already available in Arabic since 1971, the TTP recently also became available in Turkish (Ankara, 2011) and Persian (Tehran, 2017). The translator of the TTP in Persian, Ali Ferdowsi, names Radical Enlightenment in his foreword as the inspiration for wanting to make the book available in Iran and Afghanistan. Given reports of accelerating secularization in the MENA region, Spinoza's TTP will likely continue to play a role in contestations over Islam and the state [49,50].

In the Netherlands, the TTP's renewed popularity also coincides with mass secularization and a crisis of national identity. Since the end of the Cold War, it has become increasingly clear that so-called depillarization left an identity vacuum at the same time as the country faced new challenges of pluralism after migrants and refugees of Christian, Muslim, and other backgrounds gained citizenship. Israel's books have helped canonize Spinoza as a prominent figure not only of modernity in general but also of the famed

progressive culture of Amsterdam and now of the Netherlands. In this period, Henri Krop published a long study on the reception of Spinoza's thought in the Netherlands (2014), describing Spinoza as a 'paradoxical icon' of a down-to-earth country, despite the intricate metaphysics of the Ethics and his Spanish-Jewish roots.

Spinoza's thinking is remarkably appropriated and reinterpreted by actors on different sides of the political spectrum in twenty-first century contestations about the philosopher, religious diversity, and tolerance.

In Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present (1999), feminist philosophers Moira Gatens (*1954) and Genevieve Lloyd (*1941) turn to the TTP to think positively about cultural diversity, denying that the TTP advocates authoritarian rule or an enforced social uniformity [51]. In Spinoza on Learning to Live Together (2020), Susan James (*1951) gives a holistic account of Spinoza's ethics and politics, to similarly describe the political necessity of human cooperation and pluralistic coexistence [52]. Focusing on the individual's freedom to think, other scholars such as Spinoza's biographer Steven Nadler (*1958) agree that Spinoza opposed authoritarian rule but present a more liberal interpretation. In A Book Forged in Hell (2011), following Yovel and Israel, Nadler also presents Spinoza's TTP as pivotal in the development of the worldview of our 'secular age' [53].

These feminist and liberal interpretations contrast with volumes such as the 2018 Moord op Spinoza, in which the Dutch law professor and far-right senator, Paul Cliteur (*1955), describes a contemporary 'murder of Spinoza' at the hands of Islamic extremists and the scholars and activists on the left who write apologies for them [54]. Yet another position is that of philosopher Victor Kal (*1951), based in Amsterdam, who describes the TTP as a work exhibiting a 'fascist' structure of political reasoning in De List van Spinoza: De Grote Gelijkschakeling (2020) [55]. According to Kal, Spinoza tricks the people into obedience by having the state manipulate their religious passions to create uniformity, for which Kal refers to the German word 'Gleichschaltung', Nazi terminology for the controlling of all aspects of citizens' lives under totalitarian rule. This reading, in turn, goes against that of Nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt, who read the TTP as the conniving of a 'liberal Jew', whose success resulted in the weakening of state sovereignty in European political thought, because 'the leviathan's vitality was sapped from within and life began to drain out of him' [56].

Where Kal protests Spinoza's rejection of transcendence, which reminds one of the theologians' criticisms of the TTP in different periods, Cliteur sees the TTP as fostering a line of defense against the threat to liberal democracy posed by Islam and monotheism in general. Both appear to agree, however, that he was no defender of religious diversity and come in against the feminist and liberal readings of Spinoza. It appears then, that Spinoza's TTP cannot easily be subsumed into one single perspective, whether feminist, liberal, or authoritarian, without serious objections from another; every philosophical classic is multilayered and has the potential to open up a whole range of perspectives.

6. Conclusions and Overview of Articles in This Special Issue

In the 21st century, Theo Verbeek outlined the TTP's inconsistencies in Exploring the Will of God (2003) and in a review of the Cambridge Guide to the work, named it 'badly organized and—let us admit it—without a clear and recognizable focus' [57]. Yet, notwithstanding being in the shadow of the Ethics for three centuries since its publication in 1670, in the past 50 years, the TTP is being read in more languages than ever. There still is no consensus about aim, argument, and intellectual sources, and perhaps, given the book's reception thus far, there never will be. The work's elusiveness has facilitated its interpretation by scholars with communist, liberal, feminist, and even far-right leanings, a hallmark of a masterpiece that can be read and reread, and in which one keeps discovering new insights and ways of interpreting.

The articles in this Special Issue are similar in the sense that they convey an array of differing readings. In their contributions, Jo Spaans and Henri Krop situate the TTP in its seventeenth century Dutch context. Spaans shows that 'Spinoza lived in a country marked

by religious diversity and a lively culture of discussion' [58] and Krop explains how the TTP intervened in the political-religious controversies of his age.

Michiel Leezenberg's contribution, which focuses on the medieval roots of the TTP, going as far back as Al-Farabi, can be contrasted with Jo van Cauter and Daniel Schneider's emphasis on Spinoza's methodological reliance in the TTP on the scientific revolution represented by Francis Bacon, i.e., to consider 'the natural historical method' as 'the best means available for interpreting historical documents like Scripture'.

The charge of having produced philosophical discrepancies in one work also reappears, in Martijn Buijs' suggestion that Spinoza's philosophy of religion is contradictory. Yoram Stein, in contrast, argues the TTP to be a coherent book, which discusses and places the domains of theology and philosophy differently, but leads to the salvation of the ignorant and wise alike.

Finally, three articles demonstrate the TTP's continued critical relevance in a global world. Viviane Magno gives an account of the philosopher Marlinea Chaui, based in Brazil, who analyzes the concept of 'superstition' as being central to the TTP's critique of authoritarian rule. Magno warns readers, however, that Chaui's reading is not to be reduced to her context, as Spinoza's TTP itself should not. It is this broader recognition of the TTP's critical power that allows it to be relevant in wildly different countries in the present. Sina Mirzaei's overview of the TTP's reception within the Islamic Republic of Iran, gives a glimpse of a dark world where philosophers, translators, and journalists have been murdered for translating and commenting on philosophies considered dangerous to the political theocracy. Jamie van der Klaauw's article shows that our world of digital 'fake news' and conspiracy theories, used effectively by demagogues, has not fully emancipated itself from the superstition criticized by Spinoza. What these three articles show, in conclusion, is that Spinoza's situated criticism was a philosophical criticism of political domination, enabled by the manipulation of the masses' emotions through the power of the imagination.

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Spinoza in His Time: The 17th-Century Religious Context

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Abstract: In one of the last paragraphs of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670), Spinoza extolls the harmony between people of a diversity of faiths, maintained by the magistracy of Amsterdam. However, he also seems apprehensive about the possibility of the return of chaos, such as during the Arminian Controversies in the Dutch Republic in the 1610s and the English Civil War in the 1640s and 1650s. The so-called Wolzogen affair in 1668 probably rattled him. Spinoza's fears would, however, prove groundless. Theological controversy in the public church was often fierce and bitter, but did not threaten the integrity of the State after 1619. Political and ecclesiastical authorities supported discussions and debate in which a new theological consensus could be hammered out. From the examples of Petrus de Witte's *Wederlegginge der Sociniaensche Dwaelingen* and Romeyn de Hooghe's *Hieroglyphica*, I will argue that such freedom was not limited to the universities, under the aegis of academic freedom, but that Spinoza's call for free research and open debate was in fact everyday reality.

Keywords: Spinoza; Petrus de Witte; Romeyn de Hooghe

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1. Introduction

In Spinoza's lifetime, the Dutch Republic rose to an impressive peak of power and wealth. Wartime conditions suited the ill-assorted handful of provinces. They never stopped trade—on the contrary, the unsuccessful attempts of the Spanish enemy to block expansion of existing shipping routes towards the Far East and the New World, where exotic spices came from and mountains of gold were rumoured to exist, provoked an armed response that won the Dutch a global emporium. Together with the manufacture of quality goods, the cultivation of industrial crops and efficient dairy farming at home, as well as piracy on the high seas, this created a wealthy elite of merchants and entrepreneurs as well as a thriving artisanal class. Strong social networks in cities as well as in rural areas buffered the shocks of personal misfortune due to sickness, too many young mouths to feed, or old age, and this in turn fostered a resilient workforce. The booming Dutch economy absorbed a massive immigration of labour migrants, both skilled and casual, and religious refugees from all over Europe, almost effortlessly.

Inevitably, fortune did not smile equally upon all, and the astounding military and economic successes had their victims. Yet, despite its darker sides, the designation 'Golden Age' fits the Dutch 17th century [1,2].[1] Prosperity manifested itself in a thriving market for luxury goods, art and books. Rivalry between the seven provinces resulted in no fewer than five full-fledged universities and ten Illustrious Schools, testifying to a lively intellectual culture as well. The academic climate was highly competitive and internationally oriented [3]. Knowledge production spilled over from the Latinate academies into a much broader milieu of skilled artisans, inventors, artists and writers. In the absence of censorship, except on publications that were considered outright seditious, blasphemous or slanderous, they found information on every conceivable subject in the thriving Dutch book market, also in the vernacular, and contributed to knowledge production in their

[1] The way Prak in 2020 rewrote his earlier book reflects the recent discussion on the term 'Golden Age' in the Netherlands.

turn [4,5]. Although the Dutch Reformed church was the public church of the Republic, and the many and various religious dissenters faced restrictions in their freedom of public worship and access to public office, they were excluded neither from the economy, nor from intellectual culture and debate. Spinoza himself is an eloquent example of this. In what follows, we will look at the context of Spinoza's thought: the religious diversity, the theological controversies, and the general culture of free debate in the Dutch Republic of his days.

2. Religious Diversity

In one of the last paragraphs of his *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Spinoza extolls the harmony between people of a diversity of faiths, maintained by the magistracy of Amsterdam. In this excellent city, he writes, 'all kinds of people, belonging to every nation and professing every faith, live together in perfect unity' [6] (chapter 20, § 15). An attempt to visualise this diversity yields something like Figure 1. What you see is a contemporary map of Amsterdam. Each of the dots represents a house of prayer that was in use during the 17th century, and the dots are colour coded for the various Christian confessions and the Jews [7] (pp. 412–413).

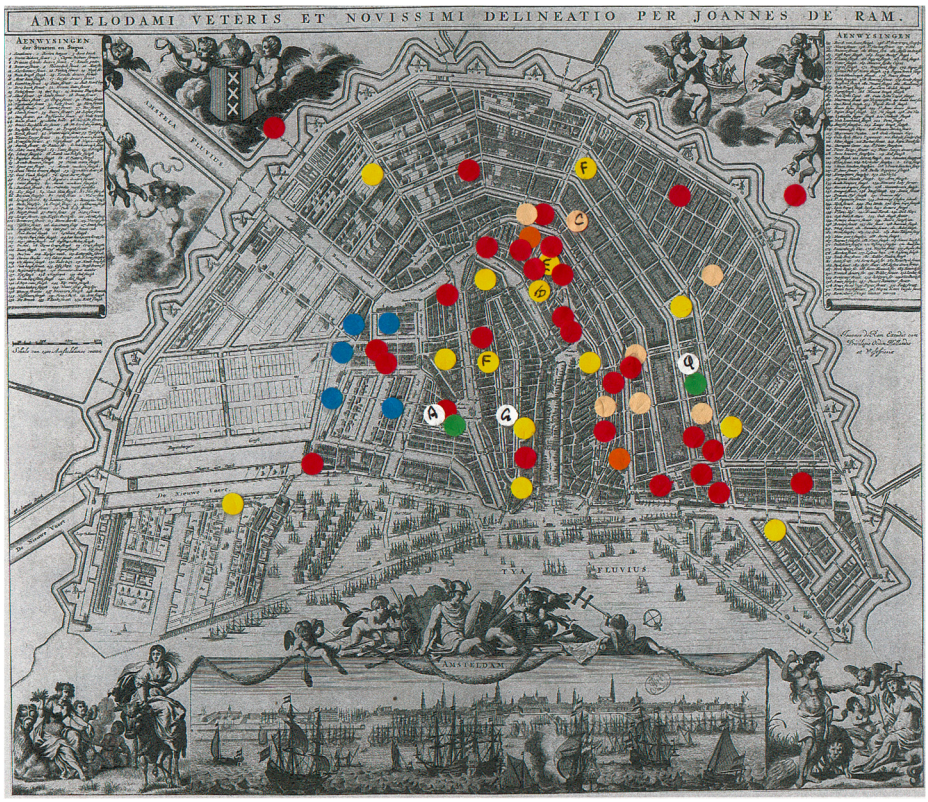

Figure 1. Map of Amsterdam, designed by Johannes de Ram, ca. 1683, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam sign. RP-P-AO-20-46, overlaid with an impression of the locations of churches and synagogues.

What strikes the eye is that the Reformed Church, as the result of an extensive building programme, had the use of old and new church buildings evenly spread throughout the old city centre as well as the recently built neighbourhoods around it: the yellow dots. Reformed immigrants from Francophone, Anglophone or German speaking lands could attend services in their own designated buildings (yellow dots marked F, E, D respectively). Yet the Reformed churches were far outnumbered by the Catholic 'hidden churches': the red dots. Various other religious groups were numerous enough to have several places of worship at their disposal: the relatively prosperous Mennonites (salmon dots) in the prestigious western half of the city, the on average poorer Jews (blue) at the eastern side,

the numerous Lutherans (orange dots) in the centre and near the waterfront where many of them found work. At a glance, one can see that Reformation and Revolt had not turned the Dutch Republic into a Calvinist nation.

Amsterdam, the hub of trade and finance, and the largest of the Dutch cities, may have been religiously the most diverse, but when we broaden our view to the country as a whole we can see how unsuccessful the Reformed church had been in winning hearts and minds of the Dutch and how diversity reigned all over. Brabant and Limburg had remained overwhelmingly Catholic. But also in numerous villages in the rural heart of Zuid-Holland, a Reformed minister had to make a congregation work with only a handful of parishioners among a solidly Catholic local population. Similar instances of strong Catholic presence could be found in Utrecht, in Twente (Overijssel) and the southeast corner of Friesland. In Graft in Noord-Holland, Mennonites formed a local majority, and Mennonites of several denominations were spread all over Groningen and Friesland. Rotterdam was almost as diverse as was Amsterdam, but here the Remonstrants had an exceptional stronghold.

The religious fragmentation of the Dutch population was compounded by the influx of immigrants, refugees and wanderers from practically everywhere. Foreign merchants settled in the port cities, diplomats and their retinues around the courts of the stadholders in Den Haag and Leeuwarden. Foreign students visited the academies. Soldiers and sailors of many nationalities served the Dutch army, the navy and the merchant fleet. Refugees and adventurers of all stripes built their fortunes here or held on to a more precarious existence on the margins of the industriousness and prosperity of the Dutch Republic in its Golden Age. Among these immigrants, and especially among the refugees, many were Reformed, but perhaps even more belonged to different faiths. Amsterdam, to stay with that example, harboured numerous immigrant churches, with as the most visible the Lutherans and the Jews. They were considered *nationes*: communities of resident foreigners who benefited the city with their trade, and enjoyed all kinds of privileges in return. Among these privileges was the right to public worship, and to build monumental public churches and synagogues. In the 18th century, for the same reasons, the Armenians would be granted full religious freedom, in a smaller church, but one that by the decoration on its façade was immediately recognisable as belonging to Eastern Christianity (the white dot marked A on the map). These privileges infringed upon the Reformed church's monopoly on public worship. Catholics, Mennonites, Remonstrants (green dots), Greek Orthodox and Quakers (white dots marked G and Q) and several smaller groups had to make do with hidden churches, discreetly disguised as ordinary residences or warehouses [7–9].

In Spinoza's paean to Amsterdam the different religious groups together made up one harmonious mix. But he did not write his *Tractatus* in order to sing the praise of Dutch tolerance. Rather, he intended to warn the political authorities that this harmony was under threat, and that they should do their utmost to maintain it. He does not specify a concrete reason for his fears, but the drift of his argument is that religion was a hazard, more specifically its ministers, who had the ear of the common people. Most dangerous of all were occasions where ministers wanted to impose a contested religious regime, *and* found support with politicians. Here, Spinoza saw a recipe for a disturbance of public order, and eventually for civil war.

The ministers of the Dutch Reformed church, indeed, have something of a reputation for engaging in endless theological controversies and for theocratic ambitions. But when one takes a good look at the constitution of the public church, and especially when one compares it to the ecclesiastical establishments in other European countries at the time, the public church was not all that powerful. In England, for instance, the Anglican Church was 'by law established': her bishops had (and still have) session in the House of Lords. Here, as well as in Catholic and Lutheran countries, in the Protestant Swiss cantons and German principalities, ecclesiastical courts held jurisdiction over infractions on laws that were 'mixed', that is both secular and ecclesiastical (such as for instance family law and public morality), and could impose fines and prison sentences—but not in the Dutch Republic. Here, the public church was protected by the State, but it was not a 'person in

law'. It was financially completely dependent on the political authorities. For ecclesiastical appointments and for the sessions of classes and synods, political approval had to be asked, and the decisions of synods were invalid without ratification by the States of the provinces. There was no 'mixed' jurisdiction here—the civil and criminal courts were fully competent in all legal cases [10]. Theologians could and did offer advice, and sometimes it was heeded, but not necessarily so. The authorities kept their hands free.

Even so, in the past, matters had spun dangerously out of hand. During the Arminian Controversies of the 1610s, theological and political conflicts had become inextricably entangled. In the church, Remonstrants had opposed Counter-Remonstrants; and in politics, the stadholder had faced the powerful States of Holland and their grand pensionary. Civil war had been averted only by a *coup de main* of Maurits van Nassau. He had Johan van Oldenbarnevelt condemned for high treason and beheaded. He ordered the States General to convene a national synod. This international ecclesiastical gathering, held in Dordrecht in 1618 and 1619, decided upon the contentious theological points. An after-session exclusively for the representatives of the Dutch churches formulated a new church ordinance that was ratified by the States of the provinces only after everything that smacked of ecclesiastical autonomy had been expunged—and in Friesland, was rejected entirely [11]; [12] (vol. I, pp. 268–275).

As frightening as the Arminian Controversies had been, the ultimate horror scenario was the English Civil War. It was fresher in everyone's memory, and matters had escalated even more spectacularly. Here, also, ecclesiastical factions had been at loggerheads: the High-Church wing of the Church of England against the English Puritans and the Scottish Presbyterians. Parliament deposed, judged and beheaded the anointed king, ruling by the grace of God—to the consternation of all of Christendom. In politics and in religion, for years England was the scene of unprecedented chaos, until in 1660 both the monarchy and the established church were restored [13]. In his *Tractatus*, Spinoza suggested that anarchy could overwhelm the Republic again, if the authorities would not allow everybody 'to think as he pleased, and to say what he thought'. Such freedom, Spinoza claimed, could not harm the State, but on the contrary, would strengthen it, whereas compulsion and censorship in religious matters would foment discontent.

3. Theological Controversy

The decades preceding the appearance of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* were indeed again marked by theological controversies entangled with political strife. The background to these controversies is well known: the work of Descartes met with an eager response, but also provoked sharp protests. It did not only divide contemporary philosophers, but above all caused havoc in the theological faculties. Once the work of Descartes appeared in Dutch translation, controversy spread also outside academic circles, fanned by acrimonious pamphlets. Yet the universities bore the brunt of the conflict. After a first round of difficulties at the university of Utrecht in the 1640s, in 1656, in an attempt to calm the waters, curators of the university of Leiden banned the teaching of and disputations about Cartesian philosophy from the theological faculties. Students loudly protested. That same year the synod of Zuid-Holland deliberated on the unrest at the provincial university. As was customary, acting members of the States of Holland, the so-called *commissarissen-politiek*, attended the synod. These commissioners were not just passive observers: they could and did enter into the deliberations of the synod, backed by the full weight of their high office—as I remarked before, the Reformed church was by no means autonomous. With their input, the synod drafted a *Resolutie tot vrede der kerk* (Resolution towards the peace of the church), which was then duly promulgated by the States of Holland. Theologians and philosophers were commanded to keep to their respective disciplinary fields. When and where these overlapped, as was the case with Cartesianism, they had to hammer out a peaceful compromise [14,15]; [16] (vol. I, pp. 306–311); [17] (vol. III, pp. 517–519 and vol. IV, pp. 35–42); [18] (vol. III, pp. 111–112, 55*–58*).

Thus, without taking a stance themselves, synod and States attempted to quell disorder while maintaining academic freedom. Peace was not restored overnight. Abraham Heidanus and Johannes Cocceius, the leading theologians at the university of Leiden, made advanced students defend Cartesian theses in public academic disputations. In this way, they probed the boundaries of what was acceptable. Several times these experiments erupted into violent riot. It had always been part of accepted academic culture that students who strongly disagreed with speakers' ideas would prevent them from being heard, making an unholy din banging on the furniture with their fists and stamping their feet on the wooden floors. This time, however, the audience in the stately academic auditorium also pelted the professors presiding over the disputation and the students who had ventilated offending notions with garbage, so that the sheriff had to rescue the beleaguered academics and escort them home [19] (pp. 384–386, 426–427); [20] (pp. 42–43); [21] (pp. 80–89); [22] (pp. 212–214).

In 1668, riots hit the streets—this time not in Leiden but in Middelburg. Here, the fiery puritanical preacher Jean de Labadie was minister to the Walloon congregation. He had accused a fellow Walloon minister, Louis Wolzogen, a Cartesian, of the most heinous heresies—wrongly so, in the eyes of the Walloon synod. The synod demanded apologies from De Labadie, but he refused. De Labadie's adherents vented their displeasure with this assault on their minister's honour in the streets of Middelburg. The magistracy had to send in law enforcement to restore order. When the synod thereupon decided that De Labadie should be deposed for recalcitrance, the States of Zeeland and even the *Staten-Generaal* had to throw in their weight to prevent further mayhem [23]; [24] (pp. 79–103).

During the years between the 1656 resolution towards the peace of the church in the States of Holland and the riots in Middelburg in 1668, coalitions had formed between prominent Dutch Reformed theologians. One faction was made up of men who fiercely rejected the new philosophy, and who often sympathised with the views of English Puritans. De Labadie counted upon the strength of this group, and gambled that with their backing he could defy the Walloon synod. On the other side a more diffuse coalition had formed of men who were eager to experiment with new philosophical concepts and innovative biblical exegesis in order to modernise Reformed theology, and bring it up to date with current scholarly trends. Spinoza seems to have regarded the escalation of violence in these years—from the normal exuberance of students, to threats of bodily harm in the Leiden auditorium, to fisticuffs on the streets of Middelburg, and eventually the involvement of the highest level of the political authorities with what was essentially a theological controversy—as the harbingers of a new round of civil strife on the model of the Arminian Controversies or even the English Civil War.

At that moment, the oppositional camps were as yet ideologically ill defined—personal animosities played a substantial role. Yet, in the 1650s and 1660s we see the contours take shape of what in the 1670s and 1680s would become known as the Voetian and Cocceian factions. Polemical exchanges and backbiting between them seriously disrupted the Dutch Reformed church, in several waves, between 1672 and 1694. In the latter year, the States of Holland promulgated a new resolution towards the peace of the church. This time the States of the other provinces copied it, and this effectively put an end to this conflict [25]. In the 18th century, even after the battle axes had long ago been buried, people would shudder at the recollection of the fierceness of the ecclesiastical troubles. The Voetian and Cocceian controversies overshadow the historiography of the period until the present day. Yet, the integrity of the State was never in danger, and no blood was shed.

4. General Debating Culture and *Libertas Philosophandi*

Spinoza's fears thus proved groundless. They were groundless, because both State and Church already practiced what Spinoza preached: freedom of research and debate, *libertas philosophandi*—also, and perhaps even especially, regarding theological claims [8] (pp. 218–224). This was already visible in the resolution towards the peace of the church in 1656, which did not aim at silencing the debate over Cartesianism, but first of all at keeping

it civilised. In two examples, I want to demonstrate that this was not merely an incident, but rather the official policy of the authorities in Church as well as State, and a deeply rooted sentiment within the wider intellectual culture of the Dutch Republic, also outside the academies.

My first example is the response to Socinianism. The Socinians, or, as they were also called, the Polish Brethren, were the descendants and spiritual heirs of antitrinitarians who, in the 16th century, had fled Italy for the then very tolerant Poland. They were strict monotheists, who rejected the Trinity and the divinity of Christ as one Person of one tri-une God, and were considered dangerous heretics by all other Christian confessions. In Poland, however, Socinianism spread and was given freedom of worship as one of the four publicly admitted confessions, alongside Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism. In Rakow, Socinians established their own academy. Socinian theologians were admired and feared for their skill in theological controversy. Through correspondence and occasional visits abroad, they built an international network of sympathisers, also within the Dutch Republic. Those contacts proved very valuable when Counter-Reformation Catholicism gained the upper hand in Poland, and the Socinians were forced into exile.

Whether many Polish Brethren came to the Dutch Republic remains unknown. They did not establish Socinian congregations or any visible organisation here. However, their fanning out over Europe was already considered a dangerous threat. Around the middle of the 17th century, practically every Dutch theologian worth his salt wrote a learned Latin refutation of Socinianism. They were considered the ultimate enemies of the Reformed church, as sharp debaters and excellent defenders of a pernicious, but highly cogent, and therefore attractive and convincing doctrine [26]. As far as I know, it has never been done, but I would not be surprised if comparative research would show that at that point the Dutch Reformed were more alarmed about Socinianism than they would be about Spinozism a few decades later.

Now one would expect the Reformed church to do everything in its power to suppress Socinianism. At a later moment, the church indeed requested a ban on the public sale of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, the authoritative collection of the books of the most prominent Socinian theologians, printed in nine hefty folio volumes in Amsterdam and Leiden between 1665 and 1692. But the Reformed church did not attempt to protect its members by shielding them from Socinian ideas, quite the contrary even. In 1655, the impeccably orthodox Petrus de Witte, Reformed minister in Delft and later in Leiden, published a *Wederlegginge der Sociniaensche Dwaelingen* (Refutation of Socinian Errors) in the vernacular and with full ecclesiastical approbation [27]. This book emphatically aimed at a broad lay audience. It was written in the form of questions and answers, like a textbook, or a catechism. It provides a detailed overview of Socinian doctrines. It liberally quotes the works of Socinian theologians by chapter and verse, and thus not only refutes them, but also offers an easy entry into their works. And the *Wederlegginge* sold very well: within seven years four editions appeared, each new one more extensive than the earlier ones.

Dutch Reformed readers were familiar with theological primers. This was the result of an intensive programme of catechism teaching. Not only schoolchildren and those who prepared for full membership had to know their catechism, the States of Holland urged the churches to catechise adults as well, in church and in their homes, in an effort to persuade wavering Catholics and others to join the public church. Leading theologians were developing methods for advanced catechetical training of confirmed church members, following the guidelines of the national synod of Dordrecht, and by the middle of the 17th century this form of lifelong religious learning was becoming rather popular. By no means did all believers have the time or the inclination to join these lessons. Yet many a Reformed minister wrote a textbook in which, starting from the Heidelberg Catechism, Reformed doctrine was explained in great detail. Although more often than not these books were substantial tomes, they met with a lively demand. Authors vied for the attention of book buyers and readers, offering the reading public variety in style and presentation to choose from, some adding the lyrics for devotional songs, others enriching the lessons

on the Catechism with titbits of biblical antiquities or church history. The most popular titles were reprinted repeatedly, often over a long period of time, suggesting considerable demand. *Korte schets der godlyke waarheden* (Short sketch of the divine truths) by the popular Amsterdam minister Johannes d'Outrein, despite its title a book of over 400 densely printed pages, saw over twenty editions between 1688 and the middle of the 18th century. In the wake of this catechetical 'campaign', a lively market emerged for translations of works of academic theology, originally published in Latin, and for scholarly theological books published immediately in the vernacular. It became a mark of an all-round education and urbanity to be theologically articulate, and to be able to follow, and even join, current debates [28,29].

People were encouraged not only to be knowledgeable about their own Reformed orthodoxy, but also about alternatives. Petrus de Witte of course impressed upon his readers that Socinianism was to be considered a soul-corrupting heresy, but he did not invoke his clerical authority. He first presented his readers with a solid crash course in Socinianism, before contrasting it with Reformed truths, in order to enable them to judge for themselves. Undoubtedly, theology students, who had to study theological controversies as part of their training, avidly read De Witte's book, as it was easier going than the Latin textbooks. But his *Wederlegginge der Sociniaensche Dwaelingen* reached a much wider audience. The Leiden University Library holds a copy in which one Allert Aryans van Worms has written his name on the flyleaf (Figure 2).[2] On the next empty page, he made the note that he had sold Baertge Willems a poker and five fishes, for eight *stuivers*, and that he had given her a sixth fish for free.[3] Apparently Allert was a fisherman or sold fish for a living. In another hand follows the name of the next owner, Dirck Maertens, and the way he had acquired it: he bought it from Allart Aryans 'with the fish, each fish a *dubbeltje*' (= two stuivers) (Figure 3).[4] The nature of this transaction is not entirely clear. It may have been a betting game. Anyway, it had nothing of the academic or the ecclesiastical about it. Remarkably a book on Socinianism changed hands 'with the fish', and found readers way outside the world of scholars and their well-stocked libraries and bookshops.

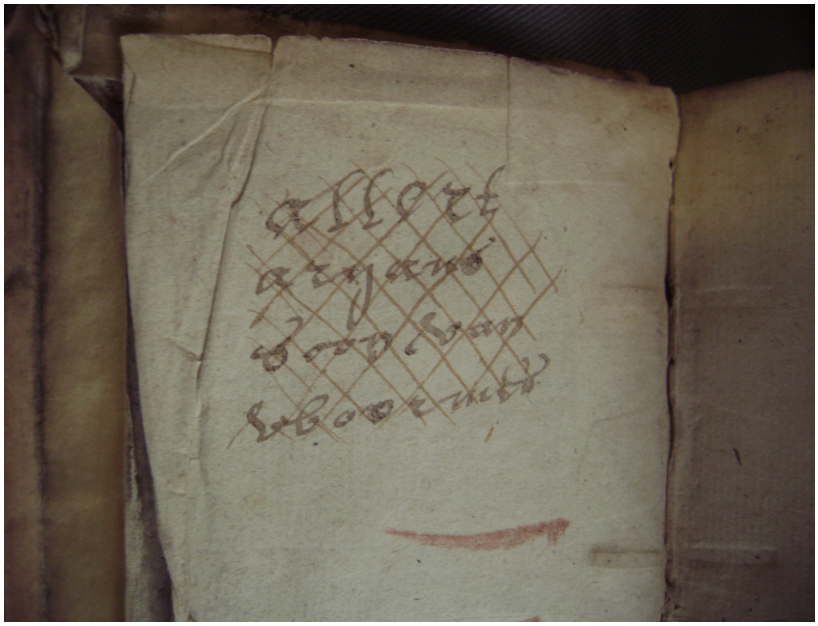

Figure 2. Owner's inscription in the first edition of De Witte's *Wederlegginge*, fly leaf, UB Leiden, shelf mark 55 H 16.

[2] (loosely crossed out) 'allert aryans soon van Woormts'.
[3] (loosely crossed out) 'aen Baertge Willems ver kocht een poock 5 visse vrij de 6. 8 stuijver'.
[4] 'Dirck Maertensz hoort dit boeck toe heeft het gekocht op de vis yder vis een dubbeltie van allert arejans'.

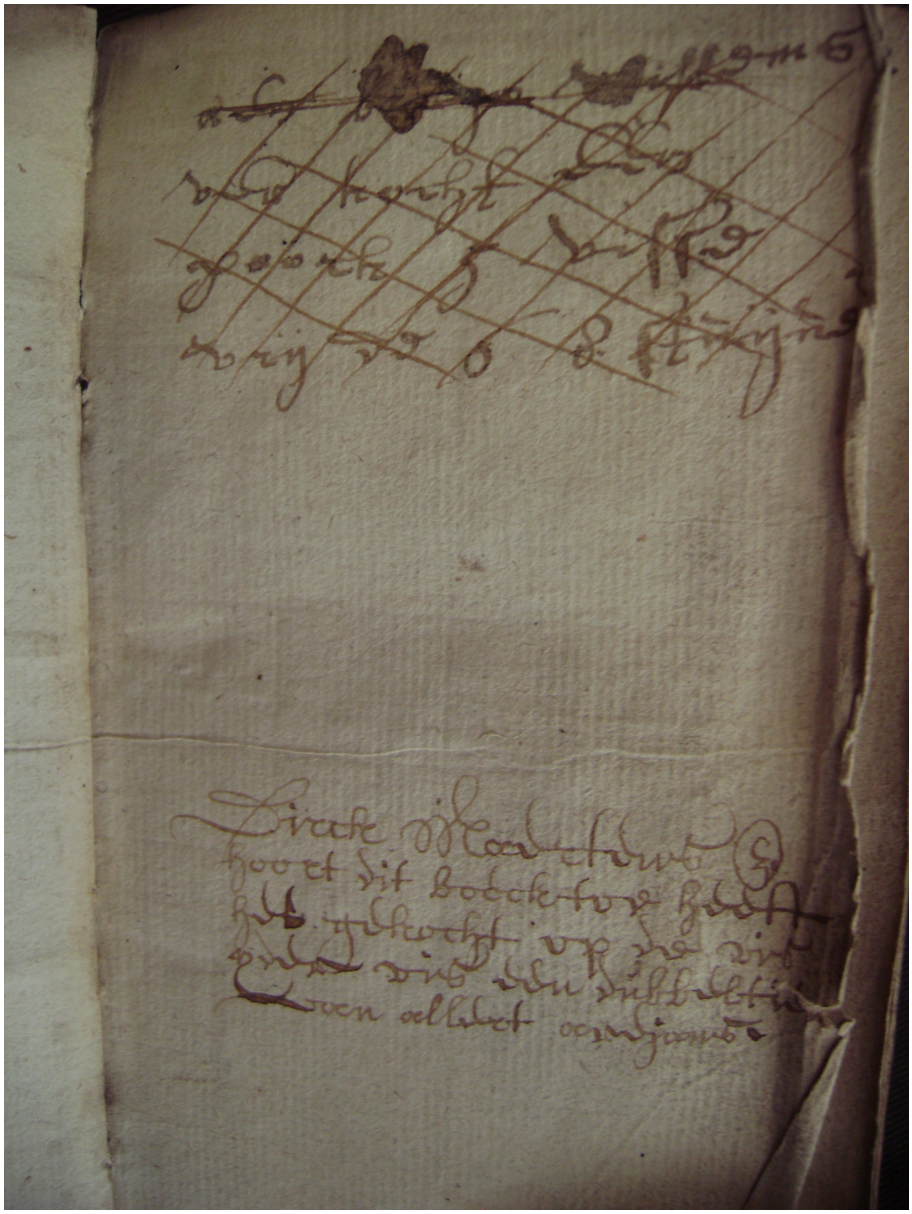

Figure 3. Reminder of a sale of fish on the next empty page of the same book, and new owner's inscription.

My second example is the depiction of the Peace of God's Church, designed by the then famous etcher Romeyn de Hooghe (Figure 4). It is one of 63 elaborate etchings in his *Hieroglyphica of merkbeelden der oude volkeren* (Hieroglyphica or Emblems of the Ancient Peoples), published posthumously in 1734. Near the end of his very successful, although not entirely uncontroversial career De Hooghe wrote two substantial and very innovative books: *Spiegel van Staat* (Mirror of the State, 1706–1707) on the structure of the Republic as one state, highly decentralised, as it was the product of a long historical process; and *Hieroglyphica* on the history of religion, as a process of decline and recent reformation. De Hooghe was first of all an artist, who produced what the market demanded, but in much of his work, and especially in these two books, he proves himself a voracious reader and a well-informed, perceptive observer of the time in which he lived. Much of his factual material on the past was copied from earlier works, most of the time without reference to his sources, as was not uncommon at the time. However, the argument he makes in both books eventually looks at the present and the promises it holds for a better future [30–32].

Figure 4. Plate 35, *Van de Vrede van Gods Kerk* (on the Peace of God's Church), in Romeyn de Hooghe, *Hieroglyphica*. Private collection.

For the study of early modern Dutch religion, the etchings in *Hieroglyphica* are a unique source. Besides the portraits of theologians and images of church buildings, we actually do not have much pictorial material to study [33] (pp. 22–27). I am struck time and again by the ways De Hooghe captured the then current discourse on religion in his images. Plate 35 in *Hieroglyphica* depicts the Peace of God's Church, very probably a reference to the only recently issued resolution towards the peace of the church [31] (pp. 326–333). The central figures in this etching are the Peaceful Church (A) and her industrious sister Free Inquiry (B), who also stands for the body of the faithful. The Peaceful Church, the true Bride of Christ, can be free of internal strife and schism because she allows her members a Christian freedom to search the divine mysteries contained in the Holy Scriptures. Free Inquiry wears the hat of liberty, and at her feet lie old coins and a set of compasses, symbols for the study of antiquity and scientific measurements. She tramples a tiara, the emblem of the Papacy.

The couple is flanked by images of good and evil. The enemies of the Peaceful Church and Free Enquiry are depicted on the right side of the image. First among them is the Papacy (C), in the shape of a bellowing tyrant who imposes his will by force. Donkeys' ears indicate his disrespect for learning, and he is surrounded by instruments of oppression: the

schoolmasters' ferule, the sword, and the keys to heaven in his hands, the smoking faggot for the stakes on which heretics were burned at his feet. Behind him, we see false prophets. On the other side of the picture, De Hooghe placed a worthy missionary (F), trumpeting the Gospel to the world, inspired by the Holy Spirit (the flame of Pentecostal fire on his forehead), approaching the heathens not with force, but with sweet eloquence (the parrot on his hand). Behind him is a learned man (G), searching the Scriptures, exposing falsehoods and establishing truths. His head is winged to denote his quick intellect. The third figure on this side is a wise old man, his eyes on the saving truths of biblical revelation, his hand resting on a globe bearing the images of the prophets, holding a telescope, the instrument of far-seeing.

In the chronology of *Hieroglyphica*, plate 35 offers an idealised image of the early medieval church, when the Papacy rose to power, to become what the Reformers would reject as the Antichrist, but also when bible studies and theological learning flowered in monasteries and Christian missionaries successfully converted the European heathens (figure K, an armed knight, illuminated by the sun of justice, chasing away the darkness of heathen superstitions). Yet the image is suffused with references to his own time. A large part of the background to Peaceful Church and Free Inquiry is taken up by an enormous booth of green boughs, such as were in use for the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. This festival played an important part in the eschatology of Johannes Cocceius, whose 'prophetic' theology was at the peak of its popularity in the first decade of the 18th century, when De Hooghe created his *Hieroglyphica*. For Cocceius, it was a prefiguration of a time in the future, when the church as an institution would become obsolete: when true doctrine had conquered and unified the peoples of the world, and universal peace reigned [34] (§ 636–650).

In *Hieroglyphica*, De Hooghe looks back upon a period in which theologians had explored Cartesian mathematics, the many religions of the peoples overseas, and above all the text of the Bible, against the background of antiquarian and philological studies. This process of exploration had produced clashes like the Voetian and Cocceian controversies, and had fed a climate of libertinism that rejected biblical revelation [35]. More important in the long run, however, was that it modernised Reformed theology, made it compatible to the scholarly discourses of its time. It had done so by tightening the focus of theology on the conversion and spiritual regeneration of the individual believer, and abandoning the all-encompassing claims of the confessional churches to embody the truth in all areas of life, in science and scholarship, in government and social discipline, as well as in religion. As has been argued before, the grip of the public church on politics and public morality was already relatively weak in the Dutch Republic. If we regard De Hooghe as a mouthpiece for public opinion among the intellectual elite, as I think we should, his *Hieroglyphica* can be taken as testimony to the dominance of *libertas philosophandi* in Dutch public discourse, in the universities as well as in the public church and in polite society as a whole [32] (pp. 133–157).

5. Conclusions

Spinoza lived in a country marked by religious diversity and a lively culture of discussion. Adherents of a wide variety of faiths and libertines who had abandoned religion lived side by side, and public debate encompassed religion, also in a comparative perspective. Differences of opinion were negotiated in public debate, also when these differences concerned religion: in academic disputations, in pamphlets, undoubtedly during the advanced catechism classes, in artistic expression, and apparently even among fishermen and their customers. Debate could be fierce. Controversies could span years and even decades. But with the Arminian Controversies and the English Civil War within living memory, the political authorities refrained from intervention and backing one faction over the other. Like Spinoza, they were all too aware how that could lead to civil discord.

The freedom of debate was not unlimited, but compared to the situation in other early modern confessional states, its boundaries were very wide. The public church could not

impose its orthodoxy, even had she wanted to. Instead she educated everybody willing to hear, on a voluntary basis, on her own orthodoxy, but also on those of others. Inevitably, confrontation and comparison led to negotiation, and gradually the character of the church and of its doctrine changed. What had counted as orthodoxy in the 16th century no longer satisfied in the seventeenth, when new knowledge led to new questions that demanded new answers. The Cartesian and Cocceian 'novelties' that provoked such heated controversy, were outdated in the eighteenth. Much of what had been unacceptable in the 17th century was eventually absorbed by a new Reformed orthodoxy, after it had been examined from all sides, measured and weighed in public discussion. Spinoza engaged himself in that debate, influenced it and was influenced by it in turn, and became the object of debate himself. It was his intellectual home.

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The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus and the Dutch: Spinoza's Intervention in the Political-Religious Controversies of the Dutch Republic

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Abstract: This paper outlines the Dutch background of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (TTP) and aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. It reads Spinoza's first main work published anonymously as an intervention in the many political-religious controversies, which began in 1579 and ravaged the Dutch Republic during the first century of its history. The three main topics of these controversies are also the focus of the TTP: I. the freedom to philosophize; II. the relation between Church and State, and III. the nature of public religion, which is defined by a minimal creed. These topics were familiar to the contemporary Dutch reader. The TTP appears to give a theoretical account of what theological-political practice was in the days of Spinoza.

Keywords: Spinoza; theological-political treatise; liberty to philosophize

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1. Introduction

In *Spinoza en zijn kring* (Spinoza and his circle), the nineteenth-century biographer of Spinoza, K.O. Meinsma, observed that 1656, the year of the *herem*, created a fault line in the life of the philosopher [1] (p. 90). After that year, he stated, Spinoza became part of Dutch history and shared in the political and intellectual fortunes of the Dutch Republic. In 1947, the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl concluded that the TTP was merely "a piece of propaganda upholding the view of the States [Republican] Party" [2] (p. 40). Although the last observation might seem exaggerated, if only because all contemporary "Republican" commentators, who supported the party of the States of Holland were unanimous in their condemnation [3] (pp. 147–175),[1] it is obvious that Spinoza had concrete political aims in mind when writing the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. In letter 30, he wrote to Oldenburg that he interrupted his work on the *Ethics* to put on paper "his opinion on Scripture". His motives were, as he states: "the prejudices of the theologians", which hindered "the more prudent" to understand his ideas; the accusation of atheism by ordinary people and his worry about "the freedom of philosophizing", which in the Dutch Republic "the preachers suppress as much as they can with their excessive authority and aggressiveness" [4] (pp. 14–15).[2] In the preface of the TTP, Spinoza maintains that the state he lives in is an ideal state: "since, then, we happen to have that rare good fortune —that we live in a Republic in which everyone is granted complete freedom of judgment and is permitted to worship God according to his mentality, and in which nothing is thought to be dearer or sweeter than freedom." However, the clergy, driven by their lust for power, threatens the peaceful

[1] Related critiques include *Epistola ad amicum, continens censuram Libri cui titulus Tractatus theologico-politicus* written by Coccejus's disciple Johannes Melchior, who was connected to Utrecht Cartesian circles. In 1673, a second refutation was published, the *Vindiciae miraculorum*, by the prominent Arminian minister Jacob Batelier. The third refutation is *Adversus anonymum theologico-politicum liber singularis* by the Utrecht professor of philosophy Regnerus van Mansvelt. The fourth refutation was written in Dutch by Willem Blyenbergh, a Dordrecht corn trader and correspondent of Spinoza. The fifth refutation was written by Johannes Bredenburg, a Collegiant. The last refutation was *Arcana Atheism Revelata*, written by the Amsterdam Socinian, Frans Kuyper.

[2] This fragment of Spinoza's letter is not included in the Opera Posthuma, but preserved in Oldenburg's correspondence to Boyle.

existence of the Republic [5] (p. (*)3v); [4] (p. 69). According to the German historian Schilling, the anticlericalism of the States Party, which Spinoza apparently shared, originated in the party strife during the so-called "Regime of True Freedom" [6] (pp. 656–657).

The front page of the TTP refers to Dutch political-religious controversies as well. The phrase "*libertas philosophandi*" was frequently used in the early years of Cartesianism, when the new philosophy successfully struggled to become admitted to the Dutch universities by appeal to this right, but Spinoza links this "professional freedom" to the more traditional discourse on toleration, which the Union of Utrecht (1579) codified and the idea of Batavian freedom cherished by all factions on the Dutch Republic. The phrase "Theological-Political" in the main title refers to the discourse in the Reformed states, which called the state the "Lieutenant of God" and the "Patron of the Church".

Acknowledging the Dutch background of the TTP will contribute to a deeper understanding of the *Theological-Political Treatise.* By reading Spinoza's first main work as an intervention in the many political-religious controversies that ravaged the Dutch Republic from its inception in 1579 to the end of "First Era without Stadholder" in 1672, known as "The Year of Disaster", which saw Johan de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, executed by the mob and William III reinstated as a new Stadholder, we may also be able to assess the extent to which the TTP transcends ordinary polemics. During this century, the Orangists, supporters of the Stadholder, a position traditionally held by the Prince of Orange, fought with the Republicans. At several times, this fighting brought the Republic to the brink of civil war. In 1618/9, for example, the Stadholder Maurits of Orange as Commander in Chief of the army of the States General—a body of representatives of all seven princes of the Union—disarmed the troops of the province of Holland and had his Grand Pensionary, Johan van Oldenbarneveld, executed for high treason. Spinoza refers to this shameful event at the end of chapter 20 of the TTP [5] (pp. 331–332); [4] (pp. 350–352). It should be noted that Spinoza here also denounced the religious politics of the States of Holland at that time. All these controversies were caused by the indeterminate nature of the Dutch Republic, which in fact was no state at all. It was a conglomerate of competing and collaborating territories based on the Union of Utrecht (1579), a treaty signed by seven provinces in order to be able to wage war against their legal sovereign, the king of Spain.

In his introduction to the Dutch version of the TTP, Fokke Akkerman observes that parts of "its biblical criticism and political theory were already widely current in Spinoza's age" [7] (p. 23). Along this line, the present paper argues that the TTP was deeply rooted in existing political-religious controversies. In order to substantiate this claim, I discuss the following interrelated topics, which Spinoza focused on in the TTP and which at the same time were at the core of Dutch debate: I. the freedom to philosophize; II. the relation between Church and State mainly dealt with in chapter 19; and III. the confession of "universal or catholic religion", that is, the confession of the ideal public Church.

It may well be that Spinoza, as Curley nicely says, "did not always write what he thought and did not always think what he wrote" [4] (p. 54). The rhetorical nature of Spinoza's praise of the Republic in the Preface and of Amsterdam in chapter 20 is apparent. However, we should avoid as much as possible reading the TTP "between the lines" because Spinoza "did not say anything", which "a careful reader could get from the work". I hope to argue that the TTP asks for a careful reform and not for a radical "regime-change" of the Republic.

2. The Freedom to Philosophize

The introduction of Cartesianism at the Dutch universities caused acrimonious debates in which the States of Holland had to intervene. In 1656, they ordered the theologians and the philosophers not to interfere with each other's business and not to abuse the *libertas philosopandi* by discussing theological issues [8] (pp. 273–276); [9] (pp. 70–71). The regulations of many Dutch universities prescribed the teaching of Aristotle's works. Aristotelian notions such as substantial form and final cause were generally seen as basic to theological education [10]; [11] (pp. 181–182). Moreover, Cartesianism caused a reversal in the debate

on Biblical hermeneutics, as we can see in Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (1666), because this philosophy promised a clear and final interpretation of Scripture that humanist philology was unable to provide [12].

Already early in the 17th century, the teaching of Ramism—an alternative to Aristotelianism developed by Petrus Ramus (Pierre de La Ramée, 1515–1572)—was defended by an appeal to the freedom to philosophize [13] (pp. 38–90). Hence, the existence of different philosophical systems and the obvious fact that in the Church and at the University a diversity of opinions and doctrines exist led the Utrecht divine Gisbertus Voetius (Gijsbert Voet, 1589–1676) to accept the necessity of freedom to philosophize. Voetius—infamous among philosophers for his quarrel with Descartes and mentioned as such by Spinoza in letter 43—dominated the Reformed Church for almost a century and gave his name to one of its main factions, the "Voetians". Many Voetians called for a purification of public life, a "Further Reformation", and invited the Christian magistrate to suppress "unchristian" behavior, such as drinking, gambling, and disregard of the Sabbath. In his argument for the freedom to philosophize, Voetius stated that dissent among Christians is unavoidable, even among "the orthodox", because the visible Church on earth is not the same as the invisible or mystical Church in heaven, where religion is directly taught by God and unanimity reigns by necessity [14] (p. 11) and [15].[3] The visible Church and "orthodoxy" are of a basically human nature. Given the diversity of opinions, Voetius underlined the need for moderation and tolerance. He called them the "positive means to preserve the regime of the Church" [16].[4]

In addition to moderation and tolerance, Voetius pleaded for liberty. In the Reformed Churches there should be a liberty, which is the golden mean between Roman Catholic intolerance and Islamic servitude that repress all discussion about religion on the one hand, and the immoderate license of libertines and Arminians, on the other [16] (pp. 683–684).[5] Hence, tempered freedom prevails in the Reformed Churches [16] (p. 679). Voetius differentiates between four kinds of freedom: 1. liberty of conscience; 2. liberty of speech which gives no offence; 3. academic or professional liberty [16] (p. 686);[6] and 4. theological freedom in the Church, which is limited by the fundamental tenets of the confession [16] (p. 698).

According to Voetius, academic freedom is necessary in theology because theologians, although they are orthodox, will never solve hermeneutical problems in the same manner due to the weakness of the human intellect and therefore there should be liberty to criticize and correct each other [16] (p. 680). Through the battle of opinions mankind will be able to oppose error and heterodoxy. Voetius also granted philosophers a limited, academic freedom, restricted by the other disciplines. Mundane philosophy should not intrude into the field of "sacred philosophy", which rests upon Biblical authority (and as such is part of theology) [16] (p. 687) and undermine orthodox religion by arguing, for example, that the rational soul is a mode of the body, or that the essence of man is thought alone and does not include the body (both of which will be part of resurrected man). Heretics use such pseudo-philosophy to substantiate their errors [16] (p. 687).[7] If the philosophers transgress the limits of their discipline, the liberty of philosophy degenerates into license. Voetius mentions two contemporary philosophers who did so. The first is Hobbes, who in *De cive* dared "to discuss justification, free will and the reception of Christ in the Lord's Supper, as a philosopher" [16] (p. 687). The second is Spinoza who "as philosopher took the licence to theologize and deals with scriptural theology according to Cartesian method only" [16]

[3] The following section on Voetius is also to be found in a slightly expanded form in [15], esp. p. 194.

[4] The title of *Politicæ ecclesiasticæ pars* III, lib. 2, tract. 2, c. 2, Johannes van Waesberge: Amsterdam, 1676.

[5] "Pugnant cum libertate prophetandi, 1. In defectu primo servitus & tyrannis Muhammedica, per quam de religione non licet disquirere. [cf. Spinoza's observations on "the religion of the Turcs" in the preface of the TTP, 7] Deinde servitus inquisitionis Papalis. II. In excessu, Socinianorum, Remonstrantium, Vorstii, Acontii postulata libertas prophetandi, revera intolerabilis licentia: quippe qui eam ad fundamentalia, dogmata de Dei attributis, trinitate, persona & officiis Christi &c. extendunt."

[6] Voetius uses here the phraes *libertas scholastica* or *libertas in philosophicis*.

[7] "plura istiusmodi pseudo-philosophemata ab Epicureis, Socinianis aliisque ad haeresiarum suarum stabilimentem facile assumi possent."

(p. 682).[8] Therefore, although Voetius remained a staunch Aristotelian throughout his life and rejected Cartesianism passionately, he acknowledged a clearly circumscribed liberty to philosophize.

The first to bring up the notion of the freedom of philosophy to defend the teaching of Cartesianism was Adriaan Heereboord. In 1647, he began his public lectures with an address *De libertate philosophandi*. In a disputation of an uncertain date on the same topic, he had his student argue that although Aristotle was the first to develop a philosophy that provided causal knowledge of phenomena, it is not the norm of truth [17] (p. 330). Such a norm is based on empirical perception and reason and not the authority of a master. He therefore abhorred the slavish mind of an Averroes, who merely commented on the books of Aristotle, and the monkish scholastics. Moreover, he argues, Aristotelian philosophy, as all philosophy, is often ambiguous, poorly written, controversial, and dubious. The cause is the weakness of the human intellect, which lacks the capacity to penetrate the secrets of nature. After the Reformation, which ended a millennium of pagan and heterodox scholars and of Aristotelian philosophy, the Christian philosopher is at liberty to judge for himself in philosophical matters, certainly if by being born in The Netherlands he breathes "the free Batavian air" [17] (p. 9).[9] All philosophers should be free to judge and dispute all things unhindered by any human authority or prejudice, whether they are Aristotelians, Ramists, or Copernicans. Bacon and Descartes are Heerebord's heroes because they daringly restored the ancient liberty of philosophy. He greeted Descartes as the "greatest of all philosophers, defender of Truth and the Liberty in philosophizing" [17] (p. 13).[10]

Seven years later, after Heereboord's Cartesian disputation, Henry Born, the last Aristotelian professor at Leiden University, stated that a philosopher should not tie himself down to the doctrine of a particular school, but should instead obey the rule of one's own reason and experience as the only sources of truth [18] (pp. 7, 9). Human weakness implies that truth is dispersed among all philosophical schools. Moreover, human doctrines must be judged freely in the light of the laws of Nature, which are established by the Creator himself. Born's argument echoes a phrase popular at that time: Plato is my friend, Aristotle is my friend, but Truth is a better friend. By 1650, both Heereboord and Born identified liberty in philosophy with eclecticism and with a teaching of philosophy that integrated ancient and current sources.

However, in 1666, four years before the publication of the TTP, the Cartesian Johannes de Raey rejected this eclecticism, since "having more masters in philosophy than one only enlarges our prison" [19] (p. 436). De Raey identified the freedom to philosophize with the freedom to use our reason without limits and to contemplate truth. This freedom consists of the liberty to know, to judge, and to will, and requires that the mind functions free from the body and the senses, a need both Plato and Descartes had acknowledged. This implies that, if scholarly activity is inevitably related to the senses as in the arts and in daily life, such liberty of judgment is unattainable and we have to rely on tradition and authority. This applies to the Bible as well, in that we use our sight and hearing capacity to read Scripture or listen to it being preached in the Church. Hence, according to De Raey, in practical philosophy and in the higher faculties of theology, jurisprudence, and medicine, there will be no liberty of philosophy. Moreover, it will never be possible to integrate theology, law, medicine, and politics into philosophy and, according to De Raey a philosopher should only be free to judge about the things that are his own, that is say, all things accessible through human reason.

In the context of Dutch academic education, the "freedom to philosophize" at the time of Spinoza meant the freedom of the scholar to do his job, i.e., to teach physics or

[8] "Huc referri debet tract. Theologico-politicus, de libertate philosophandi nuper ab ex-Judeo quo, sed naturali psychico theologo ac philosopho, ubi prætextu libertatis philosophandi secundum methodum Cartesii (cui unicè addictum se ostendit) licentiam quærit & sumit contra veritatem Christianæ religionis, & theologiam scripturariam theologizandi".

[9] Epistola ad curatores: "nulli negandum in disputando, ingenii et judicii libertatem, sub libero ac Batavo aere natus".

[10] Epistola ad curatores: "salve philosophorum maxime, veritatis, philosophiae, libertatis in philosophando, stator, assertor, vindex."

mathematics without interference of the "higher" disciplines or external authorities and to be able to criticize another scholar [20] (pp. 6–7). Its defense was generally accepted and Spinoza also endorsed this policy. In letter 13, for example, he refers to a scholarly dispute between Descartes and Boyle, in which Boyle criticized Descartes "without any harm to the Nobility" of both. Such procedure in science is in accordance with the liberty to philosophize as conceded to every scholar [21] (p. 210). However, the liberty of philosophy should not endanger political stability by intruding into domains of life that are not ruled by reason alone. This outcome of the Cartesian controversies, as we find in De Raey, Spinoza also endorsed. As we read in letter 48, Spinoza reacted with deep distrust to the offer of a chair of philosophy at Heidelberg University because "the liberty to philosophize" is—and should be—restricted by the requirements of public religion. Spinoza believed that if the philosopher interfered with public religion, it might cause social conflict and turmoil. [4] (p. 397). Spinoza also accepted censorship and willingly, as he stated, submitted the TTP to the judgment of the supreme "Powers of my Country" and if they—apparently to Spinoza's surprise—will judge it to be incompatible with public welfare, he wanted the book to be unwritten [4] (pp. 353–354). However, unlike for example De Raey, according to Spinoza, philosophy had no rivals in the field of scholarship because theology—as it is based on the imagination—provides for a totally different kind of knowledge and is in fact no science at all. Therefore, he writes in chapter 15: "I've shown how Philosophy is to be separated from Theology, what each principally consists in, and that neither should be the handmaid of the other, but that each has charge of its own domain without any conflict with the other" [5] (pp. 250–251); [4] (p. 281). A separation of both disciplines is also aimed at by the States of Holland in 1656, but in the TTP it is not the result of a decree by a political authority, rather, it is the outcome of philosophical argument.

In the TTP, the freedom to philosophize is related to the political freedom of speech and to the religious freedom of all to worship God in their own way. The combination of these forms of liberty seems to be new in the TTP, but as we saw before, Spinoza himself believed that the last two forms of freedom were taken for granted in the Dutch Republic, and neither religious freedom nor civic liberty as we find defended in chapter 20 of the TTP aroused any indignation or even comment among its early critics, although they were always eager to denounce the philosopher in public. Only Van Mansvelt dealt with this topic. The Utrecht professor argued that our deeds are never wholly separated from our opinions and rejected Spinoza's observation that "so long as one behaves according to the decrees of the sovereign authorities, one cannot act contrary to the decree and dictates of one's own reason" [22] (p. 354).[11] This implied the destruction of human freedom, Van Mansvelt argued, because the decrees of authorities will often be unjust and false and, sometimes they will be in conflict with the judgments of citizens. It is therefore impossible that "we wholly transfer our right to live according to our own judgments to the sovereign" [22] (p. 293).[12] On the other hand, "reasons of state" will often require the curtailment of citizens' rights and liberties, and this is the case even in Amsterdam, where the authorities reduced the religious freedom of the Roman Catholics and the sects [22] (p. 362). According to Van Mansvelt, Spinoza's praise for the city of Amsterdam does not describe an actual situation, but refers to a Utopia. These comments of Van Mansvelt show that Spinoza and his Dutch contemporaries shared the language of liberty but his philosophical underpinning is different. According to the TTP, however, liberty is not a concession to human weakness or an instrument for preserving political stability, but the "freedom to philosophize" is essential to science scholarship and to peace and piety. As Yoram Stein also shows in this issue, Spinoza's TTP transformed traditional tolerance from a defect, which should be avoided where possible, into a virtue, which contributed to social cohesion.

[11] Cf. TTP, 20, Curley, p. 347.
[12] Cf. TTP 17.

3. The Relation between Church and State

The combination of the theological and the political in one word, as Spinoza used it in the title of this "second masterpiece", is anything but new in the Reformed tradition. In 1620, for example, a theological-political academic discourse was held at Giessen University "on the hard question whether we may defend with arms the exercise of our religion against a prince who is trying to prevent it by force" [23–25]. In 1662, eight years before the TTP, a Dutch book was published with the Latin title *Theologico-politica dissertatio*. It argued on theological and political grounds against religious freedom for Roman Catholics [26]. Theo Verbeek concludes that "theological-political" denotes books with political arguments based on Scripture, as did "many 16th and 17th century treatises on politics" [20] (p. 8).

The Reformation of the 16th century secularized religion and the Church and made conscience the supreme authority of individual faith. At the same time, by eliminating the Pope, the Magistrate came to be seen as the unrivalled viceroy of God on earth and the prince the head of the Church. In the Union of Utrecht of 1579, article 13 states that "every individual may stay in his religion and because of his religion nobody will be submitted to investigation and inquiry".[13] In the seventeenth century, the freedom of conscience and of thought accorded by the Union of Utrecht to the inhabitants of the Seven Provinces was generally acclaimed, and foreign commentators regarded this liberty of thought as a basic feature of the federation. William Temple, for example, wrote in 1673: "It is hardly to be imagined how all violence and sharpness, which accompanies the differences of Religion in other Countreys, seems to be appeased or softened here, by the general freedom which all men enjoy, either by allowance or connivence. No man can here complain of pressure in his Conscience" [27] (p. 181). Freedom was seen as a basic asset of a viable society, not only by radical political thinkers such as Spinoza and the De La Court brothers but also by the "orthodox". However, the very same article 13 of the Union of Utrecht made it obvious that the freedom of thought enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic was in no way absolute, because it coincided with a Public Religion, established by the secular authorities in view of the peace and well-being of the people.[14] The United Provinces, just like every other pre-modern European state, adopted a Church, which dominated moral, social, and political life. No separation of Church and State existed. The *Grote Vergadering* of 1651 confirmed the engagement of the Dutch State for the case of Calvinism.[15] This General Assembly issued a *Naedere Unie* (the Further Union), which underlined the political importance of the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619). This Synod was both an ecclesiastical assembly of the Dutch Reformed Church and a political event, for the States General of the Union also invited the other reformed powers and Churches. The delegates had to settle the theological-political controversies, which during the Twelve Years' Truce had brought the Dutch Republic to the verge of civil war. Moreover, in the Dutch Republic the town magistrate appointed the ministers of its churches and paid their salaries and the Provinces took care of their education at the universities—the main objective of the establishment of Leiden University after the revolt [10] (p. 18). The universities were part of the religious-political system. Many university charters contained a stipulation which said that the professors had to sign the confessional writings of the Church [10] (pp. 130[16], 168–169). In the 1980s, the German historian Heinz Schilling introduced the notion of a Confessional State in order to indicate the intricate relationships in the pre-modern era between state, dominant religion, and other more or less tolerated religions in its territories.

[13] In the original: "schijn religie vrij sal moegen blijven ende dat men nyemant ter cause van de religie sal moegen achterhaelen ofte ondersoucken".

[14] In the original: "als si tot rust ende welvaert van de provincien, steden ende particulier leden van dyen ende conservatie van een ygelick, gheestelick ende weerlick, sijn goet ende gerechtigcheyt doennelick vynden sullen."

[15] For example, in N. Wiltens (ed.) *Kerkelyk plakaaat-boek*, Slethus: Den Haag, 1722, I, p. 6: "The States of the Provinces have declared and hereby will declare that they will maintain the true Christian reformed Religion as at the moment it is preached and taught in the Churches in these countries and furthermore in the year 1619 at Dordrecht is confirmed by the National Synod" (my translation). According to the Supplement volume, the assembling States promised to repress serious sins such as the profanation of the "Sabbath of the Lord" and in "Socinian Writings".

[16] Franeker: "professores in religione cujus summa Catechesi Heidelbergensis Belgicaque Ecclesiarum et confessione Belgicae Ecclesiae comprehensa est, consentiant".

According to him, the Dutch Republic was no exception to the general European rule, and no political-religious party in the Republic seriously questioned the need for a religious footing of state and society [28].

All leading theologians in the confessional state accepted the state's power in religious and ecclesiastical matters. Voetius, for example, fully acknowledged the authority of the secular authorities to interfere in church business, since the Magistrate possesses his power by divine law [29] (pp. 133–134). Reformed theologians and their adversaries tended to identify their view as a golden mean. On the one hand, Roman Catholicism saw all authority in society conferred on the Pope by God, who transferred his power to the Magistrate. Erastianism, on the other hand, argued that God had primarily conferred all power to the Magistrate, which delegated a part of its power to the ministers of the Church. However, within the Dutch Reformed Church the Arminian theologian Wttenbogaert in his 1610 *Tractaet van 't ampt ende authoriteyt eener hoogher christelicker overheydt, in kerckelicke saecken* (Treatise of the office and authority of a higher Christian government), reprinted in 1647, denounced a model of "collateralism", or equal authority "evenhoogheid", which distinguished between two powers of God delegated to the Magistrate and the Church. He attributed this model to his Counter-Remonstrant adversaries [30] (pp. 17–26). In 1615, the Counter-Remonstant minister Antonius Walaeus, who after the Synod of Dordt became Leiden University's primary professor of theology, reacted in *Het ampt der kerckendienaren, midtsgaders de authoriteyt, ende opsicht, die een hooghe christelicke overheydt daer over toecompt insonderheyt over het Tractaet des E.I. Wtenbogaerts* (The office of the Ministers of the Church and the Authority and Supervision, which the Christian government is entitled to), flatly denying that the Counter-Remonstrants adhered to such a model. He argued that the Magistrate is the guardian of the Ten Commandments and had the duty to implement these. Hence, the state chooses a public religion by the mandate it receives from God. More particularly, the state had to protect the Public Church and defend religion against the foes of Divine Truth. Walaeus, however, added that the Church had a spiritual office given to it directly by God. This observation refers back to the early days of the Reformation, when John Calvin in part 5 chapter 20 of his *Institutions of the Christian Religion* wrote: "it is a Jewish folly to include the kingdom of Christ under the elements of this world", thereby implying a clear-cut distinction between "earthly" civil power of the state and the spiritual kingdom of God, where there are no "courts, laws and magistrate" and every Christian enjoys complete spiritual freedom. However, Calvin also noted that God himself established the Magistrate, and so "the nature of magistracy is to be derived from the word of God" [31] (pp. 637–638).

In Protestant tradition, Philip Melanchthon had already attributed the duty to provide for religion to the State. It had the *custodia* or *cura religionis* [32]. This care included both tables of the Ten Commandments, that is to say not only those regarding inter-human relations but also those regarding the service due to God [32] (p. 229) and [33] (pp. 309–312). The view that government has to enforce all Ten Commandments implies the full authority of the state with regard to public religion. During Johan de Witt's regime, some radical thinkers did indeed come to this conclusion. In 1665, for example, "Lucius Antistius Constans", a name sometimes identified as a pseudonym for Spinoza, De La Court, Meyer, or Van Velthuysen, wrote an argument "in accordance with nature and right reason", against the claim of the Church to have an intrinsic right to *potestas spiritualis* [34].[17] Religion is either inner or outer and public, the author observed in the first chapter. Inner religion makes man only accountable to God; for no prince knows the hearts of his fellow men nor can he cause their outer religion to correspond to their real faith. Only God possesses this power. In inner religion, an absolute liberty of conscience prevails. Public religion, however, is a social affair. Therefore, in civil society, God gave his power to determine what is just and true in religion exclusively to the Magistrate. Henceforth, the state represents God in all public affairs, including those of the Church. That is the

[17] H. Blom in the preface of the 1991 reprint with a French translation, p. xi suggests that the author was a regent, who died young.

reason why Constans called the Magistrate *prodeus* or *prodei*, "since he becomes God and is the lieutenant of God and acts in stead of Him" ([34], p. 23). Although the author adopted Hobbes's natural law concepts, by attributing the *ius circa sacra* to the Magistrate, he remained within the bounds of the Reformed tradition.

Voetius sought to avoid such Erastianism by adding to the sentence "the magistrate is granted authority in ecclesiastical matters by divine law" the phrase "not in itself, or as such, but as far as they pertain to this world". This left the Church an authority and office of its own [14] (p. 131).[18] Hence, the power of the State with respect to public religion is limited since the Church has the authority to decide its internal and spiritual affairs by itself. The first who clearly formulated this distinction between the internal and external affairs of the Church was a Jena theologian in the first decades of the seventeenth century [34] (p. 275). Justus Lipsius introduced the concept *ius in sacra* and Grotius adopted the expression *ius circa sacra* in order to demarcate the power of the State—the *ius circa sacra*—and the authority of the Church—*ius in sacris* [35] (p. 375). However, Reformed scholars had a hard time defining the proper power of the Church. Marten Schoock for example, who became (in)famous in the history of philosophy by vehemently attacking Descartes in his *Admiranda methodus* (1643), defined the Magistrate with Jean Bodin as "the highest power over citizens and subjects, which is free from laws" [36] (p. 91).[19] It is delegated because only God is a real magistrate. God established all earthly powers, and they take part in His power to order and rule the states of earth. Therefore, they are called His "lieutenants" (*velut vicarii*) [36] (p. 3). This phrase is orthodox and Calvin used it in the last chapter of his *Institution* [31] (p. 550).[20] This delegated power explains why the prince may promulgate laws "not only with respect to civil but also with respect to sacred matters" [36] (p. 112).[21] However, as Ambrosius stated, "the emperor is not above, but in the church", the Magistrate is provided with the "architectonic power" to determine what matters are sacred. In doing so, the prince is guided by the Bible. Therefore he is called "the educator of the churchs" [36] (p. 113).[22] Referring to the famous chapter 13 of St. Paul's letter to the Romans, Schoock maintains that the Church and its ministers have to obey the state even if it is pagan or heretic. The only specific duty of the Church God conferred on it is to admonish and correct the state. Schoock substantiates this claim by referring to Calvin's successor Theodore de Bèze [37] (pp. 630, 643). However, in exercising this duty, the ministers have to be extremely cautious to avoid tumult. It is only with respect to doctrine that the Church may act with confidence. In the history of the Church, several examples seem to contradict this very restricted notion of ecclesiastical power, such as Ambrosius, who excommunicated the emperor Theodosius the Great because his troops massacred the inhabitants of Thessaloniki in 390 CE—a counterexample which Spinoza also discusses in the beginning of chapter 19. Schoock adopted the solution of Bodin, who observed that Ambrosius, being the bishop of Milan, was not competent to judge the morals of the emperor because he was a member of the Church of Constantinople. Moreover, this killing was not a bloodshed, but a lawful execution because these citizens committed a capital crime by killing some civil servants [38] (p. 339). We may conclude that Wttenbogaert falsely attributed the idea of a real "collateralism" of Church and State to his Counter-Remonstrant adversaries.

Article 13 of the Union of Utrecht on the one hand implied the notion of a Christian magistrate but on the other granted all citizens liberty of conscience. It created a major intellectual problem in the Confessional State, namely to account for the tolerance of "false

[18] [the State] "Habere supremam et formalem potestatem in omnes subditos. 2. Habere specialiter coactivam supremam et formalem potestatem in personas, res, actiones et causas ecclesiasticas non quidem in se aut qua tale, sed sed quatenus ad hoc saeculum" and "Potestas magistratus esse immediatè à Deo et ideo independenter ab ecclesia est jure divino".

[19] "summa in cives ac subditos legibus absoluta potestas".

[20] The magistrate "mandatum a Deo, Divinum authoritatem praeditos esse, ac omnino Dei personam sustinere, cujus vices quodammodo agunt".

[21] "ea se non modo ad negotia sacra ac ecclesiastica quam civilia extendat".

[22] "Sic erit nutricius genuinus ecclesiae, maxime si non minus ad conservandae orthodoxae religionis, quam extirpandae heterodoxae, quam gnaviter incumbuerit".

religion", i.e., convictions at variance with public religion and its confession. If someone rejected it, Voetius observed, he deserves eternal damnation. The Church does not tolerate such an unbeliever in its midst and rightly considers him to be excluded from the Kingdom of God. Hence, the king of Great Britain did a good thing when he committed a Socinian to the flames. Apparently, this theory leaves little hope for toleration. Voetius maintained: "since by divine and natural law the state is the defender of religion, the Magistrate is in conscience bound to promote and favour it *as far as in its power* and take away all evils and sins that do harm to the glory of God. . . . and some theological errors are intolerable in a state, such as the assumption that God does not reign over human affairs and is not the judge of evil deeds, the Magistrate should prohibit the public exercise of such a false religion" [29] (p. 388[23]) and [33] (pp. 314–315).

However, the practice Voetius advocated is less harsh than the theory because the clause put in italics to a certain degree made the tolerance of "false" religion possible. The authority of the Magistrate is essentially a juridical authority based on all kinds of treaties, conventions, and agreements and the use of its power required prudence. According to Voetius, a threefold practice of tolerance of "false" religion in a Confessional state developed. The Magistrate in the Dutch Republic "permitted" false religion in the case of Lutheranism. "Tolerance" occurs if the Magistrate sincerely wants to ban a false religion but is unable to do so safely. This is the attitude of the Reformed Government against Roman Catholicism, which the authorities occasionally prohibited merely due to "political reasons". Finally, "indulgence" is where the Magistrate applies the existing banning edicts with moderation. This is the case with Arminianism. However, Socinianism, Paganism, and Judaism were false religions, which in the Dutch Republic deserved no tolerance at all because they denied the basic tenets of Christianity. The same applies to Anabaptism and Arminianism if infected by Socinianism. Even a limited amount of force in destroying false religion was allowed. Individuals may be forced to emend their faith before the Magistrate, but "inquisition and tyrannical coercion of conscience" should be avoided [29] (p. 390).[24]. In this manner, the repression of false religion should coexist with the liberty of conscience.

Voetius's view on tolerance reflected the general practice in the Dutch Republic—with the possible exception of the Jews who were admitted to some Dutch cities [39] (pp. 437–438). The Public Church preached true religion and admonished all citizens to follow its lead. The secular authorities only intervened if they considered the foundations of the political-religious order to be at stake. Governmental bodies interfered by banning books [40] (p. 95),[25] fining printers, and imprisoning authors. So, theoretical intolerance coexisted with a large but not unlimited practical tolerance.

However, new theological-political turmoil was caused by the "Further reformation", that is to say the Dutch version of Puritanism. In the 1650s, influential parts of the Public Church were dissatisfied with the continuing presence of dancing, public swearing, gambling, wearing long hair, theatrical performances, and disregard of the Sabbath. Apparently, these distressing phenomena were proof of the incompleteness of the Reformation and the unchristian nature of the Dutch society. An impediment to the Further Reformation, the Voetians argued, was the Magistrate, which refrained from using its power to repress all "ungodliness" and "false religion", although it could easily do so by closing theaters and bars.

At the time when Voetius developed his ideas on the "*exercitia pietatis*" in Utrecht, the leading theologian at Leiden University was Joannes Coccejus. In the Dutch Republic, his federal theology was also very popular. He and other leading theologians felt the "Further Reformation" eroded "Christian liberty". The political-theological controversy stimulated by the "Further Reformation" and conflicts caused by the introduction of Cartesianism

[23] "non licet magistratui, Dei ministro, libertatem excercitii sive publicam permittere siquidem potestas et potentia illi adsit impedienda".

[24] "posse etiam compelle singulari homines ad edendam fidei suae coram magistratu absque inquisitione et tyrannide conscientiarum".

[25] "from 1583 to 1700 the States of Holland prohibited 263 titles. Of these about ten were of a philosophical nature. The most important books were: Spinoza's TTP, his *Opera Postuma*, the Dutch version of *Leviathan*, Meyer's *Philosophiae S. Scripturae Interpres*, the Socinian *Bibliotheca fratrum polonorum*, Koerbagh's *Bloemhof* and his *Een light* and the philosophical novel *Philopater"*.

coincided and the followers of the States Party tended to support the sympathizers of Coccejus in the Public Church and of Cartesianism in the universities and vice versa. This makes apparent that there is no intrinsic link between republicanism, Coccejan theology, and Cartesianism. Already in the nineteenth century, the Church historian J.A. Cramer concluded that external factors brought these groups together, that is the power of a common enemy, the voetian Further Reformation [41] (p. 39).[26]

The first who linked Cartesianism with theology was Lambertus van Velthuysen (1622–1685) [42] (p. 14) and [43].[27] From the very beginning, his focus on Christian liberty destroyed the foundations of the program of the Further Reformation. Of course gambling, drinking, and usury are evils, he argued, and every sinner has to justify his misbehavior to God, but the citizen is in no need to account for his sins to the Magistrate. Unlike Voetius, Van Velthuysen did not write a treatise devoted to state and Church relationships, but the contours of his theologico-political argument, comprising biblical interpretation, the fundamental articles of Faith, the nature of the Church, and its relation to the state, are clearly visible in the Dutch pamphlets he wrote during the 1660s. According to his *Tractaet van de Afgoderye en Superstitie* (Treatise on idolatry and superstition), the purest act of idolatry—unsurprisingly, considering Van Velthuysen's Protestant persuasions—is the Roman Catholic Mass, described by the Heidelberg Catechism (question 80) as an "accursed idolatry" [45] (p. 1). Yet, Van Velthuysen's aim is not to participate in confessional polemics, but to adjust the balance between the Magistrate's duty to defend true religion and the liberty of conscience. In a pamphlet of 1660, he argued that Christian magistrates are not duty-bound to ban gambling, drinking, and providing interest-bearing loans [46] (p. *4r). Although the Magistrate is obliged to promote God's honor which is injured by these vices, this is counterbalanced by the reason of state, the "general need for the state to allow evils in order to prevent still greater evils". This is the case, for instance, with the toleration of Jews and Catholics, who are needed for the economy [46] (p. 271ff). Moreover, magistrates are obliged to enforce moral discipline in three cases only: first, if the preservation of the state is in danger; second, when the "first imprints of honor and shame" are involved: moral notions so evident that nobody can willingly deny them, unless he is a blinded atheist who "purely out of spite spurns all good arguments for God's existence" [46] (p. 73); and finally, in those cases where Scripture clearly states that God has delegated the punishment of the wicked to the secular authorities. This last possibility, however, is purely hypothetical, since Christ has abrogated the Old Testament laws and the New Testament does not contain such laws [46] (p. 65).

In his polemic with the Further Reformation, Van Velthuysen secularized the Church and made it lose its sacred nature. Although the authority of Christ as an infallible teacher has in part passed on to the apostles, these, "as the Reformed well know", have not in turn found "followers or successors in this doctrinal infallibility" [47] (p. 33). This means that the Church of the Reformation is merely a union of co-religionists, which a citizen joins in freedom. The members elect the pastors, who therefore even in the Church have no greater authority than common believers, nor are church members bound by the decisions of church bodies [47] (p. 87). Like all social organizations, such as the "college of midwives" or the "college of judges", the Church is subject to the state [47] (p. 33). According to the Utrecht regent, who clearly adopted the Reformed view, this subordination is limited to the organizational aspects, i.e., outer religion. The government possesses the *jus circa sacra*, but does not extend itself to matters of inner faith—for conscience is outside government control. By this argument, the confession lost its divine nature and became a bylaw of the Church, which regulates its services, but which does not express the inner faith of the believers.

[26] Van Asselt underlines the anti-scholastic base line in this theology and the "duplex ordo" between philosophical and theological knowledge of God. According to him, the Bible was no physical text, but a book of piety.

[27] Van Bunge [9] (pp. 50–54) pays attention to the role of the theologian Christoph Wittich, who in the 1650s developed the concept of "accommodation". According to his notion originating in Calvin, the Bible spoke about physical topics in the language of the common man and contained no philosophical truths about the constitution of nature. The message of the Bible is basically of a moral nature. For this section, see [44].

4. The Confession of the Public Church

In the TTP, Spinoza establishes the nature of public religion and its confession at the end of a painstaking philological research of the Old Testament, using no less than 716 different Hebrew words [48]. All these Hebrew words appear without vocalization, which complicated a reading of the text to a reader without expert knowledge of Hebrew. Moreover, the "philosophical reader" Spinoza addresses had to comprehend the arguments, which refer to targumim and medieval Jewish commentators as well. The reader could only understand the TTP thanks to the dissemination of philological expertise as developed by humanism.

The humanist movement had transformed medieval hermeneutics into an independent "scholarly" discipline. This *ars interpretandi* required the study of ancient languages such as Greek and Hebrew [12] (pp. 94–98). From the 16th century onwards, all kinds of grammars, dictionaries, and concordances were written and printed for a wide community of readers, and a method to use them was developed. Humanist scholars included the study of the Bible in their activities, and theologians had to put up with the presence of such a *Grammaticus* (philologist), who wrote Biblical commentaries adopting the same method used in interpreting secular texts of the Ancients. The importance the Reformers attributed to the study of Hebrew is apparent in Théodore de Bèze's history of the Reformation. According to Calvin's colleague, the Reformation started with the humanist Johann Reuchlin because he made the knowledge of Hebrew available to the Church. Bèze wrote: "by divine grace the Christians regained the ability to read the 'divine secrets' once again in the languages they were written" [49] (pp. 1–4).

Spinoza's library contained no less than sixteen works that could be related to biblical philology. The most important are Buxdorf's *Biblia sacra Hebraica ac selectissimis Hebræorum interpretum commentariis*, Bale 1619 (folio 1); Tremulius's translation of the New Testament from Aramaic, Geneva 1569 (folio 2); Buxdorf's Hebrew grammar in two parts, 1629 (octavo 12); the *Clavis Talmudica*, translated by the Leiden Hebraist, l'Empereur (quarto 19); and a Dictionary of Biblical and Rabbinical Hebrew by Phillippe d'Aquin, Paris 1629 (folio 8)—all Christian Hebraists [50].

In 1627, the Leiden theologian André Rivet wrote a *General Introduction to the study of the Old and New Testament* [51] (p. 210). In this manual he distinguishes between two kinds of interpretation: philology, or "textual theology", which is the simple understanding of the words and sentences we find in the texts of the Bible—and the reading of these sentences as constituting the "Word of God". However, if we read the Bible texts in a literal way only, they will often seem to be contradictory or defective. Therefore, a second form of interpretation is needed to provide the Church with the necessary means to establish the content of Faith. The second form of reading the Bible presupposes its unity, and the Holy Writings to convey one message, although, according to Reformed canon, they consist of no less than 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Spinoza's friend Adriaan Koerbagh was probably the only 17th-century scholar who flatly rejected the unity of the Bible. In the entry "*Bibel*" of his dictionary, we read that the Bible is a collection of fictional books comparable to the legendary *Reynaert the Fox* or *Till Eulenspiegel*, a trickster figure in Medieval Dutch folklore. According to Koerbagh, an ecclesiastical assembly arbitrarily determined which books belong to the New Testament many years after the death of Jesus, but a later assembly might well change the canon if they want to. Hence, the unity of the Bible is a human construction, which "only fire and sword" maintain [52] (pp. 95–97). The unity of all those seemingly disparate biblical texts is established, as Reformed orthodoxy argued, by making Scripture itself the unique norm of interpretation, and by comparing biblical texts only to other biblical texts, but we have to read them with a "pure mind" and enlightened by the Holy Ghost. The second way to establish Faith is to read the Bible in the light of the tradition, as the Church of Rome argued [51] (p. 271).[28]

[28] Cf. also Meyer's *Interpres* on the different keys to create a unity in the Biblical texts.

In chapter 7 of the TTP, we find an outline of the meagre outcome of the textual approach to interpreting the Bible. Spinoza states that our knowledge of Biblical Hebrew will always remain imperfect because the Hebrew texts are ambiguous and their history is completely known to us [5] (pp. 133–135) and [4] (pp. 179–184). Therefore, we are unable to understand the Word of God. Spinoza's friend Lodewijk Meyer also viewed the results of Reformed Biblical philology with the same scepticism. In the first three chapters of his 1666 *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture*, often edited in one volume with the TTP, Meyer outlines the problems the art of interpretation encounters. They are impossible to overcome because written language is always ambiguous. Although Meyer speaks about language in general, his arguments apply particularly to Biblical Hebrew. However, the extreme diversity recorded in the *historiae* of the different books the Bible is a prerequisite to delineate their universal characteristics, which allows Spinoza and the philosophical reader to establish the universal doctrine of the Holy Writings [53] (pp. 46–71).[29] In TTP 12, Spinoza writes that the Bible is God's Word "only with respect to religion", that is to say with respect to its meaning and not with respect to the written texts, which are "faulty, distorted, or mutilated" and their meaning cannot be worked out "from linguistic usage or gathered solely from Scripture" [5] (pp. 217–218) and [4] (pp. 254–255). Spinoza, looking for a definition of faith, agrees with Meyer that "the rule of interpretation must be the natural light of reason which is common to all men" and therefore "the highest authority to interpret Scripture rests with each individual" [5] (p. 149) and [4] (p. 191).[30] So, the force that creates unity among men is reason. Yet, this force is not "philosophical reason, but common sense". To give everyone the freedom to interpret the Bible will cause no problems because, like Euclid's geometry, the crucial parts of the Bible's teaching are expressed in ordinary language. Meyer's and Spinoza's shared concern to denounce ecclesiastical and theological authority is reflected in the TTP in the refutation of Maimonides's stance, which suggests that the Bible was written by consummate philosophers and could only be interpreted by professional philosophers. It is not his plea for reason, which made Spinoza oppose Maimonides, but his fear of a privileged class of theologians, which, as we saw, we find among other radical Dutch commentators.

In chapter 14 and 19, Spinoza, inspired by this anticlericalism, intervened in the debates on the doctrine content of the confession of the Public Church. A confession should consist of a coherent set of propositions, which define specific doctrines. They are called the articles of Faith. With phrases such as "foundations of religion", "biblical dogmas", "principles", or the fundamentals of universal Faith, Spinoza denoted the universal Faith, which may be inferred from the Bible by applying his method of interpretation, and which a believer has to accept in order to acquire salvation. The dogmas of Holy Scriptures conceived as a unity are at the same time the basic tenets of Faith [5] (praef, 6, 12, 14, pp. [A8v], 118, 218, 229) and [4] (pp. 123, 167, 255, 263).

As we have seen, determining the content of Faith or the True Religion is an important theological problem because the Magistrate should suppress opinions at variance with basic religious truths. In the second volume of the *Diputationes Selectae*, a manual of theology, Voetius underlined the importance of the topic and observed that it is related to basic theological issues such as the liberty to speak in the Church (*libertas prophetandi*), tolerance and moderation, heresy, schism, and the union of the churches [55] (p. 511). Although not all doctrine we come across in the Bible is equally relevant to "redeeming Faith and the community of the Church", it seems obvious that Faith consists of an elaborate series of truths. Faith is more than trust in a person—be it God or Christ—but obviously has a subject-matter as well. Voetius here refers to the scholastic distinction between "*de quo creditur*" (Who we trust) and "*quod creditur*" (the truths we believe in). "True faith requires the explicit knowledge of a whole sequence of truths or articles", he says [55] (p. 516). Such a sequence entails not only a small number of general principles but also

[29] Touber gives a full discussion of these topics and of the relation between the TTP and the humanist philological tradition in The Netherlands.

[30] I will not discuss the controversial relationship between Meyer and Spinoza. A good start is Walther [54].

many logical conclusions. Judaism and Catholicism share this view, but it runs counter to Arminianism, which took the number of articles of Faith to be few. Ironically, Voetius added that the Arminians do not meet their theory of a few articles in practice [56] (pp. 715–716). Furthermore, Van Velthuysen, a member of the Public Church, rejected the Remonstrant idea that the number of basic articles of Faith are few and mainly of a moral nature: "trust in the Divine promises", obeying His precepts and reverence of Scripture [56] (p. 529). Indeed, the leading Arminian theologian Philippus van Limborgh argued that in view of Christian liberty and mutual tolerance in the Church, we should distinguish between articles "absolutely necessary with respect to salvation", which in case of unbelief make someone a heretic, and doctrines less urgent. Fortunately, the number of absolutely necessary articles are only very few and easy to find by a man who respects the Bible [57] (p. 852). Moreover, they do not include purely speculative doctrines without any relation to the exercise of piety that is morality [57] (p. 854). The bare minimum of articles was reached by Hobbes, who argued that only one article is necessary: the public declaration that "Jesus is the Christ" [58] (p. 590). However, for Hobbes, the other salutary doctrines are contained in this tenet.

Like Van Limborgh and the Arminian tradition, Spinoza relates the controversy on the number of articles of Faith to freedom: "To establish, then, how far each person has the freedom to think what he wishes with respect to faith, and whom we are bound to consider faithful, even though they think differently, we must determine what Faith and its fundamentals are" [5] (p. 230) and [4] (p. 264) and to the idea of a confession, which is beyond controversy and shared by all. However, Spinoza also links the number of the fundamental articles of Faith to his anticlericalism. He observed that in the history of Christendom the men of the Church misused the historical opportunity to extend the number of articles beyond what is necessary "to look after their interests". To that end, they "confused them with philosophy" and based them on useless speculation. So, the "Ecclesiastics" being "private men with abundant leisure" could falsely pretend to be "the supreme interpreters of Religion" [5] (p. 320) and [4] (p. 342).

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I argued that the *Theological-Political Treatise* is more than a piece of propaganda, although it shared the anticlericalism of many "Republican" commentators of the period. It is a philosophical masterpiece by its argument, but was also deeply rooted in existing political-religious controversies. It intervened in the Dutch debating culture because it addressed basis problems of the Reformed Confessional state. Notwithstanding its unique defense of philosophical, religious, and political freedom of philosophy and his anti-clerical views of the nature of Public Religion and of the relation between the State and its Church, the TTP made use of notions existing in Reformed tradition and intervened in Dutch intellectual history. The intriguing phrase "the liberty to philosophize" connected the work to the heated discussions, which the introduction of Cartesianism gave rise to. This was also the case for the more general idea of academic freedom, which even the orthodox had to concede to philosophy and philology. Spinoza included in this conception the existing notion of individual religious freedom, or freedom of conscience and also the freedom to criticize government, which he nevertheless heavily restricted. Spinoza's view of the relationship between the State and its Church did not surprise his contemporaries, I argued, because it fit well into the reformed tradition, which made the Magistrate "the Lieutenant of God" on earth. The spiritual power of the state to enforce religion was restricted, as we saw in the case of Voetius, by the liberty of conscience and of inner religion. Spinoza argued for the latter on pragmatic grounds. The third section of this paper discussed the confession of "catholic religion", which in practice is the confession of the Public Church. Both Reformed theologians and Spinoza insisted that such a confession should be the outcome of a scrupulous study of the Bible, which I argued, is to be done not only by means of philology, but also by the same common sense of every man, who is also able to grasp its truths simple as the propositions of mathematics. Spinoza's theological-

political treatise was seen as a normal intervention in the political-theological debates of his age. However, it was his philosophy, shining through the text, which aroused the indignation of his critics and remained highly controversial during the Enlightenment period and well thereafter.

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Of Prophecy and Piety: Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* between al-Farabî and Erasmus

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Abstract: In this contribution, I discuss some less well-known premodern and early modern antecedents of Spinoza's concepts and claims in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. On the one hand, I will argue, Spinoza's notion of prophecy owes more to Moses Maimonides than to any Christian author; and through Maimonides, Spinoza may be linked to the discussion of prophecy in *The Virtuous City* by the tenth-century Islamic philosopher al-Farabî. Spinoza's concern with prophecy as a popular formulation of the Divine Law may be fruitfully seen in the light of these two authors. On the other hand, Spinoza's notion of *pietas* has arguably been shaped by a number of early modern authors from the Low Countries, including Thomas a Kempis and Erasmus: it does not consist in merely obeying the law, but also has a clear devotional and theist dimension of love for God and for one's neighbors. As such, it may be associated with recent ideas on philosophy and spiritual exercises. These findings have a number of non-trivial implications for Spinoza's place in the rise of modern, academic Western philosophy. I will discuss these implications in the context of Pierre Hadot's influential views on philosophy as a way of life and Michel Foucault's notion of spirituality.

Keywords: Spinoza; Jewish philosophy; Islamic philosophy; prophecy; spiritual exercises

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1. Introduction

It is tempting to read Spinoza's attempt to separate philosophy from theology in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth *TTP*) as on a par with the separation of modern science from Medieval scholasticism, and of rational knowledge expressed in purely literal language from the imagination and its illusions, and from the seductive and misleading beauty of rhetoric [1]. And sure enough, in his characterization of the imagination as by definition unable to yield 'adequate knowledge,' rather than a legitimate if imperfect source of knowledge, he appears to follow Descartes, who was equally vocal in rejecting scholasticism, the imagination, and rhetorical language use.

Yet, one should beware of overstating the modern and/or Cartesian aspects of Spinoza's epistemology—and perhaps of even seeing him as part of the epistemological tradition of modern philosophy at all. Famously, Richard Rorty has argued in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that this modern philosophical tradition starts with Descartes and is marked by the shift to seeing knowledge in terms of representation, by the emergence of skepticism as a major philosophical challenge, and by the rise of epistemology as the main philosophical subdiscipline [2]. This development, according to Rorty, is paired with the gradual professionalization of philosophy as an academic discipline that generates its own questions rather than engaging with wider cultural or societal problems.

The problem with this analysis is that Spinoza does not fit in well with the new focus on skepticism and epistemological concerns that Rorty finds in philosophers like Descartes and Kant. Although he pays lip service to the notion of 'clear and distinct ideas,' Spinoza nowhere makes epistemological skepticism into the starting point of his philosophy in the way Descartes does. Put differently, he does not appear to be concerned primarily, as Descartes is, with the question of what enables the self or the subject to have true knowledge; nor does he appear to reflect or anticipate what Rorty calls the

'professionalization'—and, one may perhaps add, depoliticization—of modern philosophy into an academic discipline.

Likewise, and more recently, Jonathan Israel's influential history of the Radical Enlightenment may force us to rethink the history of early modern and modern Western philosophy, but perhaps in ways other than those imagined by Israel himself. Israel claims that Spinoza is the first truly modern philosopher: unlike Descartes and other thinkers of what he calls the 'moderate Enlightenment.' Spinoza and the Spinozists, he argues, are the backbone of a transnational 'radical Enlightenment,' which rejected the Cartesian dualism of substance, and which refused to compromise with either absolute rule or clerical authority, shaping the Enlightenment's alleged rejection of all "monarchy, aristocracy, woman's subordination to man, ecclesiastical authority and slavery" ([3], p. vi, 12).

This account has been criticized on various points; for example, in interpreting Spinoza's substance monism as amounting to "non-providential deism, if not outright materialism and atheism" ([3], p. 12), Israel in fact reproduces the labels of Spinoza's opponents; moreover, some of these labels were explicitly rejected by Spinoza himself. Israel's reading not only makes Spinoza rather more 'modern' than Descartes and Hobbes; it also, and unlike Rorty's account of the professionalization and depoliticization of modern philosophy, calls attention to the political dimensions of Spinoza's work. Against such modernizing readings of Spinoza, however, I would like to argue that we should pay more systematic attention to some of the premodern and early modern sources of both character and content of Spinoza's thought. Since these sources appear more clearly in the *TTP* than in the *Ethics*, my discussion will focus on the former work (I generally quote from the Silverthorne/Israel translation of the *TTP* [1], but have modified it where I thought it necessary; for the Latin text, I have relied on the Gawlick/Niewöhner edition). On the one hand, I will argue, Spinoza leans heavily on Medieval Jewish philosophers, in particular Maimonides, and through the latter—at one remove, so to speak—on Islamic political philosophers like al-Farabî; on the other hand, Spinoza's notion of *pietas* appears to reflect late Medieval and Renaissance spiritual concerns rather than early modern republican and liberal political theory. For this reason, I hope to argue, one may get a better understanding of Spinoza by seeing him as emerging from a tradition that sees philosophy as a way of life rather than an academic discipline, as recently (and influentially) discussed by the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot.

2. Prophecy: Spinoza between Al-Farabî and Maimonides

Spinoza has with some justification been called a 'Jewish philosopher;' not, of course, in the sense of engaging with philosophical questions as a believing or professing Jew, but in the sense of engaging with a specifically Jewish philosophical tradition [4–6]. More specifically, he is connected with this tradition in particular through Moses Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* (*Dalâlat al-hâ'irîn*), a book he possessed in Hebrew translation [7]. To the extent that he does, however, he may also be argued to be engaging, at one remove, with the Islamic philosophical tradition from which Medieval Jewish philosophy had emerged [8,9]. These Islamic roots are quite clear in Maimonides's philosophical work. Indeed, the *Guide* is literally unthinkable without its Islamic philosophical background: it was originally written in Arabic, and its philosophical and theological vocabulary is largely the same as that of Maimonides's Arabic Islamic predecessors. I will try to make the case for Spinoza's Jewish and Islamic philosophical backgrounds by briefly discussing, first, his affinities with Maimonides, and second, his similarities with al-Farabî.

At first blush, it may seem overstated or misguided to credit Maimonides with any serious influence on Spinoza. After all, he comes in for harsh criticism in the *TTP*, where the latter rejects the very project of proving the philosophical respectability of Jewish Scripture as 'ridiculous,' and qualifying the attempt to derive 'Aristotelian trifles' (*nugas Aristotelicas*) from Scripture as 'nonsense' (I. 4). Despite these criticisms, however, Spinoza's indebtedness to the *Guide* is obvious: it supplies, for example, both the thematic and the vocabulary for his own discussion of the relation between prophecy and philosophy. In

fact, the opposition between philosophy as the realm of indubitable knowledge acquired by the intellect and prophecy as the realm of the law and the imagination appears to owe rather more to Maimonides, and more generally to the Jewish and Islamic traditions, than to Christian theology or philosophy. In the latter, prophecy and the law play a rather less central role than in the former two, for the obvious reason that the New Testament characterizes Christ not as a prophet but as the son of God; moreover, his teachings are said not so much to present or reaffirm the law as to 'fulfill' it (cf. Rom. 3.18).

Spinoza's views on Christ do in fact bring him closer to Judaic and Islamic views than to Christianity. Thus, he surreptitiously characterizes Christ not as the son of God but as a prophet, albeit one with a vastly superior, perfect mind, "to whom the decrees of God . . . were *revealed* not by words or visions but directly" (*Christum, cui Dei placita . . . sine verbis aut visionibus, sed immediate revelata sunt*, 2.18; emph. added). Like Moses, that is, Christ is characterized here as a prophet who communicated *with* God, rather than as an incarnation or hypostasis *of* God. In one crucial respect, though, he is superior in prophecy even to Moses: like Maimonides, Spinoza reads the Old Testament as asserting that, whereas most prophets communicated with God indirectly (notably, as mediated by an angel), Moses directly heard the word of God himself; but to this he adds that the prophecy revealed to Christ was not mediated even by words, even if they were the words of God. Whereas Moses, unlike other prophets, "spoke with God face to face," Spinoza elaborates, Christ "communicated with God mind to mind," that is, not mediated by language. In other words, he represents Christ as a prophet who *receives* God's truth, albeit immediately, rather than as a hypostasis of God who *embodies* that truth (*TTP*, 1.18–19).[1]

To this, it might be objected that in 4.10, Spinoza appears to distinguish Christ from the prophets, adding that he was, much like the angels through whose mediation God had revealed things to mankind, "not so much a prophet as a mouth-piece of God" (*Christus not tam propheta, quam os Dei fuit*). By this, however, Spinoza appears to mean only that God has only revealed himself "to Christ or his soul" directly rather than by means of words, and that Christ's mind was adapted to general and true notions valid for all humanity rather than only for the Jews (ibid.). Spinoza, that is, distinguishes Christ from the Biblical prophets not in ontological or soteriological terms, but only by the superiority of his understanding.

Further, Spinoza castigates Maimonides's attempts to associate (some forms of) prophecy with the intellect rather than the imagination, and accordingly with philosophical knowledge: for him, prophetic revelation works through the imagination alone; and a man with a strong imagination inevitably has a weak intellect, and vice versa (I.4). In this respect, he turns out to stand rather closer to al-Farabî (d. 945CE), who in his main work, the *Virtuous City* (*al-madîna al-fâdila*), likewise defines prophecy as working through the imagination rather than the intellect (For an English translation and a (barely legible) Arabic text edition of the *Virtuous City* see [10].).

It may sound odd to associate Spinoza with an Islamic thinker from the tenth century of our era. There are no indications that Spinoza was familiar with any work of Islamic philosophy, with the possible exception of Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (This work, however, was published in Latin translation by Edward Pococke only in 1671 and in an anonymous Dutch translation in 1672, that is, after the completion and publication of the *TTP*.). Nevertheless, at one remove and mediated by Maimonides, Spinoza clearly rekindles the concepts and themes discussed by al-Farabî and other Islamic political philosophers. Maimonides held al-Farabî in the highest esteem, praising his works as "finer than sieved flour;" accordingly, the *Guide* is clearly indebted to al-Farabî's analyses of the relation between philosophy and prophecy, and between mass and elite, even if it nowhere explicitly refers to the latter's political writings (nor, incidentally, to those of any other Islamic philosopher).

[1] In 1.20, Spinoza seems to suggest that Christ, unlike the other prophets, received his prophecies through his intellect rather than his imagination; but in the light of 1.19, this paragraph is more plausibly read as seeing Christ's prophecy as received directly from mind to mind (*de mente ad mentem*), rather than by the effort of the imagination (*imaginationis ope*), that is, mediated by words or images; cf. 4.10.

Maimonides's aims are not the same as al-Farabî's, however; unlike the latter, who develops a Platonist political philosophy in a monotheistic setting, he defends a particular monotheistic faith against the temptations of philosophy. The 'perplexity' alluded to in his title is the apparent contradiction between (Judaic) Scripture and the philosophical insights yielded by the intellect and by demonstrative argument. The *Guide* attempts to present Scripture as philosophically respectable, and to resolve its apparent contradictions with philosophical knowledge. Rather more than al-Farabî, Maimonides thus appears keen to defend one particular revelation against the perplexing influence of philosophy.

Although Spinoza rejects Maimonides's attempts to extract philosophical truths from Scripture, he agrees with the latter's view that prophetic revelation is formulated in a simple and visual language that is accessible to the masses and easily understood, and that the abstract and learned discourse of philosophy is the exclusive preserve of a literate and educated elite. This distinction, too, can be found in al-Farabî–even more clearly, in fact, than in Maimonides. In chapter 14 of the *Virtuous City*, al-Farabî discusses the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*). This faculty, he argues, imitates the rational faculty (*al-quwwa al-nâtiqa*) and the intelligibles (*ma'qûlât*), by creating perceptual and pleasant images of abstract concepts (§14.6). According to this analysis, divination is comparable to dreaming, if on a higher level, since prophecy "is the most perfect rank which the imaginative faculty can reach" (§14.9).

Al-Farabî gives an almost completely naturalist account of prophecy, according to which prophecy is a feature of the imaginative faculty that all humans have, and argues that the prophet, i.e., the man endowed with the most perfect imagination, receives images from the active intellect, whether during sleep or while awake. This account is not entirely naturalist in so far as it is formulated in terms of emanation from, or actualization by, an active intellect that is external to the human soul; but it is not religious in a theist sense either, since it is (mostly) not formulated in terms of revelation (*wahy*) by a personal divinity or angel either. Thus, both al-Farabî and Maimonides talk about human knowledge, or rather intellection (that is, the actual thinking by the human intellect), in terms of emanation, or actualization, by an Active Intellect that is itself external to the human soul. Spinoza's epistemology, of course, rejects these emanationist accounts; but despite appearances, it is not quite Cartesian either: for him, the nature of the human mind itself is the primary source of revelation, as it participates in God's nature: "everything that we understand clearly and distinctly, is dictated to us . . . by the idea of God and by nature" (*omnia, quae clare et distincte intelligimus, Dei idea . . . et natura nobis dictat*, 1.4). Skeptical doubt, as noted, does not emerge as a serious problem in this characterization of knowledge of God.

In several respects, Spinoza stands closer to Maimonides than to al-Farabî; like the former but quite unlike the latter, he freely quotes from biblical Scripture in support of his arguments. The *TTP* has been called a work of 'applied' or 'practical' philosophy [1] (p. VIII); but its line of argumentation is generally based on Scriptural quotations rather than syllogistic arguments, and may accordingly be called theological rather than philosophical. 'Theological' is of course an unsatisfactory term here, given Spinoza's stated aims of separating theology from philosophy, and of subordinating religion to the authority of the sovereign. Hence, we should return below to the question of what exactly is the character of the 'philosophy' espoused in the *TTP*.

In fact, when we contrast him with Maimonides and Spinoza, it becomes clearer just how radical al-Farabî really is: nowhere in the *Virtuous City* does he quote the Qur'an even a single time in support of his argument, and nowhere does he mention Muhammad as the prophet of Islam. Instead, he generically speaks of prophets in the plural, and of the 'first principle' (*al-sabab al-awwal*) and of 'divinity' (*ilâh*) rather than the specifically Islamic God referred to by the proper name *Allâh*. In fact, that word appears only twice in the entire book (§15.19).

In chapter 17, the radical political implications of al-Farabî's account become clearer. To begin with, al-Farabî makes the Platonist claim that philosophers should rule in the virtuous city, a claim both Spinoza and Maimonides stop short of. Even more daringly,

he argues that in an ideal city, the ruler (*ra'îs*) is both a philosopher, who has received the emanations from the active intellect through his intellect, and a prophet, who has received these emanations through his imaginative faculty (§15.10–11). Hence, for him, the philosopher has a superior kind of knowledge: whereas philosophers know things as they are, he continues, prophets only know them by imitation (*tamthîl*); hence, unlike philosophers, who know things by means of demonstrative reasoning that leaves no room for doubt or debate, prophetic imitations do not yield certainty, that is, indubitable knowledge. Moreover, the one universally valid philosophical truth may be imitated by different symbols and images. That is, al-Farabî not only argues that prophetic imaginings are inferior to demonstrative philosophical knowledge, but also that *different* rhetorical imitations of the same universally valid philosophical truths may exist, and hence that 'it is possible that excellent nations and cities exist whose religions differ, although they all have as their goal one and the same felicity' (§17.2). Put differently, he openly states that a virtuous or excellent city does not even need the specifically Islamic revelation. Spinoza, like Maimonides, falls far short of such an overtly non-religious[2] and non-confessional political philosophy that overtly–not to say defiantly–qualifies religious revelation as an inferior imitation of philosophical insights.

3. Piety: Spinoza between Thomas a Kempis and Erasmus

These differences between al-Farabî and Spinoza lead us to explore the political contents of the *TTP* anew. It has long been customary to read this work against the background of the canonical Western political thinkers who preceded him, in particular Hobbes, whose *De Cive* Spinoza is known to have read, and Machiavelli, whose *Il Principe* figures especially prominently in the posthumously published *Tractatus Politicus*. Here, however, I would like to draw attention to a number of antecedents and sources of inspiration that stem from other traditions.

To begin with, it has been argued by a number of authors that Spinoza's work, in particular the *TTP*, should be understood against the very specific political, religious, and intellectual background of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, which has been characterized as an unintended consequence of the revolt against the Habsburg empire ([11], p. 49). The Republic was also something of an exception to the general trend towards centralized states and absolute rulers that could be witnessed in early modern Western Europe. Instead, the idea of a decentralized republic of autonomous provinces was both a political reality and a normative ideal, especially during the 'stadholderless' era (1650–1672). Partly as a result of this decentralization, it also knew a religious pluralism that was exceptional by seventeenth-century Western European standards, though not necessarily by those of premodern polities. It did have censorship laws, but these were not enforced very strictly, consistently, or even centrally. Nonetheless, the risks of publishing unorthodox views on religion were very real. As is well known, Spinoza had already run afoul of the Jewish Talmud Torah community in 1656; and when the *TTP* was published—clandestinely and anonymously—in 1670, it caused such an uproar that Spinoza abstained from publishing anything else in his lifetime. In 1674, the book was banned by the states of Holland and by the Dutch States General. Subsequently, all of Spinoza's writings would also be placed on the Inquisition's list of prohibited books.[3]

Over the years, it has become increasingly clear that Spinoza's philosophy, and in particular his political thought, is very much the result of this republican and relatively tolerant, but still dangerous, religious climate. Spinoza is even qualified a 'Cartesian republican' by Van Bunge because of his rejection of the Aristotelianism that constituted the school philosophy of his age [11] (p. 36–37). Van Bunge readily acknowledges the oddity of this term, since Descartes consciously and deliberately abstained from developing any

[2] One is tempted to call al-Farabî's ideas 'secularist;' but this term may be anachronistic here.

[3] Interestingly, there are no hints in al-Farabî's writings nor reports in contemporary sources that the even more radical ideas developed in the *Virtuous City* ever brought him into serious problems with the theologians (*mutakallimûn*) of his age, or with religious scholars (*'ulamâ*) more generally. More generally, the early 'Abbâsid period appears to have been remarkably tolerant of religious freethinking.

political philosophy. In the seventeenth-century Low Countries, however, Cartesianism had acquired a particular, and politicized, quality, not so much as the result of the 'academic Cartesianism' that was gradually gaining a foothold in the Dutch universities, but in the 'lay Cartesianism' expressed in the Dutch-language writings of authors like the De la Court brothers [11] (p. 45). Below, it will appear that the question of the relation between the professionalized or school philosophy practiced by academic theologians and what–for want of a better term–one might call the 'lay philosophy' used by political pamphleteers is of particular relevance for Spinoza (cf. [12]).

Famously, Spinoza argues in the *TTP* that 'the aim of the state is freedom' (*Finis ergo Reipublicae revera libertas est*, 20.6), and that there should be a 'freedom to philosophize' (*libertas philosophandi*), because this freedom is not a threat to piety (*pietas*) or political stability. However, what exactly do *pietas*, *libertas*, and *libertas philosophandi* (and, for that matter, *philosophia*) mean for him? He does not clearly define or describe any of these notions. Consequently, much ink has been spilled on the question of whether Spinoza's notion of *libertas* amounts to a form of 'negative liberty,' or 'freedom-from,' or rather to 'positive liberty,' or 'freedom-to,' as Isaiah Berlin calls it, or to a form of 'republican liberty,' as identified by Quentin Skinner [13–15].[4] To the extent that Spinoza characterizes liberty in the *TTP*, however, his notion appears to be closer to what today would be called 'freedom of conscience,' that is, the freedom of philosophical thought and religious belief, rather than any more political notion of freedom of action. Moreover, Theo Verbeek argues that Spinoza does not really demand freedom for philosophical activity in general, but more specifically for his *own* philosophy [16] (pp. 6–8).

Moreover, liberty in any political sense is difficult to square with Spinoza's other key notion in the *TTP*, that of *pietas*, which—although no more defined precisely than *libertas*—is generally characterized in terms of obedience, whether to a law or to a sovereign. Oddly, detailed discussion of *pietas* is largely absent even from studies of the *TTP*; to the extent that it is discussed, it is often linked to pagan and early Christian Roman thinkers, in particular, Stoics like Seneca. Thus, Melamed and Rosenthal do not discuss *pietas* at all [17]; Bagley largely identifies it with 'faith' or 'faithfulness,' but does not discuss it in detail [18] (pp. 114–116); Nadler sees Spinoza's 'true piety,' or the 'inward worship of God,' as an entirely personal matter, contrasting with the laws, which govern outward behavior [19] (pp. 201–202); and Verbeek argues that we should take Spinoza's *pietas* in a practical sense, equivalent to the seventeenth-century Dutch 'godzaligheid,' adding that *pietas* "is the Calvinist notion of 'good works'" [16] (p. 7).[5]

These characterizations, however, have two problems: on the one hand, they miss the overtly political dimension of Spinoza's *pietas*; on the other, they misconstrue its background in the early modern forms of Christianity in the Low Countries. As I will argue below, it seems to have devotional rather than strictly Calvinist connotations. The political dimension of revealed faiths becomes clear from Spinoza's remark that the laws revealed to particular prophets are not specific to particular peoples or cultures but to particular *states* (Preface, §10), and his notion of political sovereignty appears remarkably absolutist. Superficially, it may seem that for Spinoza, religious authority is textual rather than personal; on closer inspection, however, he appears to subordinate any *religious* authority to the *political* power of the sovereign, given his claims that "divine law depends solely upon the decree of the sovereign authorities" and "sovereign authorities are the [sole] interpreters of religion and piety" (19.9).

This association of piety with both political and religious obedience is rather problematic; at best, it shows an idealized concept of what true religion and true piety *should* amount to, not what it *in fact* is. Most importantly, it wrongly suggests that religious revolt and spiritual protest movements are *only* the result of oppression by the state. It is therefore no coincidence that Spinoza is cautious not to mention any revolts against

[4] Remarkably, however, Spinoza is almost entirely absent in Quentin Skinner's numerous discussions of republican liberty.

[5] For some discussion of the Christian backgrounds of Spinoza's *pietas*, see [20].

religious authority, schismatic authors, or seditious movements of the recent past (Luther, Calvin, and the Reformation, for example, are conspicuously absent), let alone contemporary freethinkers like Koerbagh and Van den Enden. Thus, the *TTP* contains rather more examples from Biblical Hebrew and pagan Latin antiquity than from contemporary history; and it only briefly mentions the Dutch revolt against the Spanish king Philip II, the civil war in England, and the Remonstrant controversy that eventually led to the 1618 Orangist coup. Spinoza's staunchly anti-revolutionary attitude even leads him to radically reinterpret recent Dutch history: since the States of Holland (*Ordines Hollandiae*) have never had a king, he argues, the revolt against king Philip was not an act of sedition or revolution against a legitimate monarch, but a legitimate move to recover the States' original power (*pristinum imperium*) against the attempt by the 'last count' (*ultimus comes*, i.e., Philip) to usurp sovereignty (18.10; cf. 18.8, 20.15).

The second point concerns the general characteristics of early modern Dutch spiritual life. It may be tempting to seek the antecedents of Spinoza's use of *pietas* in the Reformation, and specifically in the Calvinism that dominated religious life in the seventeenth-century Republic; but one should not overemphasize these Calvinist influences. There are certainly affinities between some of Spinoza's views and different aspects of the reformation, witness, for example, his own (dare I say Lutheran?) method of 'Scripture alone' (*sola scriptura* I.6), i.e., of basing arguments and interpretations only on what is found in, or clearly derived from, Scripture (Preface, §10). It should be noted that this is also the argumentative style of the countless Protestant pamphlets that were published in the seventeenth-century Netherlands.[6] Against such readings, however, I would like to suggest that Spinoza's view of religion, and in particular his conception of *pietas*, is devotional and humanist rather than Calvinist. The ultimate source of this devotionalism, both in Spinoza and in the Dutch Reformation at large, is undoubtedly Thomas a Kempis (1380–1471), who had emerged out of the Brethren of the Common Life in Deventer and their the 'modern devotion' (*devotion moderna*). In fact, it is difficult to overestimate Thomas's importance for early modern Dutch spirituality at large, among both Catholics and Protestants, and even among Calvinists: thus, Jonathan Israel argues that Thomas "more than any other figure of the Dutch-Speaking lands of the Middle Ages remained an inspiration for the Dutch Reformed church of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, even among its most rigidly Calvinist spokesmen" [22] (p. 42). In the seventeenth century, this devotionalist spirituality acted as a counterweight to the strict, severe, and law-oriented Calvinism of the theologians.[7]

In fact, Thomas a Kempis's *Imitatio Christi*; is undoubtedly the historically most influential formulation of these devotional ideas: directly and indirectly, this text exerted a tremendous influence not only in the Low Countries but in Western Europe at large. Although Thomas's inward-devotional piety does not contain any criticism of either the worldly authority of rulers or the spiritual authority of the Catholic church, it does react or protest against the late-Medieval Catholic high culture of scholastic learning, and against the professionalized philosophy of the scholastic theologians. Thus, in its emphasis on everyday spirituality and devotion, on poverty and simplicity, and on obedience out of love, the *Imitatio* explicitly contrasts the virtuous life of humility and devotion (*caritas*) with the scholastic study of the Bible and its concern with abstractions like genus and species and with cleverness (*cauillacio*) in debates (I.3.3–5). The latter, Thomas argues, is a 'vain science' (*vana sciencia*): it is not in itself wrong, but it is inferior to a virtuous life, and to the 'highest study,' which is meditating on the life of Christ (*Summum igitur studium noster sit: in vita ihesu christi meditari*, I.1.3). Although meditating on Christ is obviously less central to his concerns, Spinoza, too, rejects the pursuit of wealth, and contrasts the simple teaching

[6] Unlike Spinoza, however, these pamphleteers explicitly addressed themselves to the 'simple folk (*eenvoudighe luyden*) and to the 'common man' (*den ghemeenen man*); cf. [21] (p. 305).

[7] Van Deursen notes the differences between Catholic and Calvinist piety in the Republic: the former, he writes, involved retreat, rites, and ritual objects, whereas the latter emphasized reading the Bible and obeying God's commands in everyday life [21] (p. 301).

of love (*caritas*) and justice in Scripture with scholastic attempts to turn religion into *scientia* (see esp. 13.2).

Thus, the *Imitatio* involves a devotional rather than law-oriented conception of faith much like Spinoza's. This convergence becomes even clearer in Thomas's conceptualization of obedience and submission. Throughout the *Imitatio*, the importance of obedience is emphasized, in particular the obedience to a spiritual authority (*prelatus*); but the core of this obedience is devotional love (*caritas* or *amor*), in particular for Jesus (cf. II.7). Hence, Thomas contrasts obedience out of necessity and obedience out of love; only the latter, he writes, yields inner quiet, and even freedom: only by subjecting oneself with all one's heart and for the sake of God, he writes, does one acquire liberty of mind (*Nec libertatem mentis acquirent: nisi ex toto corde propter deum se subiciant*, I.9.3-4). That is, Thomas's obedience involves not simply obeying out of necessity to a law, but obeying out of devotional love for a personalized God. Spinoza likewise emphasizes that obedience to God consists solely in justice and love, or love of one's neighbor (*obedientiam in sola Justitia et charitate sive amore erga proximum consistere*, 14.10). Thus, the *Imitatio* may be said to have provided the broadly devotional background for Spinoza's view of religion and piety.

Next, a devotional and humanist notion of *pietas* appears explicitly, and quite frequently, in Erasmus, who from 1478 to 1485 had studied in the Latin school run by the Brethren in Deventer. Although Erasmus is critical of various aspects of the modern devotion as preached by his former teachers, preferring a more worldly devotional engagement (*pietas*) to the latter's inward-looking devotion of *Innicheit*, he likewise recommends a life of humility and devotional love, free from vanity and jealousy. In his 1523 catalogue of his writings, he even lists his works promoting piety as a separate category.[8] The key term here, however, even more central than that of *pietas*, is the notion of the 'philosophy of Christ' (*philosophia Christi*), which is explicitly and systematically contrasted with the professionalized scholastic philosophy and theology. In works like the *Encheiridion* and the *Paraclesis*, not to mention the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus argues that this philosophy of Christ is simple, easy to understand, and formulated in the vernacular language; as such, it favorably contrasts with the scholastic *disputationes* and verbal quibbles in Latin of philosophers like Ockham, Duns Scotus, and St Thomas.

Finally, in the Low Countries of Spinoza's own age, there were various pietist movements, which likewise rejected (by now, predominantly Protestant) theological debate for a life of simple piety and devotion. This Protestant pietism had come to the Netherlands from England the late sixteenth century; the first to develop it for a specifically Dutch setting was the Middelburg-born Reformist pastor Willem Teellinck (1579–1629), whom the later pietist Gisbertus Voetius has called "a second, but Reformist, Thomas a Kempis."[9]

As a work of spiritual guidance for the laity, the *Imitatio Christi* enjoyed a tremendous popularity, both in handwritten and in printed forms, and both in Latin and in vernacular versions, and has rightly been called 'early modern bestseller.' In fact, its influence is so pervasive in early modern Dutch culture, and beyond, that it may be difficult to pinpoint or identify. To mention but one channel of such indirect influence: Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, is reported to have been particularly fond of the *Imitatio*; and in fact, in his *Spiritual exercises*, he explicitly recommends studying this work [25] (p. 45).[10] It is an open question to what extent the Jesuit society appropriated and institutionalized the spirituality of the *Imitatio*, for example in the *docta pietas* (learned piety) as part of its 1599 plan of studies (*ratio studiorum*)—a plan that Descartes, too, is likely to have followed in the years of his Jesuit education. It is equally uncertain whether Spinoza learned about the *Imitatio Christi*, Erasmus and Jesuit *docta pietas* through his teacher, the former Jesuit

[8] "Quintus attribuatur hiis quae instituunt ad pietatem," Letter to Johann von Botzheim, January 1523 (1341A); published separately as *Catalogus novus omnium Erasmi Roterdami lucubrationum* (1524, n.p.). In turn, Erasmus's notion of the philosophy of Christ, which identifies *pietas* and *caritas*, owes much to Stoic conceptions of *pietas* as can be found in–in particular–Cicero and Seneca [23].

[9] "Soo dat hy met recht eenen tweeden Thomas a Kempis (doch ghereformeerden) van onse eeuwe mochte ghehouden werden" [24] (p. 154). Discussion of early modern Dutch piety is oddly absent from Israel's studies on the Dutch republic and on radical Enlightenment.

[10] On the popularity of the *Imitatio Christi*, and on its profound effect on Ignatius of Loyola, see [26] (ch. 10).

Franciscus van den Enden.[11] What is certain, however, is that there were various channels through which the *askèsis* or spiritual exercise elaborated in the *Imitatio* may have reached Spinoza, whether directly or indirectly.

Thus, some form of early modern Dutch devotionalism is more than likely to have been known to Spinoza, even if there is no direct evidence of him having read Thomas a Kempis any more than of his being familiar with al-Farabî. This background in devotionalism and humanism also gives Spinoza's rejection of scholasticism a rather different flavor. Often, the reaction against scholasticism (and specifically against Aristotle's philosophy) that we find in early modern philosophers like Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza has been characterized in primarily metaphysical and epistemological terms, whether in the guise of a reaction against final causes in the realm of nature, or against abstract essences or substantial forms; this, of course, fits within the narrative of the gradual professionalization of philosophy. However, in late Medieval and early modern Northern Europe, one witnesses another and rather wider reaction against scholasticism, or more precisely against the academic theological learning shaped by Aristotelianism and the high culture of Latinity that was developed in the institutions of the Catholic church and in the universities. As has long been known, the popular devotional mysticism of authors like Jan van Ruusbroec, the 'modern devotion' of the Brethren of the Common Life in Deventer, Luther's translation of the Bible into the vernacular, and in a sense, the Reformation at large, may all be seen as more or less overt criticisms of this dominant Church culture, which was formulated in Latin rather than in a language the commoners (and especially women) could understand, and elaborated in a philosophical jargon that was increasingly exclusive to a small group of educated scholars eager to show off their cleverness in disputations.

Concerning the intellectual character of this devotion, however, Spinoza appears to mark a significant difference with respect to Thomas and Erasmus. He appears to agree with both in his claim that the only knowledge of God we need 'is knowledge of His divine justice and love, that is, those attributes of God we imitate by a sound rationale of life' (*cognitionem divinae suae justitiae et charitatis; hoc est, talia Dei attributa, quae homines certa vivendi ratione imitari possunt*, 13.8).[12] Spinoza also appears to share Erasmus's idea that the teachings of Scripture contain a simple message of devotional love. Erasmus's expression *philosophia Christi*, however, seems to suggest the opposite of what Spinoza is arguing, in so far as the latter precisely tries to *separate* faith and theology from philosophy. Unlike Spinoza, Erasmus also recommends Biblical study and the acquisition of what he calls *docta pietas* even for the uneducated masses and for women. He emphatically, indeed almost defiantly, calls the philosophy of Christ an 'illiterate philosophy' (*illiterata philosophia*) or 'vulgar' philosophy (*philosophia plebeia*), and argues that this philosophy is more effective than all the philosophical learning of sophisticated thinkers like Aristotle. Although Spinoza would agree with characterizing *pietas* in terms of a simple practical ethics rather than scholastic cleverness, he resists the suggestion that the illiterate masses should be guided by devotional love; instead, for the *vulgus*, he only preaches the strict obedience to the law—not so much the universal law of *pietas* as the laws of specific states.[13] Like Thomas and Erasmus, Spinoza sees 'philosophy' as a way of life; but unlike them, he does not write for the edification of the common man (let alone woman). Thus, the 'reader-philosopher' he addresses in the Preface (*philosophe lector*, §15) is emphatically not a commoner. Like Maimonides and al-Farabî, Spinoza maintains a strict distinction between the illiterate mass (Latin *vulgus*, Arabic '*âmma*) and educated elite (Ar. *khâssa*), adding that the masses can be no more rid of their superstitions than of their irrational fear (*ibid*.). In

[11] Nadler already notes that Spinoza may well have learned about humanists like Erasmus from his teacher, the Jesuit-educated Franciscus van den Enden, whose humanist and democratic ideas found little favor with local Calvinists; more generally, he argues that being educated at Van den Enden's school was a decisive influence on Spinoza's intellectual and personal development [19] (pp. 125–129).

[12] Unlike Thomas, Spinoza recommends we do not imitate Christ but rather the justice and devotional love of God Himself; but like Thomas, he emphasizes that the knowledge needed for leading a pious life involves devotional simplicity rather than scholastic sophistication.

[13] This reading would seem to make of Spinoza a more authoritarian and conservative, and a less liberal and democratic, thinker than is often thought. Cf. [27].

this context, his 1671 letter to Jarig Jelles warning against translating the *TTP* from Latin into Dutch, the language of the masses, gains in significance.

There is also a major political difference between Spinoza and his devotionalist predecessors. To the extent that the early vernacular devotional movements embody a protest against scholastic theology, and more generally against the Latin-based theological high culture of the late-Medieval Catholic church, this popular spirituality also had an obvious political dimension: it involved a redefinition, or renegotiation, of the relation between the church and the laity, and between the illiterate mass and the educated elite. Oddly, however, Spinoza entirely ignores this popular protest implicit (or explicit) in various forms of devotional *pietas*; instead, he emphatically argues that piety is identical to obedience and charity—albeit obedience to the laws of states and to the universal law of an abstract *religio catholica*, rather than to a church or to a prelate. Is he merely being disingenuous here, choosing to conveniently overlook the oppositional element in the various religious and devotional movements of the recent past, not least the very Reformation out of which the Dutch Republic had emerged? Or is he really a conservative, if not an outright authoritarian, thinker, who actually believes that all religious and other sedition should be avoided, and that revealed religion is a useful and legitimate tool for controlling the masses? This point has recently been argued forcefully and provocatively by Kal [27]; but whatever the answers to these questions, it is clear that Spinoza, with his strict and unbridgeable separation between philosophical elite and irrational religious mass, and with his downplaying of the potential for resistance in spirituality, marks a significant step *back* with respect to the ideals of popular education, emancipation, and protest that had emerged in the early modern period.

These considerations finally allow for a differentiated answer to the question of Spinoza's philosophical modernity. If the above argument concerning Spinoza's indirect and implicit links to Islamic–Judaic philosophy and to early modern spirituality has any validity, his modernity is rather more ambivalent than some recent readings would have us believe. His emphasis on the distinction between mass and elite, and on prophetic revelation in terms of laws, correlates with Maimonides and al-Farabî; and his suggestion that the inner meaning of the law is devotional resonates with Thomas and Erasmus. We may therefore qualify Spinoza's thought as a philosophy of *askèsis* as much as a philosophy of *mathèsis*—where *askèsis* is used not, of course, in the sense of austerity and self-renunciation, but in the ancient sense of training, practice, or exercise. It centers less around intellectual theoretical activity than around practical or spiritual exercise; it aims at making humans free not from doubt but from fear, and free in so far as they are guided by devotional love (*caritas*) and piety (*pietas*) rather than duty and obedience.

When looked at as a way of life to be achieved by spiritual exercises, Spinoza's philosophy may appear to have more in common with devotional predecessors like Thomas a Kempis and Erasmus than with philosophical successors like Kant and Hegel. It also fits in better with the 'lay Cartesianism' preached by the popularizing pamphleteers of the Dutch Republic, some of whom were personal acquaintances of Spinoza's. His strict elitism, however, is rather difficult to square with the ideals of these early modern predecessors, and in fact brings Spinoza rather closer to his Medieval sources of inspiration, Maimonides and al-Farabî.

4. Philosophy and Pietas as a Way of Life?

These considerations, finally, bring us to Pierre Hadot's influential writings on philosophy as a way of life [28,29]. Famously, starting from obvious examples like Marcus Aurelius and Seneca and generalizing to thinkers like Socrates and Plato, Hadot argues that ancient philosophy was generally not an academic discipline but a form of spiritual exercise; it aimed not at creating a technical jargon for specialists, but at an art of living for all humans. It was only in the twelfth century, Hadot continues, that the idea of philosophy as a way of life was replaced by the idea of philosophy as an academic discipline. The setting for this professionalization of philosophy, of course, was the new institution of the university,

where learned *disputatio* replaced spiritual guidance. After this development, he argues, spiritual practices became the domain of Christian religion rather than professionalized philosophy; but even in early modern philosophers like Descartes and Spinoza, one can still see traces of the ancient conception. On these grounds, Hadot also criticizes what he sees as Foucault's analysis of the rise of modern, academic, and/or scholastic philosophy. He reads the latter as arguing that, starting with Descartes, philosophy refocused from the spiritual practice of *askèsis*, or care of the self (interpreted as a transformation *of* the subject), to the theoretical questioning of the evidence given *to* the subject, which itself is presumed to be given as well. Against this view, Hadot objects that both Descartes and Spinoza 'remained faithful to the ancient definition: for them, philosophy was 'the practice of wisdom'' [29] (p. 272).[14] In his 1982 lectures on the hermeneutics of the subject, however, Foucault rather more cautiously speaks of a 'Cartesian *moment*' rather than a historical development starting with Descartes, recognizing that the *Meditations* may also qualify as a form of spiritual exercise or 'care of the self.' More pertinent to our discussion, however, Foucault actually contrasts Spinoza with this Cartesian moment, in an off-the-cuff remark that, characteristically, is as suggestive as it is terse. For Descartes, he writes, knowledge alone is the condition for the subject's access to the truth; but Spinoza's *Treatise on the Improvement of the Intellect* discusses how one has to *transform* one's being as a subject in order to have such access [31] (pp. 17; 27–28). In other words, Foucault argues that even an early modern thinker like Spinoza sees philosophy in terms of spirituality rather than epistemology, and of askèsis rather than evidence. Especially in the first nine paragraphs of the *Treatise on the Improvement of the Intellect*, he elaborates, Spinoza proceeds from the 'properly spiritual question' of how the subject should be transformed for it to have access to the truth. Put in these terms, the opposition between what one might call–in Foucault's wake–the 'Cartesian' and the 'Spinozian moment' involves not so much a temporal or chronological development as a confrontation between what one may call a philosophy of knowledge, or *mathèsis*, and a philosophy of spiritual exercise, or *askèsis*.[15]

In fact, the idea of philosophy as a way of life is even more explicit in the *Treatise on the Improvement of the Intellect* than Foucault suggests. In the very first paragraph, Spinoza openly describes his search for a new 'way of life' (*novum institutum*) that will give one a lasting and highest joy in all eternity (*continua ac summa in aeternum laetitia*, §1). Arguing that the aims we pursue in our everyday lives, like wealth, honor, and sensual pleasures, are 'vain and futile' (*vana et futilia*), Spinoza argues that the highest good we can aim for is to transform our own and others' human nature into a state of 'knowledge of the unity that the mind has with the whole of nature' (*cognitionem unionis, quam mens cum tota Natura habet*, §13). Thus, the human perfection that results from the spiritual (or, more precisely, intellectual) exercise of improving one's understanding involves not so much correct or indubitable knowledge in itself as the 'highest happiness' (*summa felicitas*) that results from this knowledge. The certainty Spinoza aims for, that is, is ethical rather than epistemological, and Stoic rather than Cartesian; most importantly, it involves the transformation of, rather than a foundation in, one's subjectivity.

Foucault's claims are based exclusively on the early *Treatise on the Improvement of the Intellect*; but they find corroboration in the *TTP*, and in the *Ethics*. In the latter, Spinoza briefly discusses the best 'way of living' or 'plan of living' (*vivendi institutum*) that agrees both with his ethical principles and with common practice (*communi praxi*); in the former, as noted above, he speaks of the imitation of God as a 'way of living' or 'rationale of life' (*ratio vivendi*). Moreover, in the *TTP*, he explicitly states that the cultivation of piety is a

[14] On philosophy as spiritual exercise in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period, see also [30] (ch. IV).

[15] In a 1979 interview published in 2018, Foucault characterizes 'spirituality' rather more explicitly in terms of resistance to particular forms of power, describing it as the desire to transform one's subjectivity, as opposed to 'religion', which imposes a subjectivity from the outside (Eric Aeschimann, 'Michel Foucault, l'Iran et le pouvoir du spirituel: l'entretien inédit de 1979' *Le nouvel observateur*, 7 February 2018; available at https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20180207.OBS1864/michel-foucault-l-iran-et-le-pouvoir-du-spirituel-l-entretien-inedit-de-1979.html (accessed on 15 February 2021)). This would put Foucault's analysis in a rather better position to account for the oppositional aspects of spirituality than Hadot's; but I leave discussion of these matters for another occasion.

precondition for access to (prophetic) truth: since the imagination does not involve clear and distinct ideas, he argues, it does not yield indubitable knowledge; instead, all prophetic certainty is founded upon the vividness of the imagining; upon a divine sign that confirms the receiver as a prophet; and, 'most importantly' (*praecipuo*), upon the fact 'that they had only . . . their minds exclusively to what is right and good' (*quod animum ad solum aequum et bonum inclinatum habebant*, 2.5). Put differently, Spinoza explicitly characterizes *pietas* as the most important precondition for prophetic certainty: 'God . . . revealed things as they were to a pious man and did not forbid him to tell the truth' (*pio . . . rem, ut erat, revelavit, et vera praedicere non prohibuit*, 2.4).

The exercise of piety, in other words, is a precondition for access to the truth. This implies that *pietas* as characterized in the *TTP* does indeed seem to amount to what Foucault means by spirituality, and to what Hadot means by spiritual exercises: it involves the attempt to change one's own subjectivity in the hope of gaining access to the truth. We are far removed indeed here from cartesian epistemological concerns with evidence and skepticism.[16]

5. Conclusions

In the *TTP* and elsewhere, Spinoza appears to proclaim a philosophy of *askèsis* rather than a philosophy of *mathèsis*. Hence, we should interpret his rejection of scholasticism not in primarily epistemological or metaphysical terms, as Descartes's rejection of Aristotelianism is usually read, but rather in terms of practical ethics. To the extent that it involves a form of spiritual exercise or amounts to a way of life, Spinoza's notion of *philosophia* not only echoes Stoics like Seneca and Cicero, but also—and at least as importantly—late Medieval and Renaissance devotionalists and humanists like Thomas a Kempis and Erasmus. Spinoza shows no trace of concern with the education of the commoners, however, but only worries about their obedience to the revealed laws. In this strict separation of philosophical elite and incurably irrational mass, he appears to be rather closer to medieval thinkers like al-Farabî and Maimonides. Although he appears to promote philosophy as a way of life rather than a professional academic activity, he strictly reserves this way for the educated few who can use and develop their intellect to liberate themselves from the fear that informs popular revealed religion. Moreover, in emphasizing that *pietas* involves not only devotional love but also strict obedience to the law, Spinoza entirely glosses over the late Medieval and early modern forms of spiritual protest that would culminate in the Reformation and the Dutch revolt.

In conclusion, it may be noted that a closer reading of the *TTP* also reveals a number of points where Hadot's claims about philosophy as the practice of wisdom should be modified, or at least deserve further critical scrutiny. First, Spinoza openly, though not entirely consistently, discusses the political dimension of this philosophical way of life—a dimension almost completely overlooked by Hadot. Second, Spinoza's strict distinction between rationally thinking and therefore free elites and irredeemably fearful and irrational, and therefore unfree, masses may resonate with premodern philosophers like al-Farabî and Maimonides; but it clashes with the ideas of early modern authors like Erasmus and Thomas a Kempis. This opens up the social (or political) question of exactly what is the appropriate audience for philosophical writing, or target for spiritual guidance. On both accounts, there appears to be room for a further exploration of the politics of Spinoza's *pietas*—and of the political aspects of spiritual exercises and philosophy as a way of life more generally.

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[16] Intriguingly, the late Medieval pious movements, and figures like Thomas a Kempis and Erasmus are largely absent from Foucault's published analyses of Medieval spirituality, which he mostly characterizes in rather generic terms as a 'religious crisis' or a 'crisis in government.'

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Spinoza: A Baconian in the TTP, but Not in the Ethics?

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Abstract: This paper resolves some puzzles regarding Spinoza's appropriations and rejections of various aspects of Bacon's methodology, and uses these solutions to resolve some long-standing puzzles concerning Spinoza's modus operandi in the TTP. We argue first that, appearances to contrary, Spinoza takes a consistent line in his assessment of Bacon's epistemic approach. We argue that Spinoza follows Bacon in grounding his overall epistemic method in a "historiola mentis" (a brief account or history of the mind), and that differences between Spinoza's and Bacon's respective historiola mentis can explain Spinoza's embrace of this inductive method for his interpretation of Scripture in the TTP, as well as his general abandonment of Bacon's inductive method in the metaphysical investigation of the Ethics. In short, we argue that the "historiola mentis" constructed by Bacon depicts the intellect as an error-prone faculty that needs be continuously restrained by observation and experimentation—a depiction which motivates Bacon's reformed inductive empiricism. Spinoza accepts this depiction in regard to a subset of the mind's ideas—the ideas of the imagination, and hence sees the inductive method as suitable for interpreting Scripture. But contra Bacon, Spinoza's "historiola mentis" also shows that the human mind includes a subset of ideas that yield true, certain knowledge of things "infinite" and sub specie aeternitatis. Spinoza finds these "intellectual" ideas to be quite useful for systematic metaphysics, but of limited use for interpreting historical texts like Scripture.

Keywords: Spinoza; Bacon; historiola mentis; biblical hermeneutics; metaphysics

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1. Two Letters, Two Puzzles

Spinoza's correspondence can leave one puzzled about Spinoza's opinion of Baconian epistemology. In August 1661, Henry Oldenburg asked Spinoza to

> . . . please be good enough to enlighten me on . . . what defects you find in the philosophy of Descartes and Bacon, and how you consider that these can be removed and replaced by sounder views. [1] (pp. 761–762)

In his reply Spinoza asserts that Bacon (along with Descartes) makes three mistakes:

> The first and most important error is this, that they have gone far astray from knowledge of the first cause and origin of all things. Secondly, they have failed to understand the true nature of the human mind. Thirdly, they have never grasped the true cause of error. Only those who are completely destitute of all learning and scholarship can fail to see the critical importance of true knowledge of these three points . . . [1] (p. 762)

In regard to the third mistake, Spinoza adds the following—dismissive—gloss on Bacon:

> Of Bacon I shall say little; he speaks very confusedly on this subject [human error], and simply makes assertions while proving hardly anything. In the first place he takes for granted that the human intellect, besides the fallibility of the senses, is by its very nature liable to error, and fashions everything after the analogy of its own nature, and not after the analogy of the universe, so that it is like a

> mirror presenting an irregular surface to the rays it receives, mingling its own nature with the nature of reality, and so forth. Secondly, he holds that the human intellect by reason of its peculiar nature, is prone to abstractions, and imagines as stable things that are in flux, and so on. Thirdly, he holds that the human intellect is in constant activity, and cannot come to a halt or rest. Whatever other causes he assigns can all be readily reduced to the one Cartesian principle, that the human will is free and more extensive than the intellect, or, as Verulam more confusedly puts it, the intellect is not characterized as a dry light, but receives infusion from the will. [1] (pp. 762–763)

Given Spinoza's charge that Bacon has (1) "gone far astray from knowledge of the first cause and origin of all things," (2) "failed to understand the true nature of the human mind," and (3) "never grasped the true cause of human error", along with Spinoza's note regarding "the critical importance of true knowledge" of these three points, it seems as if Spinoza has little appreciation for Bacon's philosophical method.

Yet, in his June 1666 letter to Johan Bouwmeester (Ep. 37), Spinoza appears to take a different line. Bouwmeester had questioned Spinoza as to

> whether there is, or can be a method such that thereby we can make sure and unwearied progress in the study of things of the highest importance; or whether our thoughts are governed more by fortune than by skill. [1] (p. 861)[1]

Spinoza begins his answer by claiming he can show that there must be some such method. He argues that he can demonstrate that our thoughts are not directed merely by "fortune," a term that he equates here with "chance", i.e., "causes which, although acting likewise by definite and fixed laws, are yet unknown to us and foreign to our nature and power," by simply noting that (1) "one clear and distinct perception, or several taken together can be absolutely the cause of another clear and distinct perception." And (2) "that all the clear and distinct perceptions that we form can arise only from other clear and distinct perceptions which are in us, and they acknowledge no other cause outside us" [1] (p. 861). From these two premises, Spinoza claims,

> it follows that the clear and distinct perceptions that we form depend only on our nature and its definite and fixed laws, that is, on our power itself alone, and not on chance . . . As for the other perceptions, I do admit that they depend in the highest degree on chance. [1] (p. 861)

It is here, after drawing the contrast between the autonomy of the ideation of clear and distinct ideas and the dependency of our other ideas upon "chance" encounters with unknown "foreign" causes that Spinoza invokes "the manner" of Bacon:

> From this it is quite clear what a true method must be and in which it should especially consist, namely, solely in the knowledge of pure intellect and its nature and laws. To acquire this, we must first of all distinguish between intellect and imagination, that is, between true ideas and the others-fictitious, false, doubtful, and, in sum, all ideas, which depend only on memory. To understand these things, at least as far as the method requires, *there is no need to get to know the nature of mind through its first cause; it is enough to formulate a brief account of the mind* [historiola mentis] *or its perceptions in the manner expounded by Verulam.* [1] (p. 861)

Here, Spinoza takes the Baconian method very seriously. He asserts that to "make sure and unwearied progress in the study of things of the highest importance", we must first grasp the distinction between our true ideas and our fictitious ideas. And to do this, Spinoza claims that we do not need deep metaphysical insight into the origins of the mind, but rather we simply need to formulate a brief account of the mind in the Baconian manner.

[1] This is Spinoza's summary of Bouwmeester's question.

So there is something of a puzzle: How does Spinoza's ringing endorsement of Bacon's epistemic approach in Ep. 37 square with Spinoza's apparent dismissal of Bacon's epistemology in Ep. 2?

It squares rather nicely. In Ep. 2., Spinoza claims that Bacon's (and Descartes) first two errors can "readily be gathered from the truth" of the following three propositions:

First, that in Nature, there cannot exist two substances without their differing entirely in essence; second, that a substance cannot be produced, but that it is of its essence to exist; third, every substance must be infinite, or supremely perfect in its kind [1] (p. 762). Spinoza also claims that these three propositions reveal "the direction of [his own] thought"[2] [1] (p. 762). They certainly do. These propositions are the fifth, sixth and eighth propositions of the *Ethics* Part I, and it is from these propositions that Spinoza derives the fundamental claims of his philosophical system. In referencing these propositions, Spinoza makes it clear that in accusing Bacon of straying "from the knowledge of the first cause . . . of all things," and failing "to understand the true nature of the human mind" he is charging Bacon with a failure to understand the most fundamental metaphysical principles of Spinoza's thought: namely, that all of Nature is a single entity and that all things, including the human mind, must be understood through this entity.

However, Spinoza explains the third mistake of Bacon (and of Descartes) quite differently. Here, Spinoza claims Bacon and Descartes misunderstood the cause of error because they accepted the "one Cartesian principle, that the human will is free and more extensive than the intellect." Unlike their other errors—which are shown false on account of Spinoza's own metaphysical discoveries—Spinoza claims that Bacon and Descartes should have seen this mistake of theirs, "for themselves"

> [T]hey [Descartes and Bacon] would easily have seen this [the falsity of the Cartesian principle] for themselves, had they but given consideration to the fact the will differs from this or that volition in the same way as whiteness differs from this or that white object, or as humanity differs from this or that human. So to conceive the will to be the cause of this or that volition is as impossible as to conceive humanity to be the cause of Peter and Paul. [1] (p. 763)

By emphasizing that Bacon and Descartes, "would easily have seen the falsity of this principle for themselves," Spinoza indicates that the methodologies of Bacon and Descartes are sufficient to uncover this particular error. It is an error that can be grasped without an acceptance of Spinoza's metaphysics: one must simply be able to take notice of the fact that our idea of the will is a confused abstraction of particular volitions[3] [2,3].

There are indications in the *Ethics* that Spinoza believes a bit of careful Cartesian introspection is sufficient to reveal this error[4] [4]. More important for our purposes here, a quick look at Bacon's *Novum Organon* can show why Spinoza would reasonably believe that Bacon's own method should have revealed to Bacon the confused abstract nature of our idea of a free will as well. Consider the sixtieth aphorism of the *Novum Organon*:

> The idols that words impose on the intellect are of two kinds. There are either names of things which do not exist . . . or they are names of things which exist, but yet confused and ill-defined, and hastily and irregularly derived from realities . . . But the other class, which springs out of a faulty and unskillful abstraction, is intricate and deeply rooted. Let us take for example such a word as *humid* and see how far the several things which the word is used to signify agree with each

[2] In reference to these three propositions, Spinoza claims "With these points established, esteemed Sir, provided that the same timeyou attend to the definition of God, you will readily perceive the direction of my thoughts, so that I need not be more explicit onthis subject" [1] (p. 762)

[3] Both Bacon (NO I, XLIX) [2] (pp. 57–58) and Descartes (Fourth Mediation) (pp. 37–43) believe the will is to blame for our errors. Spinoza explicitly confronts this explanation for error because he thinks this sort of account misrepresents the nature of ideation and the mind's relationship with nature.

[4] See E2P35s: "Men are deceived in that they think themselves free an opinion which consists only in this, they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined . . . They say, of course, that human actions depend on the will, but these are only words for which they have no idea" (p. 473). See also the Preface to E5, where Spinoza criticizes Descartes for violating his commitment to "affirm nothing which he did not perceive clearly and distinctly" in his account of the will's interaction with the body (p. 596).

> other, and we shall find the word *humid* to be nothing else than a mark loosely and confusedly applied to denote a variety of actions which will not bear to be reduced to any constant meaning. [2] (pp. 61–62)

Given the obvious parallels between this aphorism's analysis of the term "humid," and Spinoza's analysis of the ideas of "whiteness" and "will" in Ep. 2., it is no stretch for Spinoza to assert that if Bacon had organized his own ideas of his own particular volitions—as Bacon's method demands[5]—and categorized them before endorsing the usefulness of a general term like "the will," Bacon would have realized that "the will" refers to a poorly defined mental construct, which cannot explain particular instances of error. Indeed, as Spinoza argues in the demonstration of E2P49, an examination of our particular volitions reveals that none of our volitions can be conceived independently of its object, and so a general term like "the will" is "nothing but a metaphysical being, *or* universal, which we are used to forming from particulars." Hence, just as Bacon was able to recognize that a term like "humid" was an "idol" of the mind, because it can only be loosely and confusedly "applied to denote variety of actions Bacon should have seen for himself that "the will", as Spinoza puts it, "is to this or that volition as "stone-ness" is to this or that stone, or man to Peter or Paul" [4] (p. 483).

So although in Ep. 2, Spinoza is dismissive of Bacon's *substantive* understanding of metaphysics and the nature of mind, Spinoza does not deny anywhere in this letter that there is epistemic utility in proceeding in the Baconian manner and formulating "a brief account of the mind or its perceptions." Indeed, in claiming that Bacon could have seen his error for himself, Spinoza acknowledges that Bacon's natural historical method can yield significant insight[6] [5]. Spinoza's endorsement of this Baconian method then, sets the stage for a second interpretive puzzle: What sort of insight does Spinoza believe Bacon's natural historical method of carefully organizing particular perceptions into general headings can yield?

This puzzle turns out to be quite a bit more important and difficult than our first. In the TTP, Spinoza endorses a method for understanding Scripture that is often noted as having Baconian undertones:

> I say that the method of interpreting Scripture does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely. For the method of interpreting nature consists above all in putting together a history of nature, from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things. In the same way, to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture and to infer from it the mind of Scripture's authors, by legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles. [6] (p. 171)

Spinoza's language here (*historia naturae, historia Scripturae*) makes clear allusion to Baconian thought[7] [7–12]. As we argue below, in the TTP, Spinoza makes careful use of Bacon's method of interpreting nature as a method for interpreting Scripture. But it cannot be said that in doing this, Spinoza simply *follows* Bacon. For one, Bacon argues that his method of interpreting nature should *not* be employed in the study of Scripture! And

[5] We will say much more of Bacon's method in Section 2.

[6] Aaron Garrett discusses the apparently contradictory assessments of these letters as well. Garrett, however, resolves the apparent contradiction by asserting that in Ep. 37, Spinoza claims that, "in its broad lines Bacon's account of the human mind, and method is compatible with his own," while in Ep. 2, Spinoza was not rejecting "this or that thing that Bacon said," but was "instead . . . claiming that Bacon had no understanding of the way in which the human mind was related to first principles and thus fell into errors such as arguing for the existence of a faculty of will distinct from intellect" [5] (pp. 78–79). In contrast, we have argued here that the apparent contradiction between the letters is resolved by distinguishing Bacon's method of beginning inquiry with a brief examination of the mind's perceptions—a method Spinoza endorses, and the claims about the mind that Bacon reaches through his method—claims that Spinoza rejects.

[7] That this is Baconian has been noted by Zac (pp. 29–36), Donagan [8] (pp. 16–17), Preuss [9] (pp. 161–167), Rosenthal [10] (pp. 113–115), Fraenkel [11] (p. 46). Bacon, it is well known, developed the most elaborate and influential theory of natural history. He discusses natural history in his *Advancement of Learning*, *Novum Organum*, *Historia naturalis et experimentalis*, *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, *Descriptio globi intellectualis* and *Phaenomena universi*. He also presented various examples of natural histories, including, for instance, *Historia vitae et mortis* and *Sylva sylvarum*. For an excellent discussion of the scope of Baconian natural history, its novelty, and its distinctiveness in relation to traditional Renaissance natural history, see Anstey [12].

second, despite Spinoza's assertion in the TTP that the method of interpreting scripture is the same as the method for interpreting nature, in Spinoza's own investigation into the most general features of Nature, Spinoza does not follow this method! In Part One of the *Ethics* at least, Spinoza's account of God or Nature does not involve any construction of a *history of nature*, nor indeed any inductive inferences at all. So why does Spinoza believe that Bacon's inductive method is suitable for grounding an interpretation of Scripture in the TTP, but unsuitable for the metaphysical account God or Nature presented in the *Ethics*?

Our central question then, concerning the sort of insight that Spinoza believes the Baconian method can yield, is a significant one. Spinoza sees Bacon's natural historical method of carefully organizing particular perceptions (or certain data) into general headings as sufficient for securing "a method such that thereby we can make sure and unwearied progress in the study of things of the highest importance," and sufficient for interpreting the meaning of Scripture. Yet, in his development of the foundational metaphysics of "*God or Nature*" within his *Ethics*, Spinoza employs the geometric method in place of a Baconian one.

2. How Exactly Is Spinoza a Baconian in the TTP?

2.1. Spinoza on Biblical Hermeneutics

According to Bacon, the interpretation of nature is composed of two principal phases: first, it ascends gradually from experience systematically arranged and tabulated to general axioms; secondly, it descends from these axioms to less general particulars. The *Novum Organum*, a work Spinoza knew well[8], formulates this general scheme as follows: "the true method" commences "with experience duly ordered and digested, not bungling or erratic, and from it educing axioms, and from established axioms again new experiments" [2] (p. 81)[9] [13]. Spinoza follows this Baconian modus operandi in his approach to the interpretation of Scripture: "the first thing to be sought from the history of Scripture is what is most universal" and "once we rightly know this universal teaching of Scripture, we must next proceed to other, less universal things" [6] (p. 176).

Now, it might be thought that there is an obvious difference between the method of the TTP and the *Novum Organon*. Spinoza appears to be pushing us immediately towards the derivation of what is most universal, whereas Bacon emphasizes the need to make gradual *intermediate* inductions [2] (p. 97). There is however, no such disagreement. In the TTP, "what is most universal" in Scripture is not to be derived from universal axioms brought to bear upon one's interpretation of Scripture, rather, "what is most universal" are general principles of Scripture discovered from the history of Scripture itself, which are then to be used to make sense of more particular things. In this, Spinoza is in complete agreement with Bacon. As *Novum Organon* states " . . . [T]he larger and more universal agreements of things are not wholly obscure. And so we must begin from them" [14] (p. 216).

A deeper look into the method of Bacon and the interpretive method of the TTP reveals more substantial structural similarities. Consider Bacon's expansive formulation of the scheme of the *Novum Organum*:

> My directions for the interpretation of nature embrace two generic divisions; the one how to educe and form axioms from experience, the other how to deduce and arrive new experiments from axioms. The former again is divided into three ministrations; a ministration to the sense, a ministration to the memory, and a ministration to the mind or reason. [2] (p. 127)

[8] In a letter to Oldenburg [1] (pp. 762–763), Spinoza cites various passages from the *Novum Organum*, indicating his familiarity with the work. Spinoza, as we know, not only had access to *Novum Organum*, his library contained a copy of *Sermones Fideles, Ethici, Politici, œconomici: Sive Interiora Rerum. Accedit Faber Fortunae &c.*, a 1641 Latin Edition of Bacon's *Essays* (1625). This edition included material from Book VIII of *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623). Although we lack explicit evidence to confirm his familiarity with *De Augmentis* as a whole, it would be unlikely for Spinoza not to have consulted the rest of Bacon's magnum opus.

[9] In *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Bacon writes: "all true and fruitful Natural Philosophy has a double scale or ladder, ascendant and descendent, ascending from experiments to axioms, and descending from axioms to the investigation of new experiments" [13] (p. 343).

According to Bacon, the educement and formation of axioms proceeds through three progressive stages. First, there is a ministration of the sense, i.e., a preparation of a "natural and experimental history" which serves to lay the foundation of the entire enterprise. The interpreter collects into a "history" all known instances of the nature that is to be investigated. Second, there is a ministration to the memory, i.e., a construction of 'Tables and Arrangements of Instances,' which organizes and supplements the collected data into clear easy to grasp arrangement. Third, there is a ministration to the mind, i.e., the application of "true and legitimate induction, which is the very key of interpretation" [2] (p. 127). Here, the interpreter eliminates extraneous and dubious material from the history and corrects for contradictory or irreproducible experiences found within the tables and rejects testimony and observations that do not correctly exemplify or indicate the essence of the object of study.

Spinoza's guidelines in the TTP for the construction and the use of a history of Scripture show a remarkable resemblance to this Baconian procedure. First, the interpreter of Scripture is to collect all the data available that will enable her to construct, as far as possible, a history of Scripture. She is to gather all the sayings of each book, taking into account the nature and properties of the original language, as well as the specific historical circumstances of each book[10]. This careful gathering of "scriptural data" corresponds to Bacon's first step of carefully collecting experiences for further organization and tabulation. It is Spinoza's version of Bacon's *ministration of the sense*.

Second, the exegete must "organize (the sayings) under main headings so that we can readily find all those concerning the same subject" [2] (p. 173). She is to construct a subject index that will facilitate the act of interpreting. The exegete gathers all the sayings from the prophet or topic under exploration, and categorizes them by the content they are concerned with. This categorization step corresponds with Bacon's second methodological step. It is Spinoza's version of *a ministration to the memory*.

Third, the exegete is to compose a list of seemingly inconsistent utterances of one and the same prophet and subsequently determine—as far as possible—the prophet's true opinion regarding the matter at hand" [2] (p. 173). This is Spinoza's version of Bacon's *ministration to the mind*. The exegete is to attend primarily to the literal meaning of utterances. But problems arise when there is an obvious conflict between multiple utterances taken by their literal meaning. As Spinoza notes, although Moses said that 'God is a fire', he also clearly taught that, "God has no likeness to any visible things in the heavens, on the earth, or in the sea" [2] (p. 174).

As well noted, according to Spinoza the only way to resolve this tension is to interpret one of the contrary statements metaphorically. However, a metaphorical reading is only allowed when there are linguistic reasons internal to the text that permit a deviation of the literal meaning [2] (p. 174). And here, the already constructed table of utterances comes in handy. Because the term *fire* is also taken for anger and jealousy in *Job* 31:12, and since Moses on several occasions teaches that God is jealous, and nowhere claims that God lacks passions, the text itself allows us to interpret 'God is fire' as 'God is jealous' [2] (pp. 174–175). In situations where linguistic usage within the text does not illuminate the meaning of problematic sayings, the interpreter suspends judgment and accepts the inexplicability of the utterances under scrutiny. At this stage, obscure utterances are set aside and the interpreter remains with 'interpretable' passages.

For both Bacon and Spinoza then, the natural historical method—the careful gathering of a large body of data, the organization of this data into a clear and assessable fashion,

[10] Spinoza's history of a Scripture takes into account (i) the nature and properties of the language in which it was written [6] (p. 173), as well as (ii) the specific historical circumstances of each book, i.e., the life, character and concerns of its author, its intended audience). This, Spinoza emphasizes, includes (iii) the reception of the work and the way it came to be accepted in the canon [2] (p. 175).

and the parsing out of the dubious and incomprehensible bits of data[11] [15–18]—serves to keep the conclusions of the would be interpreter carefully constrained by the object of interpretation, and not left to the biases and opinions of the interpreter. As Bacon puts it, to correctly interpret nature, "we do not need to give men's understanding wings, but rather lead and weights, to check every leap and flight" [14] (p. 83). And as Spinoza puts it, we must not "twist the meaning of Scripture according to the dictates of our own reason and according to our own preconceived opinions. The whole knowledge of the Bible, must come from the Bible alone" [6] (p. 175).

Put into the context of a Baconian *history*, Spinoza's reliance on the Protestant hermeneutical principles *sola scriptura* ('Scripture alone') and *scriptura sui ipsius interpres* ('Scripture interprets itself')[12] [18] generates rather unorthodox conclusions about the intelligibility of various parts of the text. Spinoza notes that the occasions where one can actually rely on other passages to illuminate obscure utterances and teachings are limited[13] [19,20]. Our incomplete knowledge of Scripture's original language and the circumstances regarding the authorship and reception of the books prevent us in most cases from grasping the true meaning of an obscure passage. That being said, Spinoza holds that there is no problem whatsoever in determining the universal teaching of Scripture for according to Spinoza the whole of Scripture all tends towards the same teaching: "that a unique and omnipotent God exists, who alone is to be worshipped, who cares for all, and who loves above all those who worship him and who love their neighbor as themselves, etc." The Bible "teaches these and similar things everywhere, so clearly and so explicitly that there has never been anyone who disputed the meaning of Scripture concerning these things" [6] (p. 176).

For Spinoza, our ability to assess the teachings of Scripture as either clear or obscure ultimately depends on our ability to construct objective histories of certain parts of the text. There are, strictly speaking, no inherently obscure parts in Scripture. The fact that there are many things in Scripture that our reason cannot speak to, or to use Spinoza's words, that exceed "the limits of our intellect" (*limites nostri intellectus excedunt*) [6] (p. 78) is due only to the limited context in which we interpret[14] [21]. Spinoza's message is clear: "the difficulties of interpreting Scripture have not arisen from a defect in the powers of the natural light, but only from the negligence (not to say wickedness) of the men who were indifferent to the history of Scripture while they could still construct it" [6] (p. 186; see also p. 186 and p. 192).

This latter position of Spinoza is in radical opposition to a fundamental principle of reformed theology, namely, that human beings can only fully access the spiritual truths of Scripture through divine illumination, and not through mere rational contemplation. Calvin, for instance, states, "we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit" [22] (p. 78). Although reformers like Luther and Calvin did not fully reject reason in matters of exegesis, they maintained that only the internal witness of the Holy Spirit can provide the infallible certainty that Scripture is the Word of God [23] (p. 98). Indeed, Spinoza's denial of a more perfect conviction than that offered by the natural light, shows a deep

[11] We should keep in mind that what counts as a Baconian natural history is not entirely clear. *Sylva Sylvarum* and the *History of Winds*, for instance, have significant differences in composition and in goals. Based on this fact alone, plus the many divergent comments Bacon makes about natural history, what a Baconian natural history looks like remains controversial. Moreover, scholarship has shown that the method of the *Interpretation of Nature*—which involves induction—and the method of natural history are different (e.g., Jardine [15]). Indeed, natural histories—collections of facts about particular natural objects, species, or qualities—precede Baconian induction: the former merely provide 'the primary material of philosophy and the stuff and subject matter of true induction' [16] (p. 254); see e.g. also Anstey [17]. We argue that what Spinoza took Baconian natural history to be all about is precisely the process of gathering amounts of observational data, the careful organization of this data, and the elimination of dubious and incomprehensible bits of data. This conforms both to Spinoza's construction of a history of Scripture in the TTP, and to his appropriation of a Baconian 'history of the mind' (*historiola mentis*) in the TIE and elsewhere.

[12] Luther famously defended the self-interpreting nature of Scripture. See, e.g., Mostert [18].

[13] For a discussion of Spinoza's TTP within the particular context of Dutch Calvinist Orthodoxy, see James [19] (pp. 37–43, 139–160) and Grafton [20].

[14] Harris formulates this as follows: "*Rebus nostri intellectus excedentibus*, concerning which we must consult the Scriptures, are such things as we cannot deduce from first principles because they are either historical or such as lie beyond the scientific and empirical evidence at our disposal" [21] (p. 137).

philosophical break with much of 17th-century theology[15] [24,25] (as well as some notable contemporary theology)[16] [26]. It also shows a significant break with the thought of Bacon. According to Bacon, the core articles of faith are unamenable to reason, so we can only "derive and deduce inferences from them according to their analogy" [27] (p. 114). Bacon's view is that theologians should be aware not to attach the same authority to inferences as to the first principles of Scripture revealed by God himself. To illuminate this, Bacon makes a comparison between the study of religion and the study of nature. In natural philosophy, we formulate first principles through the process of induction. The validity of these principles does not rest on authority, it is reason—applied to experience—that makes them indisputable. Moreover, since these first principles have no discordance with reason, we can rationally deduce middle propositions from these first principles that will have the same level of epistemological certainty. But according to Bacon, this is not the case in religion. Throughout *De Augmentis*, Bacon affirms the divine origin and transcendent nature of Scripture's core teachings and this has implications regarding the role of reason.

> Those who enter into the ship of the church "shall step out of the bark of human reason." The stars of philosophy no "longer supply their light." [27] (p. 111)
>
> Sacred theology "ought to be derived from the word and oracles of God, and not from the light of nature, or the dictates of reason" [27] (p. 112)
>
> In religion then, the absolute certainty of first principles is not a matter of applied reasoning, but a matter of divine authority alone. Consequently, the rules of induction do not apply. The various doctrines and tenets formulated on the basis of these indisputable *mysteries and first principles* are merely probable and always open for disputation [27] (p. 115)[17]. [28,29]

In the TTP, Spinoza also famously claims that religion is a matter of obedience and not a matter of philosophical understanding [6] (p. 268). Yet, unlike Bacon, Spinoza's distinction between religion and philosophy is not rooted in the belief that human understanding is incapable of grasping the highest of theological/metaphysical truths. Spinoza has full confidence that no supernatural light is needed to grasp the highest insights of theology [6] (p. 186). For Spinoza then, understanding Scripture is no different than understanding any other product of God's power.

We shall argue below that Spinoza's insistence that there is no higher certainty than that afforded by the natural light is rooted in a *historiala mentis* that Spinoza himself constructs in the manner of Bacon. That is, we claim that at the end of Spinoza's *TIE*, Spinoza enumerates the various activities of the mind, and, that by examining the differences between this *historia mentis* and the account of the mind that Bacon presents in the *Novum Organon*, we can explain why Spinoza, in contrast to Bacon, concludes there is a sub-section of our mind (the intellect) that is capable of constructing, with perfect certainty, a set of the-

[15] Many 17th-century conservative theologians defended the idea that the Holy Spirit has to illumine before one can have true understanding of the Scriptural content. For example, in his *Disputatio Theologica de judice et norma fidei* (June 1668), Dutch theologian Gysbertus Voetius argued that "the Holy Spirit is the highest, absolute, infallible judge and interpreter of Scripture." Similar to Luther and Calvin, Voetius never fully excluded reason from matters of biblical exegesis. However, its role was merely instrumental; in the end, the Holy Spirit is needed to access the true meaning of Scripture [24] (pp. 49–52). The notion of supernatural illumination also circulated among the Dutch Cartesians. Johannes de Raey, the unofficial leader of the group, defended the idea that certain people have a privileged access to the Scriptural content because of a supernatural light. In his *Clavis*, he writes that: "God has wished some to have knowledge concerning himself, or his will and counsel, or his works revealed in Scripture, by a special and private grace, and has thus illuminated their minds. And because philosophers have no greater capacity to partake of this illumination than any ordinary person, anybody possessing such knowledge must be said to have drawn it not from human faculties, and not thereby from philosophy, but only to have accepted it from divine grace" [25] (p. 117).

[16] See, for example, Plantinga, for whom the interpretation of biblical text through the activity of the Spirit in the individual remains authoritative. He, e.g., notes that "the fact that it is God who is the principal author here makes it quite possible that we are to learn from the text in question is something rather different from what the human author proposed to teach" [26] (p. 385).

[17] Although Bacon affirms the power of the natural light in assisting with *some* matters of divinity—"that God exists, that he governs the world, that he is supremely powerful, that he is wise and prescient, that he is good, the he is a rewarder, that he is an avenger, that he is an object of adoration—all this may be demonstrated by his works alone" [13] (p. 341)—*the contemplation of nature cannot according to Bacon tell us anything about God's inmost nature.* Those who seek a fuller knowledge of the deity, must resort to Scripture, since it is there rather than in nature that God reveals his will. For Bacon, only revealed theology can provide positive knowledge of God and serve as the foundation of faith [27] (p. 111); see also Gascoigne [28] (p. 216) and Milner [29] (p. 259).

ological/metaphysical deductions[18]. We argue that the results of Spinoza's *historiola mentis* explains Spinoza's use of the geometric method in the *Ethics*, and his use of Bacon's inductive method in the TTp. Before doing so, though, we wish to draw out some additional, important, implications of Spinoza's Baconian approach to the reading of Scripture.

2.2. The TTP on Supernatural Illumination and Miracles

Although commentators have rightly noted that Spinoza construes his exegetical method in analogy with Bacon's 'natural history', the full extent of Bacon's role has not yet been determined. This section shows that Spinoza's application of the Baconian *ars historica* to Scripture also provides the framework from which to approach some of the most puzzling questions that arise in the context of Spinoza's views on the interpretation of Scripture. Specifically, we argue that both Spinoza's radical rejection in the TTP of all appeals to supernatural inspiration, and his notorious revision of biblical miracles—as having natural rather than supernatural causal explanations—are best understood in light of Bacon's discussion of ancient historical texts and the difficulties related to their transmission and interpretation. That is, Spinoza motivates his rejection of both principles in light of the biased and corrupted transmission and reception of biblical texts. Both principles are presented as theological fabrications falsely introduced throughout the ages; the product of "negligence not to say wickedness of those men who were indifferent to the History of Scripture" [6] (p. 186). We argue that Spinoza, by doing so, reformulates a worry already advanced by Bacon in *De Augmentis*—namely, that our reading and understanding of historical documents is often biased as a consequence of the operation of historical forces on their preservation and diffusion[19] [30].

In the TTP, Spinoza casts theology's traditional understanding of (1) supernatural illumination—as a necessary requisite for a true understanding of Scripture—and (2) miracles—as interruptions or contraventions of the order of nature—into the ash heap of intellectual rubbish that has permitted the misconstruing of Scripture's core moral message. Our understanding of the Bible, Spinoza tells us, does not rely on any supernatural light: "the standard of interpretation must be nothing but the natural light common to all" [6] (p. 191). The text, when properly interpreted, ascribes natural causes even to those events it presents as miracles: "nowhere does [Scripture] teach that anything happens in nature which is contrary to its laws, or which cannot follow from them. So these things ought not to be fictitiously ascribed to Scripture" [6] (p. 168).

A number of commentators have remarked that Spinoza's modus operandi introduces a significant tension in the TTP (e.g., Zac [7] (p. 206); Preuss [9] (pp. 197–201)). Criteria of rationality, in clear breach with Spinoza's own prescriptions for interpreting the Bible, seem to dictate his rejection of these doctrines. Put differently, Spinoza's allegiance to naturalism appears to contaminate his reading of Scripture. *Pace* such readings, we argue that Spinoza's dismissal of (1) and (2) follows logically from his treatment of the Bible as a product of civil history, i.e., a work of human industry fully subject to historical manipulation and corruption. Spinoza does not violate his own critique of rationalist or 'dogmatic' theories of biblical hermeneutics according to which biblical writings are interpreted so as to make them consistent with reason. Rather, he spells out the consequences of a historical approach to Scripture, the primary intention of which is to discover the 'mind of Scripture's authors'

[18] It is worth noting that by "intellect," Spinoza does not mean to pick out a faculty of the mind. Rather, he is picking out the productive ideation of the clear and distinct ideas that comprise a portion of the bundle of ideas that make up a human mind.

[19] Bacon, admittedly, would not be the first to alert the reader to the insidious role played by language, representation and the transmission of knowledge. Tacitus and Lipsius, two authors greatly admired by Verulam himself, already put forward a view of human history dominated by imagined and fabricated accounts of reality, exposing 'feigned history' and make-believe representations as ubiquitous devices for the maintenance of power (see especially Giglioni [30]). Spinoza, who in all likelihood was familiar with their work, could have drawn from a wider tradition. However, Spinoza had good reasons for calling attention to Bacon's particular treatment of these matters. Key here is Bacon's hesitancy, throughout his writings, to unconditionally apply his reflections regarding the 'critical and pedagogical' complexities related to the transmission of knowledge to the Bible. Bacon, at least openly, never extended its application to Scripture. His writings, however, simultaneously express a critical awareness of what such an application would entail for an adequate understanding of church history. Bacon's program as such provided Spinoza with an ideal starting point for a reading of Scripture *fully* grounded in natural-historical reasoning.

(*mentes authorum scripturae*). This latter category, however, must be broadly interpreted: scribal errors and intentional changes during the history of textual transmission are taken into account. In short: by integrating Scripture within the canon of civil history—extending Bacon's reflections regarding the biased transmission of knowledge to the Bible itself—Spinoza is capable of providing a theological rationale for the rejection of (1) and (2); a rejection fully grounded in a hermeneutics that admits "no other principles or data for interpreting Scripture and discussing it than those drawn from Scripture itself and its history" [6] (p. 171).

Spinoza's reliance on a 'Baconian' approach to the study of Scripture ultimately reveals a discontentment with Verulam's own treatment of the Bible. According to *De Augmentis*, the Bible should never be treated like just any other historical document; a natural-historical inquiry cannot be performed in light of the divine origin and transcendent nature of Scripture's core principles. For Bacon, reason, in matters of interpretation, can only take us so far; it is crucial that the reader of Scripture depend on 'divine illumination' and 'inspiration' to acquire a true understanding of the text. So, Spinoza's application of Bacon's method for interpreting nature to Scripture is really quite remarkable. Spinoza applies the Baconian natural historical method to a field of enquiry from which Bacon explicitly excludes it[20] [31].

It should be noted that for Bacon, a crucial source of material for the improvement of both morality, i.e., the 'Philosophy of Humanity' which considers man 'segregate', and policy, i.e., 'Civil Philosophy' which considers man 'congregate and in society', is civil history (see e.g., Wormald [32] (p. 77); Manzo [33] (pp. 37). Although civil history does not offer a strict metaphysical account of the affects and the processes involved, the knowledge contained in it still provides a vivid and captivating observation to the state of the human condition. Bacon writes that "men taste well knowledges that are drenched in flesh and blood, civil history, morality, policy, about which men's affections, praises, fortunes do turn and are conversant" [34] (p. 383). Specifically, for Bacon, civil history harbors an inexhaustible wealth of information regarding the "characters, affections, and perturbations" of the human mind. He singles out a wiser sort of historians, poets, and prophets as supreme doctors of this knowledge; they captivate the intricate workings of the mind and reveal the way in which passionate processes manifests themselves through space and time. In sum, for Bacon, an acquaintance with civil history is particularly useful since it reveals—in an especially captivating manner—the persistency and diversity of human passionate behavior.

In all this, Spinoza concurs with Bacon [35]. What makes Spinoza different from Bacon, however, is that he unequivocally includes the Bible itself within the canon of civil history. He writes:

> reading them [viz. the historical narratives of Scripture] is very useful in relation to civil life. For the more we have observed and the better we know the customs and characters of men—which can best be known from their actions—the more cautiously we will be able to live among them and the better we will be able to accommodate our actions and lives to their mentality. [6] (p. 130)

Spinoza thus explicitly attributes to Scripture the same value commonly assigned by Bacon to civil history. The Bible, like any other instance of civil history, is an excellent source of behavioral knowledge. It too offers a detailed description of men's characters, deeds, vices, and intentions as revealed by their interaction with specific personalities and

[20] However, a careful and critical reading of *De Augmentis* simultaneously reveals Bacon's willingness to increasingly apply secular reasoning to matters of the Church. Moreover, if we also take into account Bacon's activities in the *Essays*, the *New Atlantis*, *Sylva Sylvarum*, and the *Novum Organum*, we see that Verulam came remarkably close to formulating a naturalized account of various aspects of the religious phenomena. Bacon not only suggests naturalistic explanations of miracles, he goes so far as to reduce religious idolatry and superstition to the mere workings of the imagination. So while Bacon himself never performed a fully fleshed-out natural history of religion, his writings mark an important, even groundbreaking point of departure for further inquiry. However, this detailed discussion lies beyond the scope of this present chapter. For a detailed account, see Van Cauter [31] (pp. 74–90).

events, descriptions that allow the reader to infer from the reported facts their own moral and political observations.

Spinoza's rejection of all appeals to a supernatural light in matters of exegesis follows directly from his treatment of the Bible as a product of civil history. Spinoza emphasizes that in order to arrive at a sufficient understanding of Scripture—a human artefact produced through a complex history of writing, editing, and canonization—interpreters need to recognize and take into account the process of transmission and editing of the text, as well as the intentions and biases of the authors involved. The outcome of this approach is revealing: Spinoza rejects theology's reliance on inspiration as a necessary requisite for a true understanding of Scripture as mere opportunities for priestcraft; the product of "negligence not to say wickedness of those men who were indifferent to the history of Scripture" [6] (p. 186).

Spinoza, we can surmise, would arguably not include Bacon within the category of theologians responsible for this detrimental state of affairs. The point, however, remains: by integrating Scripture within the canon of civil history—identifying it as a product of human industry subject to historical manipulation and corruption—Spinoza presents a reading of Scripture capable of dismissing all appeals to supernatural illumination.

Spinoza's integration of Scripture within the canon of civil history also entails significant consequences for our understanding of miracles as related in Scripture. By a similar line of reasoning it is shown that the common understanding of miracles—as interruptions or contraventions of the order of nature—too finds little biblical support. Spinoza claims that "nowhere does [Scripture] teach that anything happens in nature which is contrary to its laws, or which cannot follow from them. So these things ought not to be fictitiously ascribed to Scripture" [6] (p. 168). The TTP does not stop here. Spinoza adds that "if anything should be found [in Scripture] which can be conclusively demonstrated to be contrary to the laws of nature, or to have been unable to follow from them, we must believe without reservation that it has been added to the Sacred Texts by sacrilegious men" [6] (p. 163). This, as Nadler rightly points out, is remarkable:

> Given everything Spinoza has said about the authors of Scripture—who, to repeat, were not learned philosophers, much less Spinozists—why should we believe that they *could not* teach a superstitious account of miracles, that any such message would have to have been inserted by an impious and sacrilegious forger? [36] (p. 638)

Confronted with this interpretive puzzle, Nadler introduces a helpful distinction between (1) the phenomenon as experienced by the biblical author, (2) the interpretation of this phenomenon by the author, and (3) the true cause of the phenomenon. When Spinoza writes that nothing can be found in Scripture "which can be conclusively demonstrated to be contrary to the laws of nature" [6] (p. 163), this should not imply that we will never find interpretations in the Bible that attribute to events supernatural causes. Rather, what Spinoza has in mind is that these interpretations "are always a function of the beliefs and preconceptions of the author" [36] (p. 640). Indeed, many of the biblical authors undoubtedly were convinced of the supernatural character of events. What Spinoza's assertion does imply, Nadler continues, is that "in Scripture we will never find the narration of something occurring in an individual's experience for which there is not, in fact, a natural explanation" [36] (p. 641). According to Nadler, this interpretation, however, does not solve all difficulties. He concludes by remarking that it is still a 'mystery' why Spinoza believes "that as a matter of fact Scripture itself—or, rather, its prophetic authors—when properly interpreted does in fact ascribe natural causes to all events, even those it presents as miracles" [36] (p. 642).

Spinoza's remarkable claim becomes less enigmatic when explained in reference to his treatment of the Bible as a product of civil history. Spinoza spells out the consequences of a historical approach to Scripture whose primary intention is to discover the 'mind of

Scripture's authors' (*mentem authorum scripturae*)[21]. This latter category must be broadly interpreted: scribal errors and intentional changes during the history of textual transmission are taken into account. Consider the following statement:

> So partly because of religion and partly because of preconceived opinions they conceived and recounted the affair far differently than it really could have happened. Therefore, to interpret the miracles in Scripture and to understand from the narrations of them how they really happened, we need to know the opinions of those who first narrated them, and those who left them to us in writing, and to distinguish those opinions from what the senses could have represented to them. Otherwise we'll confuse their opinions and judgments with the miracle itself, as it really happened. [6] (p. 165)

Spinoza tells us that some of the authors attributed supernatural causes to natural events because of ignorance[22], while others retained supernatural language only to instill devotion in their audience. This latter point should not surprise us: "the purpose of Scripture is not to teach things through their natural causes, but only to relate those things which fill the imagination, and to do this by that Method and style which serves best to increase wonder at things." [6] (p. 162). For Spinoza, the issue is rather that the long interpretive process in the transmission of biblical texts no longer allows us to properly differentiate between the opinions of the 'original' authors—viz. the subjective experience of the prophets, apostles and other protagonists—and the opinions of those involved in the complex process of transmission. Spinoza writes:

> It is quite rare for men to relate a thing simply, just as it happened, without mixing any of their own Judgment into the narration. Indeed, when they see or hear something new, unless they take great precautions against their preconceived opinions, they will, for the most part, be so preoccupied with them that they will perceive something completely different from what they see or hear has happened, particularly if the thing which has been done surpasses the grasp of the narrator or the audience, and especially if it makes a difference to his affairs that the thing should happen in a certain way. That's why in their Chronicles and histories men relate their own opinions more than the events they're reporting, and why two men who have different opinions relate one and the same event so differently that they seem to be speaking about two events, and finally, why it is often not very difficult to find out the opinions of the Chronicler and historian just from their histories. If I did not think it would be superfluous, I could cite many examples to confirm this, both from Philosophers who have written the history of nature, and from Chroniclers. [6] (p. 164)

In our study of the Bible, all interpretative difficulties commonly associated with the study of historical texts must be taken into account. That is, difficulties which relate to words, discourse, and the transmission of knowledge apply as much to the Bible as to any other chronicle or historical document. Spinoza's point is ingenious: the awareness that our knowledge of historical texts is always shaped by the transmissive means through which it is developed, organized, and passed on is a Baconian theme par excellence, as will be shown next.

Chapter IV of Book VI of *De Augmentis* deals specifically with the 'critical and pedagogical' complexities related to the transmission of knowledge and the reading of books. Bacon warns his readers that "the most corrected copies are often the least correct". We

[21] Recall TTP 7.7–8: "to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture and to infer from it the mind of Scripture's authors, by legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles. For in this way everyone—provided he has admitted no other principles or data for interpreting Scripture and discussing it than those drawn from Scripture itself and its history—everyone will always proceed without danger of error. He will be able to discuss the things which surpass our grasp as safely as those we know by the natural light." [6] (p. 171).

[22] See TTP 6.56: "It's important to know their opinions not only for these purposes, but also so that we do not confuse the things which really happened with imaginary things, which were only Prophetic representations. For many things are related in Scripture as real, and were even believed to be real, which were, nevertheless, only representations and imaginary things." [6] (p. 165).

read and study books through the lenses of teachers and traditions, yet the work of editors, annotators, commentators, and interpreters often results in a corruption of the original message: "the rash diligence of some has done no little harm" [13] (p. 491). While it would lead us astray to fully confront Bacon's reflections dealing with the transmission of knowledge, one consideration deserves particular attention. Confronted with the fact that most editors and annotators of texts conflate their own opinions with those of the original authors, Bacon makes the following suggestion: "it were especially to be desired . . . that every writer who handles arguments of the obscurer and more important kind, should himself subjoin his own explanations; that so the text may not be interrupted by digressions and expositions, and the notes be not at variance with the writers' meaning [13] (p. 494).

In sum, in the TTP, Spinoza reformulates the very same worry advanced by Bacon in *De Augmentis*: our reading and understanding of historical documents are often biased as a consequence of the operation of historical forces on their preservation and diffusion. Bacon, as we should expect by now, is careful enough not to include the Bible into his considerations: he illustrates his points using a passage from Tacitus' *Historiae*. Spinoza, by contrast, unambiguously applies the same line of thought to Scripture. For him, the Bible forms an integral part of the canon of civil history; the same methodological considerations apply.

Commentators have remarked that the above mentioned passages—those where Spinoza argues that biblical narrations of supernatural events, when properly interpreted, in fact always presuppose natural causes—present troubling questions regarding Spinoza's views in the TTP on the interpretation of Scripture. The goal of Spinoza's method of exegesis was to avoid twisting "the meaning of Scripture according to the dictates of our own reason and according to our own preconceived opinions" [6] (p. 175). Spinoza's own metaphysics—viz. the idea that it is impossible for anything to happen that is contrary to or above Nature—nonetheless seems to influence his reading of the lessons of Scripture. This might indeed be the case. However, commentators tend to ignore Spinoza's own awareness of the tensions involved. Spinoza, nearing the end of Chapter 6, adds specifically that his discussion of miracles proceeded "according to a method completely different" from the one followed elsewhere in the TTP [6] (p. 167). The majority of Spinoza's discussion of miracles in Chapter 6 centers around a purely philosophical argument in favor of the overall conclusion that all events related in Scripture, including miracles, must have happened according to the common order of nature. Spinoza, however, is fully aware that his modus operandi conflicts with his own prescriptions for interpreting the Bible: when he notes "I've elicited the main points only from principles known to the natural light. I did this deliberately" [6] (p. 167). To silence his critics, he goes on to show that his conclusion can equally be upheld using a methodological procedure that admits no other principles or data for interpreting Scripture than those drawn from Scripture itself and its history. In sum, Spinoza in Chapter 6 of the TTP shows that his conclusion can be defended using two very different methodological procedures: either through the construction of a history of miracles—an approach that emphasizes the various complexities related to the transmission of knowledge—or through the use of philosophical arguments.

Regardless of whether one finds Spinoza's response satisfactory, his procedure is both witty and well conceived. Let us briefly consider Spinoza's proposed philosophical argument. In a nutshell: Spinoza argues that miracles do not provide insight into "God's essence, nor his existence, nor his providence, but that on the contrary these things are better perceived from the fixed and immutable order of nature". Miracles do not show us the existence of God, to the contrary, "they would make us doubt his existence" [6] (p. 156). Belief in miracles, Spinoza continues, "would make us doubt everything and would lead to Atheism" [6] (p. 159). Spinoza's philosophical claim is a clear reformulation of an argument advanced by Bacon throughout his various writings. Consider the following well-known passage from 'Of Atheism':

> God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it. It is true that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about the religion. For while the

> mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further, but when it beholded the chain of them, confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity. [37] (p. 371)

A similar line of thought is found in *Novum Organum*:

> But if we take the matter rightly, natural philosophy after the Word of God is the best medicine for superstition and most highly recommended food for faith. And so to religion natural philosophy is rightly given as her most faithful servant, the former manifesting God's Will, the latter His power. [2] (p. 89)

Spinoza, of course, would not hesitate to critique or reformulate Bacon's argument in light of his own metaphysical views. Bacon's distinction between the will of God and God's power, he tells us, is fundamentally flawed[23]. What matters here is that Spinoza's discussion of miracles in chapter 6 is framed within a clear Baconian framework. Spinoza first reformulates a Baconian, or at least Baconian-inspired, philosophical argument in favor of his own views on miracles. He then goes on to show that the very same conclusion can also be obtained through historical reasoning alone, viz. through the construction of a 'Baconian' history of miracles that fully takes into account the process of transmission and editing of the text, as well as the intentions and biases of the authors involved.

We have described Spinoza's application of the Baconian method to Scripture as being somewhat Anti-Baconian because it violates Bacon's expressed prohibition against doing so. We shall now explain how Spinoza's radical application of Bacon's method actually has Baconian roots. We argue below that the inductive historical method that Spinoza employs in the TTP and the geometric that Spinoza employs in the *Ethics*, are rooted in a *historiola mentis* that Spinoza constructs in the "manner expounded by Verulam" [1] (p. 861).

3. Contrasting Spinoza and Bacon's Historiola Mentis

Recall that in his correspondence with Oldenburg, Spinoza accuses Bacon of completely misunderstanding the nature of the human mind. He said of Bacon that:

> ... he takes for granted that the human intellect, besides the fallibility of the senses, is by its very nature liable to error, and fashions everything after the analogy of its own nature, and not after the analogy of the universe, so that it is like a mirror presenting an irregular surface to the rays it receives, mingling its own nature with the nature of reality, and so forth. Secondly, he holds that the human intellect by reason of its peculiar nature, is prone to abstractions, and imagines as stable things that are in flux, and so on. Thirdly, he holds that the human intellect is in constant activity, and cannot come to a halt or rest. [1] (pp. 762–763)

Also recall that according to Spinoza's letter to Bouwmeester that:

> To acquire this [a true method for sure and unwearied progress in the study of things of the highest importance], we must first of all distinguish between intellect and imagination, that is, between true ideas and the others-fictitious, false, doubtful, and, in sum, all ideas, which depend only on memory. To understand these things, at least as far as the method requires, *there is no need to get to know the nature of mind through its first cause; it is enough to formulate a brief account of the mind* [historiola mentis] *or its perceptions in the manner expounded by Verulam*. [1] (p. 861)

Because Spinoza insists in his letter to Bouwmeester that philosophical progress does not require a metaphysical account of the mind's unity with nature, but rather only "a

[23] See TTP 6.23: "we have a far better right to call those works we clearly and distinctly understand works of God, and to refer them to God's will, than we do those we are completely ignorant of, though the latter occupy our imagination powerfully and carry men away with wonder. For only the works of nature which we understand clearly and distinctly make our knowledge of God more elevated and indicate God's will and decrees as clearly as possible. So those who have recourse to the will of God when they have no knowledge of a thing are just trifling. It's a ridiculous way of confessing their ignorance." [6] (p. 157).

brief account of the mind or its perceptions, *in the manner expounded by Verulam*" (emphasis ours), it is worth noting that Spinoza provides a *historiola mentis* of the Mind's Perceptions in the *TIE*, where he introduces the four kinds of knowledge, and where he enumerates the properties of the intellect. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza presents a very similar account of the kinds of knowledge *after* already having already explained the various perceptions of the mind through his geometric method[24]. There, in the *Ethics*, he connects his account of the three kinds of knowledge with his previous metaphysical deductions. He writes: "*From what has been said above*, it is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions" [4] (p. 477). And thereby places his claims about our perceptions within the context of his metaphysical account of the human mind. In the *Treatise on the Emmendation of the Intellect*, however, no such metaphysical explanation is given[25] [38]. Instead, Spinoza simply asserts:

> I come now to what must be done first, before all else: emending the intellect and rendering it capable of understanding things in the way the attainment of our end requires. To do this, the order we naturally have requires me to survey here all the modes of perceiving which I have had up to now for affirming or denying something without doubt, so that I may choose the best of all, and at the same time begin to know my powers and the nature that I desire to perfect. [38] (p. 12)

He then goes on to give a brief account of the four kinds of perceptions, which, as other commentators have noted, mirrors passages found in Bacon's *Novum Organum*[26] [39].

What we wish to focus upon here is the end of Spinoza's *Treatise of the Emendation of the Intellect.* There he claims:

> if we attend to the properties of the intellect that we understand clearly and distinctly, its definition will become known through itself. We shall, therefore, enumerate the properties of the intellect here, and consider them, and begin to deal with our innate tools. [38] (p. 43)

He then goes on to offer a *historiola mentis* or more precisely a *historiola intellectus*, an enumerated list of, the properties and powers of the intellect. And this is striking. Spinoza noted in his criticism of Bacon, that Bacon, (unlike Descartes and Spinoza himself) "often takes intellect for mind" [1] (p. 762). It is noteworthy then that throughout the *TIE*, Spinoza takes great pains to distinguish the ideas and perceptions of the intellect from the other imaginative ideas and perceptions of the mind. Indeed, a consideration of the following three comparisons between Bacon and Spinoza's observations regarding the mind/intellect shows, their disagreement over the introspectively *observable* properties of the intellect is substantial, and explains why Spinoza believes Bacon, "speaks very confusedly on this subject" [1] (p. 762)[27]. It also explains why Spinoza thinks the geometric method is appropriate to his metaphysics of nature, while a Baconian history would be appropriate for interpreting things within the common order of nature, including written Scripture.

3.1. Comparison A

Bacon's survey of the mind indicates to him that all our ideas or perceptions come from without.

> Man is Nature's agent and interpreter; he does and understands only as much as he has observed of the order of nature in fact or by inference; he does not know and cannot do more. [14] (p. 33)

[24] E2P40s2 [4] (pp. 477–478) comes after Spinoza's metaphysical explanation of the mind, its perceptions, common notions, adequacy and error.

[25] In the TIE, Spinoza emphasizes that his account there does not depend on a metaphysical thesis regarding the nature and origin of the mind: "But if you wish, take imagination any way you like here, provided it is something different than the intellect, . . . for it is all the same, however you take it, after we know it is something random, by which the soul is acted on . . . for as I said, it does not matter what I take it to be, after I know that it is something random, etc." [38] (p. 37).

[26] As Edwin Curley notes [38] (p. 12), the similarities between Spinoza with Bacon here is discussed by Joachim [39] (pp. 24–33).

[27] It should be noted that the construction of a *historiol mentis hinges upon introspective obvservtions.* Indeed, it is from their introspective observations that Spinoza and Bacon categorize the various ideas we possess, and weed out and reject the confused ones (i.e., 'idols' or inadequate ideas).

However, Spinoza notices that some of his ideas are not formed through "random experience" but through intellection itself:

> That it [the intellect] perceives certain things, or forms certain ideas, absolutely, and forms certain ideas from others. For it forms the idea of quantity absolutely, without attending to other thoughts, but forms the ideas of motion only by attending to the idea of quantity. [38] (p. 43)

3.2. Comparison B

Bacon's survey of the mind's tools indicates to him that neither the intellect nor our sense perception is capable of grasping the richness of Nature:

> The subtlety of nature far surpasses the subtlety of sense and intellect, so that men's fine meditations, speculations and endless discussions are quite insane, except that there is no one who notices. [14] (p. 34)

However, Spinoza notices that his intellect's "innate tools" involve a certainty that they express the world as it is in itself:

> That it [the intellect] involves certainty, i.e., that the intellect knows that things are formally as they are contained objectively in itself. [38] (p. 43)

3.3. Comparison C

Bacon's survey of the mind reveals to him that all paths to knowledge must begin with sense and particulars:

> There are, and can be, only two ways to investigate and discover truth. The one leaps from sense and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles and their settled truth, determines and discovers intermediate axioms; this is the current way. The other elicits axioms from sense and particulars, rising in a gradual and unbroken ascent to arrive at last at the most general axioms; this is the true way, but it has not been tried. [14] (p. 36)

However, Spinoza claims from his survey that we seem to possess a set of certainly true ideas that seem to follow from our nature alone:

> The clear and distinct ideas that we form seem to follow so from the necessity of our nature alone that they seem to depend absolutely on our power alone. But with confused ideas it is quite the contrary—they are often formed against our will. [38] (p. 44)

In short, Bacon's *historiola mentis* reveals the mind/intellect to be an error-prone faculty that needs be continuously restrained by observation and experimentation:

> In a sober, grave and patient character the intellect left to itself . . . makes some attempt . . . but with little success; since without guidance and assistance it is a thing inadequate and altogether incompetent to overcome the obscurity of things. [14] (p. 37)

> There remains one hope of salvation, one way to good health: that the entire work of the mind be started over again; and from the very start the mind should not be left to itself, but be constantly controlled; and the business done (if I may put it this way) *by machines.* [14] (p. 28)

However, Spinoza's *historiola mentis* treats the intellect itself as a "spiritual automaton" [38] (p. 37) that gives us true, certain knowledge of things "infinite" and *sub specie aeternitatis*[28]:

[28] In describing the intellect as a "spiritual automaton," Spinoza indicates that attempts to restrain the will from affirming this or that idea is not a concern proper to epistemological method, and indicates, why unlike Bacon, Spinoza thinks clear and distinct intellections requires no external restrains.

> Those [ideas] that it [the intellect] forms absolutely express infinity. [38] (p. 43)[29]
>
> It [the intellect] perceives things not so much under duration as under a certain species of eternity, and in an infinite number—or rather, to perceive things, it attends neither to number nor to duration; but when it imagines things, it perceives them under a certain number, determinate duration and quantity. [38] (p. 44)

According to *the historiola mentis* constructed by Spinoza, (and presented in the manner of Bacon), the intellect can give perfect knowledge of the general universal structures of God or Nature. The intellect offers a path to the knowledge of things via intellectual ideas that are perfect and absolute, and which a yield perception of things from *sub specie aeternitatis.*

And so, whereas Bacon holds that all paths to knowledge must begin with "sense and particulars", Spinoza holds there are *two* grounds for knowledge—one of sense and particulars, and one of universal intellectual axioms. Spinoza explains these two grounds in the TTP:

> If anyone, in arguing for or against a proposition which is not self-evident, seeks to persuade others to accept his view, he proves his point from premises that are granted, and he must convince his audience on empirical grounds or by force of reason; that is, *either from what sense-perception tells them occurs in Nature, or through self-evident intellectual axioms*. Now unless experience is such as to be clearly and distinctly understood, it cannot have so decisive an effect on a man's understanding and dispel the mists of doubt as when the desired conclusion is deduced solely from intellectual axioms, that is, from the mere force of the intellect and its orderly apprehensions. This is especially so if the point at issue is a spiritual matter and does not come within the scope of senses. [6] (pp. 147–148)

With all this in mind, it is not too difficult to see why Spinoza employs the geometric method in the *Ethics.* There, Spinoza is involved in a discussion of spiritual matters which lie beyond the scope of the senses, and whose ultimate basis is a set of self-evident intellectual ideas and axioms[30]. It is also no longer too difficult to see why Spinoza *does not* employ the geometric method in the TTP as he investigates Scripture. As he points out in this work:

> Scripture most often treats things which cannot be deduced from principles known to the natural light. For historical narratives and revelations make up the greatest part of it . . . Moreover, the revelations were accommodated to the opinions of the Prophets; they really surpass man's power of understanding. So the knowledge of all these things, i.e., of almost everything in Scripture, must be sought only from Scripture itself, just as the knowledge of nature must be sought from nature itself. [6] (p. 171)

Thus, divinely inspired or not, our only tool for interpreting written scripture is the same tool we use for interpreting aspects of nature that are not directly intelligible via the natural light. This tool, is the same, familiar, Baconian method that Spinoza used to distinguish the natural light from the imagination; namely, the careful organization of particular perceptions (or certain data) so that it can examined by reason and from which general principles can be drawn.

Now, in the *Ethics*, of course, Spinoza shows why the imagination, on its own, is an uncertain guide to the truth of things.

> So long as the human mind perceives things from the common order of nature, it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies." [4] (p. 471)

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains why we form inadequate ideas:

[29] It should be noted that in the *Ethics* (see E2P34), Spinoza asserts that "absolute" ideas are adequate, perfect, and true.

[30] This is not to say the *Ethics* does not depend in part on non-intellectual ideas or perceptions. It is only to say that it depends upon, and is driven by intellectual ideas and deductions.

> I. from singular things which have been represented to us through the senses in a way that is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect (see P29C); for that reason I have been accustomed to call such perceptions knowledge from random experience.
>
> II. from signs, e.g., from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, which are like them, and through which we imagined the things (P18S). These two ways of regarding things I shall henceforth call knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination. [4] (pp. 477–478)

And, in the *Ethics*, Spinoza explains why these sorts of perceptions, and the abstractions derived from them are causes of falsity [4] (pp. 175–477). But one does not need to look at the metaphysics of the *Ethics* to see why Spinoza thinks a perfect understanding of Scripture cannot be achieved via universal intellectual axioms alone. In the TIE, Spinoza asserts from his *historila mentis* that:

> Words are a part of the imagination, i.e., since we feign many concepts, in accordance with the random composition of words in the memory from the disposition of the body, it is not to be doubted that words, as much as the imagination, can be the cause of many and great errors unless we are very wary of them.
>
> Moreover, they are established according to the pleasure and power of understanding ordinary people, so that they are only signs of things as they are in the imagination and not as they in the intellect. [38] (p. 38)

It is clear then that the intellect alone is incapable of deducing the meaning of words, or deducing the opinions, and imaginations of unknown authors. And, as Spinoza emphasizes in the TTP, an investigation into written Scripture is an investigation into the history, language, symbols, and imagination of unknown people:

> [T]he historical narratives give a prominent place to . . . unusual events in nature, accommodated to the opinions and judgments of the historians who wrote them. [6] (p. 171)
>
> It is not through the natural light alone that we come to know of these historical events, or become capable of drawing conclusions about their narrators. Such knowledge depends upon data that is not derived from the intellect alone, but from particular experiences: "it is only by chance that the comparison of utterances can throw light on an utterance". [6] (p. 182)

In the TIE, Spinoza speaks about the usefulness of *random experience* in attaining pragmatic knowledge of the natural world:

> I shall illustrate all of these with examples. I know only from report my date of birth, and who my parents were, and similar things, which I have never doubted. By *random* experience I know that I shall die, for I affirm this because I have seen others like me die, even though they had not all lived the same length of time and did not all die of the same illness. Again, I also know by random experience that oil is capable of feeding fire, and that water is capable of putting it out. I know also that the dog is a barking animal, and man a rational one. *And in this way [the first kind of knowing] I know almost all the things that are useful in life*. [38] (pp. 13–14)

It is in this light that we can understand Spinoza's famous *method of interpreting nature* passage in the TTP:

> I say that the method of interpreting Scripture does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely. For the method of interpreting nature consists above all in putting together a history of nature, from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things. In the same

> way, to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture and to infer from it the mind of Scripture's authors, by legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles. [6] (p. 171)

We have then a resolution of our puzzles. Spinoza embraces the Baconian natural historical method as a method purifying and ordering one's perceptions. Unlike Bacon, Spinoza believes a *historiola mentis* reveals the intellect to be spiritual automaton that grasps universal truths of God/Nature *sub speciea aeternatis*. Hence, Spinoza concludes the geometric method is the appropriate method for metaphysics, and that the natural light of reason is sufficient for enlightenment. Yet, to interpret the common order nature—the relations of determinate bodies, images, etc.—Spinoza holds that the natural historical method is the appropriate method to use, and remains the best means available for interpreting historical documents like Scripture.

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Article

Spinoza and the Possibility of a Philosophical Religion

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Abstract: What is a philosophical religion? Carlos Fraenkel proposes that we use this term to describe "the interpretation of the historical forms of a religion in philosophical terms". Such a philosophical interpretation allows religious traditions to be utilized in service of a political-pedagogical program, the goal of which is orienting society towards the highest good: human excellence. Here, I outline the idea of a philosophical religion as it can be found in the Arabic tradition of rationalist Aristotelianism and scrutinize Spinoza's ambiguous response to this idea. Despite his programmatic separation of theology and philosophy, I argue, Spinoza, at least in some crucial passages, shows himself to be engaged in the project of retrieving the truths of philosophy through the interpretation of Scripture. Thus, there are two contradictory strains at work in Spinoza's philosophy of religion: he systematically denies that Scripture is the locus of truth, yet he articulates parts of his philosophical anthropology and rational theology by means of Scriptural exegesis. Both of these strains, however, depend on the claim that the final arbiter of truth about the divine and the one true act of worship of God is metaphysics.

Keywords: Spinoza; *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*; Maimonides; Leo Strauss; philosophy of religion

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1. Introduction

Spinoza's attitude to the mass of outward customs and inward sentiments that we conventionally group under the word religion is laden with puzzles. Accused of atheism, Spinoza argues not only that God exists, but also that, necessarily, God is fundamentally *all* there is. A scathing critic of the idea that prophecy is a source of truth, he holds up the prophets' writings as an authoritative guide to right conduct. Militantly anti-clerical, he insists on the necessity of institutionalized religion. Defender of the freedom to philosophize, he calls on the state to propagate among its citizenry certain crucial beliefs concerning God and to defend them from naysayers—beliefs which his own writings contradict. This brief list presents us with a Spinoza who is deeply invested in religion and who at the same time is its fiercest critic.

One convenient way of dealing with puzzles is, of course, to ignore them. A certain strand of historiography that has grown around Spinoza in recent decades—taking him as the enlightened forerunner of our supposed secular, tolerant, democratic order—does just that. Whatever prominence this liberal hagiographic image of Spinoza may have in the popular imagination, it is not one that can stand up to scrutiny [1].

A potentially more rewarding way of approaching the puzzles with which Spinoza's handling of religion confronts us is to read them against the background of the philosophers whose thought he receives, criticizes, and transforms. Here, it has long been recognized that the project of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* cannot be understood without some grasp of the intricate way in which metaphysics, politics, and religion are interrelated in the rationalist Aristotelian thinkers of the medieval Islamic world and the Jewish philosophers who follow their lead. While Spinoza's treatise is passionately concerned with the political and religious situation of the Dutch Republic and addresses itself to an audience that is largely Christian, if not necessarily in any particularly orthodox way, it is decisively

[1] The foremost example of this Whiggish tendency remains Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* [1].

shaped by its engagement with a position Spinoza describes as that of "the Dogmatists" (*TTP* Chapter 15 | III 180).[2] The primary representative of these Dogmatists to Spinoza is Maimonides.

One thing that makes the Dogmatic tradition salient for understanding the nature of Spinoza's project is that it draws on an idea of the nature of religion that is common currency in the medieval Islamic world—although it is by no means the only idea available, nor uncontested. This idea of religion is, as the Arabic *dīn* and Hebrew *dat* loosely suggest, that of Divine Law—that is, as a comprehensive social and political order that regulates the life of the community of believers and, in doing so, orients it towards God. Leo Strauss succinctly draws a contrast with Christianity in the following terms: "For the Christian, the sacred doctrine is revealed theology; for the Jew and the Muslim, the sacred doctrine is, at least primarily, the legal interpretation of the Divine Law (*talmud* or *fiqh*)" [4]. One may well object that Strauss's brevity risks bluntly homogenizing the diversity of religious thought and practice within the Medieval Islamic world.[3] For all that, the idea that sacred doctrine is to be thought of as Divine Law was certainly one intellectual resource available to thinkers in the Aristotelian tradition from Farabi to Maimonides. What is more, they took up this resource philosophically in such a way that allowed them to conceptualize the religious sphere as falling under the art of politics. Much of the thrust of Spinoza's own theological-political program first becomes clear when seen in light of this idea.

As the quarrel that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* picks with Maimonides makes clear, however, engagement with a position is by no means agreement with it. If an understanding of the Dogmatic tradition is to be of help in pinning down Spinoza's seemingly ambiguous stance on religion, his relation to this tradition—whether one of adoption, rejection, or some more complex negotiation—will have to become clearer. This in turn requires an idea of what form the Dogmatic tradition's own commitment to religion takes.

In what follows, I will proceed in the following way. First, I will take a closer look at the rationalist Aristotelians of the Arabic tradition to highlight some of the features most relevant to the understanding of Spinoza ("The Dogmatic Position"). In doing so, I will critically engage with Carlos Fraenkel's recent rich and enlightening suggestion for framing this tradition—the concept of a *philosophical religion* [6]. By this, Fraenkel understands the interpretation of the historical forms of a religion in philosophical terms. Such an interpretation provides those who do not have access to the truths of metaphysics with an imaginative substitute that allows them to nevertheless partake, to the best of their abilities, in a life guided by reason.

Turning next to Spinoza ("Spinoza's Ambiguous Response to Dogmatism"), I show that such a concept of a philosophical religion is present, if not uncontested, in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. This is a surprising fact, because Spinoza argues for a strong separation between philosophy and theology—the former a rational science that has access to truth, the latter a set of teachings that, based on the imagination, is indifferent to truth and strives only to produce the love of one's neighbor. Despite this disjunction, Spinoza, in ways closely akin to Maimonides, finds at least some of the rational truths of philosophy contained in Scripture. This becomes particularly clear in Spinoza's reading of the account of the Fall and his understanding of the Divine Name. An unresolved tension thus remains at the heart of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: on the one hand, Spinoza is invested in the basic presuppositions and goals of the project of a philosophical religion. His critique of religion, on the other hand, threatens to destroy the basis of such a project by denying that Scripture has any grounding in truth.

[2] In Chapter 15 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Spinoza contrasts the *dogmatici*, who wrong-headedly turn theology into the handmaiden of philosophy, with the *sceptici*, who fall into the opposite error [2]. All English translations in this piece are from Curley's edition. [3] Many scholars have pointed out that beyond those who Spinoza names as representatives of these two camps (Maimonides and Alpakhar), his real targets may be closer at hand: his friend Lodewijk Meijer's *Philosophia Sanctae Scripturae Interpres* on the one hand and the doctrinaire *predikanten* of the Calvinist church on the other hand. Here, I am less interested in the intended reference than in the systematic position articulated.

[3] For a particularly withering critique of the scholarly tendency to reduce the totality of historical manifestations of Islam to the idea of Law, see Chapter 2 of Shahab Ahmed's *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* [5].

Following this ("The Possibility of a Philosophical Religion"), I will briefly argue that the project of a philosophical religion, such as that in which Spinoza remains ambiguously engaged, can only be pursued if the fundamental notions upon which it rests—that human reason is such that it can know God and that the perfection that such knowledge represents is our highest calling—can be defended. This requires the validity of Spinoza's proofs for the existence of God.

2. The Dogmatic Position

According to a core doctrine of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, philosophy and theology each have their own domain, and neither is to transgress their mutual border. One aim of the work is thus to neatly and clearly separate philosophy, which concerns itself with the production of knowledge through the rational exercise of the intellect, and theology, which through imagination teaches practical obedience to God.

> "We have established, unshakably, that theology is not bound to be the handmaid of reason, nor reason the handmaid of theology, but that each rules its own domain. As we have said: reason's domain is truth and wisdom [*regnum veritatis et sapientiae*]; theology's is piety and obedience [*pietatis et obedientiae*]" (*TTP*. Chapter 15 | III, p. 184)

Dogmatists such as Maimonides, who contravene this rule by making Scripture subservient to philosophy, hold that the true meaning of any of its passages not only has to *accord with* reason, or not contradict it, but also has to be such that it can be *established independently* by reason. Reason has its own unshakable demonstrative clarity, whereas Scripture is often obscure. Dogmatists therefore hold that to understand what Scripture says about any particular matter, one needs to know beforehand what the truth—that is, the demonstrative truth as taught by philosophy—is when it comes to that matter. Whether, for example, God has a body or not, or whether the world is created or rather eternal, are questions that only philosophy can decide. If one comes to Scripture armed with such knowledge, the correct interpretation can reveal that Scripture teaches nothing other than this truth. No doubt, the literal sense of a Biblical passage may well resist this endeavor to read rational truth into it. The dogmatic reader, Spinoza therefore underlines, finds himself in the position where he must "twist and smooth out [*torquere et explicare*]" (*TTP* Chapter 7 | III, p. 114) Scripture until it yields the requisite sense. Yet, the Biblical authors are rarely described by Scripture itself as men of deep rational insight. Why would anyone wish to attribute philosophical knowledge to them?

To see where this methodical assumption that Spinoza lambasts as "harmful, useless, and absurd [*noxiam, inutilum et absurdum*]" (*TTP* Chapter 7 | III, p. 116) comes from, a closer look at the rationalist Aristotelian tradition is required. The following programmatic statement from Maimonides' contemporary Averroes is instructive in this case. In his *Decisive Treatise*, dedicated to the question of whether the Divine Law—or *sharīʿah*—allows or perhaps even commands that we engage in philosophy, he says:

> Since this Law is true and calls to the reflection leading to cognizance of the truth, we, the Muslim community, know firmly that demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law. For truth does not oppose truth; rather, it agrees with it and bears witness to it. [7]

For the rationalist Aristotelians, one cannot contradict what philosophy establishes beyond doubt through rational proof. If we uphold as axiom that the Divine Law is true, it must follow that what it teaches and what reason proves cannot be at odds, and any apparent conflict must be resolvable. However, it is the nature of rational demonstration that it is in and of itself clear and unequivocal, whereas what the Law says is first and foremost accepted on the strength of its authority. If an apparent contradiction does manifest itself between rational insight and the Law, the solution must therefore be, so to say, at the latter's

expense: The Law has to be read in such a way that, first appearances notwithstanding, it is allegorically in agreement with what has been established by demonstration.[4]

Yet, from what does the Law derive its authority, or why should we call it divine? The answer—that it is the result of divine revelation—is by no means as obviously an orthodox answer as it seems. For revelation is understood by the tradition not as the self-manifestation of God, but as the result of prophecy. As such, it requires a human intermediary, the prophet. The prophetology of the rationalist Aristotelians frames the prophet not as the fragile human bearer of a divine message, but as a man of consummate powers of reason and imagination. Revelation is not the deity, inscrutable in his will, choosing to send off a message, but the product of what is tempting to call a natural process: The prophet, having achieved intellectual perfection, enters into conjunction with the Active Intellect. This conjunction, filling his intellect and making it flow over into his imagination, is what allows the prophet to then express his rational knowledge of the divine in the less austere medium of evocative images and words. These the prophet offers as a substitute or imitation of philosophical truth to the masses of mankind, who do not themselves have the intellectual powers to philosophize.[5]

In what sense is this imitation of truth divine? Not, it is clear, because it has in any obvious sense been dictated by God. Its divinity instead is twofold. On the one hand, it has a divine *origin*, for it is the result of participation in the cosmic order, itself divine, that the highest human intellectual perfection affords. It is divine, on the other hand, in that it has a divine *goal*. For the prophet is not only a philosopher, but also a lawgiver. The words and images revealed through the prophet—or perhaps less reverently, shaped and used by him—are the foundation of the Divine Law in its practical and political sense. The precepts and commandments laid down in it for the community of believers create a social order that is geared towards realizing the one true form of human excellence: intellectual perfection. In light of this ideal of intellectual perfection, all other aspects of human life—whether of ethical behavior, political organization, or religious comportment—have a merely instrumental value and serve its furthering and accomplishment. Thus, we find Maimonides asserting, in a passage we will have to return to, that to a human being who is intellectually perfect, the words good and bad simply lack meaning [12].

What the precise status of the Divine Law is to the Aristotelian rationalists, however, is murky enough of a question to have spawned two radically opposed scholarly answers.

According to the first answer, associated with the name of Leo Strauss, philosophers from Farabi to Maimonides are covert but hardened atheists. Reason and revelation from their point of view are irreconcilably opposed. Philosophy as rational science is the sole key to truth and the only way of achieving human perfection. At the same time, it is an anthropological fact that only a few are by nature endowed with the intellectual ability to attain the standpoint of reason. If human perfection is to be achieved in a society in which most are incapable of rational truth, and potentially hostile to it, then religious law—though philosophically not a *genuine* locus of truth—must be used as a substitute. In the hands of the prophet-philosopher-lawgiver, who himself is above such substitutes, it becomes the instrument with which a society can be shaped that does not altogether despise rational inquiry and allows for the few to philosophize in peace so as to actualize their intellectual potential. If this is to be achieved, however, the true nature of the Divine Law cannot be openly acknowledged in front of those who are not philosophers.[6]

[4] On the *Decisive Treatise*'s relating of philosophy and religion against the backdrop of Averroes' work as a whole, see also Chapter 2 of Catarina Belo, *Averroes and Hegel on Philosophy and Religion*, [8] as well as Majid Fakhry, "Philosophy and Scripture in the Theology of Averroes" [9]. Both Fakhry and Belo support Fraenkel's claim that for Averroes, philosophy as the highest form of worship is not only allowed, but positively commanded under Islam for those who have the intellectual capacity to engage in it, and that harmony between Divine Law and "demonstration" (i.e., philosophy) is to be achieved by the metaphorical re-interpretation of the former to accord with the truths of the latter. They thus deny both the "atheistic" reading of Averroes provided by Strauss, and the once-common attribution of a theory of "double truth" to Averroes.

[5] The foundational text in Arabic philosophy for the prophet as both philosopher and lawgiver is Farabi's *On the Perfect State* [10]. On this, see (aside from Strauss and Fraenkel) Muhsin Mahdi's celebrated study *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, in particular Chapter 7 [11].

[6] This, in brief, is the position offered already offered by Strauss in his early *Philosophie und Gesetz* [13].

The second answer has recently been championed by Carlos Fraenkel. It insists against the Straussian reading that the philosophers from Farabi to Maimonides, rather than being atheists, are sincere believers for whom the projects of reason and revelation are so far from being opposed that they are, strictly speaking, indistinguishable. If God is reason, then acquiring rational insight and so achieving human perfection *is* the highest form of worship. Though it is no less true on this reading that the many are incapable of performing this highest kind of worship, religious law is not some magnificent lie or cynically wielded instrument. It is an indispensable political and pedagogical tool. Though not true in a literal sense, the Divine Law as imitation of philosophy holds a genuine allegorical truth. Moreover, as none of us are born philosophers, but acquire rational insight only slowly and through hard work, religious law allows us to discipline our irrational selves and become, if not necessarily possessors of the truth, at least not altogether cut off from it. Such a pedagogy makes it possible for all people, however circumscribed their intellectual powers may be, to participate in a life of reason to the furthest extent of their ability. If the real nature of the Divine Law cannot be publicly acknowledged, this is because such divulgence would rob non-philosophers of the substitute of knowledge that they have but without turning them into philosophers. This philosophical interpretation of religious law as a political-pedagogical program for achieving human excellence can, Fraenkel suggests, be best understood as a "philosophical religion".

What is striking about these two diametrically opposed readings of the significance of religion for the rationalist Aristotelian tradition is how little difference, when all is said and done, there is between them. They are, one might say, two sides of the same coin. Whether one describes the concept of the divine at work here as the de-throning of God in favor of a cosmic rational order or the purification of the concept of the one true God from the irrational anthropomorphic encrustations it bears in popular belief, there can be little question that we are dealing with the God of the Philosophers and that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is no more than its allegorical double. Whether we call this position atheism or philosophical religion at this point hardly seems relevant. The holy writings, practices, and institutions that make up historical religions are, in either case, as a substitute for actual perfection, no more than a rueful concession to the limitations of human nature.

3. Spinoza's Ambiguous Response to Dogmatism

Despite Spinoza's avowed distaste of Maimonides' "harmful, useless, and absurd" views on Biblical hermeneutics, he shares a great deal of the basic tenets of rationalist Aristotelianism outlined above. His God is utterly non-anthropomorphic, purely rational, and acts only out of necessity. Spinoza recognizes intellectual perfection as the only human excellence and reduces morality to a question of utility in service of this goal. He distinguishes sharply between the imagination and the intellect, assigning all possibility of error to the one and the certainty of truth to the other. He also accepts as anthropological fact that most men and women, in thrall to their passions, cannot live a life guided by reason and are therefore in need of religion to teach them obedience and piety [7]. Yet, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* programmatically refuses the idea that religion—which to the rationalist Aristotelians is an allegory of philosophical truth—can be the locus of truth at all. Why this refusal?

One response to this question might be that, in fact, Spinoza's refusal of the Dogmatic project of reading philosophical truth into the Bible is in fact overstated. As Fraenkel points out, we find Spinoza articulating in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* the very position we found in Averroes:

[7] For the purposes of my argument here, I do not dwell on the nevertheless very real differences between Spinoza and Maimonides. The most glaring of these is, of course, that Maimonides' God is a strictly incorporeal intellect distinct from the world, whereas Spinoza infamously holds that all that is, is in God (E1P15) and that God himself is an extended thing (E2P2). Great as this difference is, it does not impact the discussion here directly. One other matter of non-trivial significance I do not touch upon here is how Spinoza's concept of *amor intellectualis Dei* relates to the rationalist Aristotelian notion of conjunction with the Active Intellect. For an extensive recent discussion of these and other differences see Joshua Parens [14].

> It suffices that we demonstrate those things [that we can know by reason] clearly for us to know that Sacred Scripture must also teach the same things. For the truth does not contradict the truth [*veritas veritati non repugnavit*], nor can Scripture teach such nonsense as is commonly supposed. (*CM* 2.8II, p. 265)

Around the time he starts writing the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1665), Spinoza repeats his claim in his correspondence with Blyenbergh. The pious Blyenbergh, articulating what Spinoza in the *Tractatus* would come to call the Skeptical position, had insisted that what the Bible teaches must be held as unconditionally true. Feigning that for his part he "does not understand" Scripture, Spinoza admits he has given up its study and reserved his time for rational inquiry instead:

> And I am well aware that, when I have found a solid demonstration, I cannot fall into such thoughts that I can ever doubt it. So I am completely satisfied with what the intellect shows me, and entertain no suspicion that I have been deceived in that or that Sacred Scripture can contradict it (even though I do not investigate it). For the truth does not contradict the truth, as I have already indicated clearly in my Appendix. (*Ep.* 21IIV, p. 126)

To say that Scripture cannot contradict truth, however, is not the same as asserting with the Dogmatists that, adequately read, it positively contains the same truths that the intellect establishes through demonstration. It might instead simply be silent on matters that fall within the realm of truth and contain nothing but exhortations to loving kindness. That, after all, would be the expected result of Spinoza's anti-Dogmatic claim that the only thing Scripture teaches is piety and obedience. Yet, any closer look at the way in which Spinoza handles Scripture will swiftly make clear that this is not necessarily how he operates.

Here, I want to examine two paradigmatic cases where Spinoza not only gives his assent to the principle underpinning the Dogmatic project, but also indulges in it by reading his philosophemes into the Biblical text. These cases are Spinoza's interpretation of the Fall and his understanding of the Tetragrammaton. They might be said, respectively, to articulate *in nuce* his philosophical anthropology and his rational theology. Together they make up the two sides of the relation between man and God that forms his philosophical religion. It is indicative that in both cases, Maimonides has substantively preceded him in his conclusions.

What brings Spinoza to the Scriptural account of the Fall in Chapter 4 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is the question of what Scripture teaches us about the natural light and natural law. He comments:

> The first thing which strikes us is the story of the first man, where it is related that God told Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This seems to mean that God told Adam to do and seek the good for the sake of the good, and not insofar as it is contrary to the evil, i.e., that he should seek the good from love of the good, and not from fear of evil. For as we've already shown, he who does good from a true knowledge and love of the good acts freely and with a constant heart, whereas he who acts from fear of evil is compelled by evil, acts like a slave, and lives under the command of another. And so this one thing which God told Adam to do contains the whole divine natural law, and agrees absolutely with the dictate of the natural light. (*TTP* 4IIII, pp. 65–66)

This passage is at first cryptic. What would it mean to act from love of the good rather than from fear of evil? Why is it to Spinoza's mind precisely this story that suggests such an idea? Moreover, what does any of this have to do with "the natural law and the natural light"? The key to the passage is to differentiate between the uses of "good". First, there is the good of "seeking the good for the love of the good". This good is the intellectual perfection that is our highest calling, about which we are instructed by natural light. "Good and evil", the fruit of the tree, are on the other hand moral concepts. Eating this fruit, making it part of ourselves, we are somehow diminished. However, why should we be

made less by acknowledging that we are moral creatures, and why should a moral sense prevent us from striving for intellectual perfection?

These questions can be answered in light of the passage in the *Ethics* devoted to the same story:

> E4P68: If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free.
>
> Dem.: I call him free who is led by reason alone. Therefore, he who is born free, and remains free, has only adequate ideas, and so has no concept of evil (by P64C). And since good and evil are correlates, he also has no concept of good, q.e.d.
>
> SCHOLIUM This, and the other things I have now demonstrated seem to have been indicated by Moses in that story of the first man. For in it the only power of God conceived is that by which he created man, i.e., the power by which he consulted only man's advantage. And so we are told that God prohibited a free man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that as soon as he ate of it, he immediately feared death, rather than desiring to live [. . .].

This passage confirms the reading above: The trouble with "good and evil" is that they are inadequate ideas founded on imagination. Adam's "transgression", then, is to have thought of himself under the category of prohibition and transgression to begin with—that is, thinking that divine laws are commandments to be obeyed rather than laws of nature to be understood.

This latter point also becomes clear from the explanation that Spinoza gives in a letter to Blyenbergh about God's commandment not to eat from the tree:

> The prohibition to Adam, then, consisted only in this: God revealed to Adam that eating of that tree caused death, just as he also reveals to us through the natural intellect that poison is deadly to us. And if you ask for what purpose he revealed it to him, I answer: to make him that much more perfect in knowledge. (*Ep.* 19 IV, p. 95)

God's only desire—if one may call it that—is for the perfection of human knowledge. The fruit of the tree, in instilling in us illusory notions of good and evil and the upheavals of the affects that come with thinking in them, are thus deadly distractions from the truth. God's "commandment" does not prohibit or enjoin but informs Adam of this natural fact; "obeying" it would mean arranging one's life for the pursuit of knowledge alone.

This reading of the account of the Fall may strike one as an audaciously amoral reading for a philosopher who insists that Scripture has nothing to teach but simple moral precepts. Yet, Spinoza is here following the well-established exclusive focus on intellectual perfection that Maimonides also advances. Reason concerns itself with true and false, and good and evil (or in Maimonides' words here, fine and bad) by contrast are illusory notions of the imagination. Whoever regained the intellectual perfection that Adam the first man had would consequently be quite unaware of them:

> For the intellect that God made overflow unto man and that is the latter's ultimate perfection, was that which Adam had been provided with before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created in the image of God and in His likeness. It was likewise on account of it that he was addressed by God and given commandments, as it says: And the Lord God commanded, and so on. For commandments are not given to beasts and beings devoid of intellect. Through the intellect one distinguishes between truth and falsehood, and that was found in [Adam] in its perfection and integrity. Fine and bad, on the other hand, belong to the things generally accepted as known [*al-mashhūrāt*], not to those cognized by the intellect. [. . .] Now man in virtue of his intellect knows truth from falsehood; and this holds good for all intelligible things. Accordingly, when man was in his most perfect and excellent state, in accordance with his inborn disposition and possessed of his intellectual cognitions—because of which

> it is said of him: Thou hast made him but little lower than Elohim—he had no faculty that was engaged in any way in the consideration of generally accepted things, and he did not apprehend them. [. . .] With regard to what is of necessity, there is no good and evil at all, but only the false and the true. (*Guide* I 2; tr. Pines Volume I, pp. 24–25) [8]

Spinoza's open avowal of amoralism in the *Ethics*—that good and evil have no intrinsic meaning but are confused notions that, properly expressed, concern only what is useful for our perfection or harmful to it—is, seen from this perspective, nothing but the full-mouthed endorsement of what the rationalist Aristotelian tradition has long asserted more covertly. The central point of Spinoza's philosophical anthropology, as demonstrated by the account of the Fall, is that man's thinking of good and evil, as the product of imagination, is itself his fall from grace and his enslavement; his freedom and his escape from death are the perfection of his reason—(1) freedom, because whoever only has adequate ideas is, by that very fact, free from the passivity of the affects and thus only and necessarily acts out of his own essence, and (2) escape from death, because "a free man thinks of nothing less than of death" (E4P67).

The second question to be investigated here concerns the Tetragrammaton. The revelation of the divine name *I am that I am* to Moses (Exodus 3:14) is a *locus classicus* of philosophical theology and one often understood as the "metaphysics of Exodus": God is not only the highest being but is also, in some qualified sense, to be equated with being itself or perhaps must be understood as the ground of all being. Maimonides here is no exception. In his discussion of the names of God, he claims that, unlike all other divine epithets, which describe God's actions, the Tetragrammaton alone clearly and unequivocally expresses God's essence:

> All the names of God, may He be exalted, that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely, Yod, He, Vav, He. This is the name of God, may He be exalted, that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the articulated name. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence, may He be exalted. (*Guide*, I 61; tr. Pines Volume 1, p. 147)

What is this essence? Insisting on the absolute oneness of God, Maimonides holds that no attributes attach to his essence. Existence is considered an attribute and must be thought of as added to the essence of whatever being is under consideration if it does indeed exist. Yet, if God is the perfect being, then nothing could be added to God's essence. God's existence must therefore be a different matter: In God's case, and in God's case alone, "His existence is identical with His essence and His true reality, and His essence is His existence" (*Guide* I 57; tr. Pines Volume 1, p. 132). God could therefore not *not* exist. It is this, Maimonides argues, that the Tetragrammaton expresses:

> He, May He be exalted, has no name that is not derivative except the name having four letters, which is the articulated name. This name is not indicative of an attribute but of simple existence and nothing else. Now absolute existence implies that He shall always be, I mean He who is necessarily existent. (*Guide,* I 63; tr. Pines Volume 1, p. 156)

By contrast with this high flight of metaphysical speculation, Spinoza's discussion of the Tetragrammaton in its Biblical context seems to serve deflationary purposes. In line with the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*' stated aim of disproving that there are genuine philosophical truths to be found in Scripture, he points out that the Patriarchs, far from

[8] On Maimonides as an allegorical reader in particular reference to the story of the Fall, see Warren Zev Harvey, "On Maimonides' Allegorical Readings of Scripture", [15] which notes the proximity of Maimonides' position to that of Averroes in the *Decisive Treatise*. For a more differentiated view of the status of ethics across Maimonides' corpus and a suggestion for how intellectual perfection might not exhaust itself in contemplation alone, see David Schatz, "Maimonides' Moral Theory" [16].

having knowledge either by reason or by divine revelation of God's essence, were in fact altogether ignorant of it:

> The first point follows with utmost clarity from Exodus 6:3, where God says to Moses, to show the special grace he has given to him: [. . .] and I was revealed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them. [. . .] Next, note that there is no name in Scripture except Yahweh which makes known the absolute essence of God, without relation to created things. And therefore the Hebrews contend that only this name of God is peculiarly his, the others being common nouns. (*TTP* Chapter 13 | III 169)

Spinoza here seems to overshoot his mark. In arguing that Scripture itself admits that the Patriarchs were ignorant of God's one true name, i.e., did not know the absolute essence of God, he leads us to a passage where God extends precisely this privilege of getting to know his name to Moses. The true concept of God's essence thus *is* present in Scripture—and made known to Moses. This hardly seems to be a trivial piece of knowledge.

One might wonder, of course, whether Moses also understood what was revealed to him. The casual reader might think here that Moses had at least some trouble grasping what God intended—but not so Spinoza. Earlier in the *Tractatus* he had already argued that Moses' opinion of God was "that he is a being who exists, has always existed, and always will exist [*quod semper extitit, existit, et semper existet*]", hence the name Yahweh, "which in Hebrew expresses these three times of existing" (*TTP* Chapter 2 | III 38). God's essence as Scripture teaches it, encompassing past, present, and future, is his existing at all times, or eternally.

If we relate these readings to the account of God offered in the *Ethics*, we see moreover that they do not express some superficial, pre-philosophical grasp of the divine essence, such as one might, at best, expect the unlearned prophet of the *Tractatus* to possess, but that they represent faithfully the structure of Spinoza's metaphysics. What it means to say is that God's essence is his eternal existing becomes clearer, if we add that according to Spinoza's definition, eternity is "existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing" (E1D8). He goes on to explain that "such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth, and on that account cannot be explained by duration or time, even if the duration is conceived to be without beginning or end". In other words, to understand God as eternal is to understand his essence to be self-necessitated existence. Moses as Spinozist *avant la lettre* understands the divine as *causa sui* [9].

These philosophical interpretations of the Fall and of the Tetragrammaton are hardly to be classed as edificatory parables for instruction in piety and obedience, nor simple truths for the ignorant. They are succinct but profound articulations of Spinoza's anthropology and rational theology through the medium of Scriptural exegesis, and taken together, they purport to show how we, as finite human beings split between intellect and imagination, can flourish by realizing our place in the eternal necessity of God's order.

4. The Possibility of a Philosophical Religion

The effective display of the Dogmatic method highlighted above raises the question why Spinoza felt the need to criticize the Dogmatists at all. It is, of course, Spinoza's aim above all in the *Tractatus* to safeguard the *libertas philosophandi*. However, nothing in the program of a philosophical religion is intrinsically irreconcilable with the idea that philosophers should be allowed to think and write as they please, as long as they do not upset the public peace by all too directly undermining the prevailing traditions of the land.

The problem, then, lies on the other side. The genuine threat to the freedom to philosophize comes not from the Dogmatists but from their opponents, those whom

[9] My discussion here is indebted to Yitzhak Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence" [17]. Melamed notes that to say that God "exists, has always existed, and always will exist" and cannot be understood as happening to exist at any given time; God's eternity is to be understood as outside of time altogether and defined without reference to temporality purely as self-necessitation.

Spinoza calls the Skeptics. These not only bluntly assert the divine truth of religious writ and custom in however irrational a form, but also seek to impose their authority on the thoughts and actions of society as a whole. To effectively resist such imposition, the worry is, it may not be enough to adhere to the program of a philosophical religion. For it will always be possible for the Skeptic to subvert the attempt to find the truths of philosophy in the documents of the faith by pointing out how unlikely such readings are, as indeed Blyenbergh does to Spinoza in *Ep*. 20. As long as the Skeptics are unopposed in their claim that they are the guardians of a truth not accessible to reason and willing to enforce this truth in the polity, they will threaten the freedom to philosophize. If this threat becomes too pressing, it may become an attractive option for the philosopher to deny, as Spinoza in fact does, that truth is a matter of theology at all.

Such a denial, however, while it is effective at subverting the Skeptical position, equally undermines the Dogmatic position. For where the philosophical religion the Dogmatists advance could at least be allegorically true, Spinoza's radicalism throws out the claim to truth altogether. This is not just unfortunate for the philosopher, whose tools for instructing those not yet as intellectually advanced are of considerably less impact now. It is detrimental to the non-philosophers as well, whose need for guidance Spinoza does not seem to think any less than his rationalist Aristotelian predecessors. There is an unresolved contradiction between Spinoza's systematic claim that religious means are needed to order a commonwealth consisting largely of non-philosophers towards human perfection and his empirical assessment that religious authority, as long as it is accorded the status of being a guardian of truth, in fact resists being utilized in this way.

Whatever merit we may see in Spinoza's fight against the repressive power of the theologians and his championing of the *libertas philosophandi*, it is questionable whether his theological politics can indeed serve the purpose for which they are intended. If the problem they seek to address is that domineering theologians and their faction-spawning quarrels are a threat to peace and the freedom of thought and expression in a republic, then placing all effective religious power in the hands of the state certainly promotes conformity of opinion [10], but it hardly benefits the freedom to publicly articulate ideas that contravene the dogmas enshrined in the public cult, however conceived. If one follows Spinoza's suggestions as to how the state is to protect and enforce what the public religion teaches, it becomes unclear that a work such as his own *Ethics*, which seeks to deal a mortal blow to the idea of a providential God, could be allowed to be published.

Spinoza of course cuts back the domain of religion to matters of simple piety and obedience to God and leaves all other aspects of belief beyond its "minimal creed" for people to decide for themselves. Its doctrines are light, its interference minimal, and its core message—to love one's neighbor—surely heartening in an innocuously vague manner. Yet, this vagueness itself is troubling. For as his reading of the account of the Fall demonstrates, good and evil are chimerical notions to Spinoza and have no philosophical status of their own. What it actually and concretely *means* to obey God by loving one's neighbor—a question by no means as obvious as Spinoza here wishes to make it look—therefore remains substantively underdetermined. In practice, it may well fall to the religious state institutions to determine what is to be taught as the proper way of loving one's neighbor, what is to be thought of as good and evil. As Victor Kal has recently argued, there is little to prevent that the seemingly benevolent and undemanding moral religion that the state preaches, untethered from any substantive moral commitments, becomes an empty vessel for whatever ideas the state deems it necessary to convince its citizenry of [19].

[10] The conformity of opinion that the state religion strives for is not, of course, one that touches upon speculative matters (which are excluded from the domain of religion altogether) but regards the "minimal creed" of the universal faith and how it is to be understood. Interpreting these matters and how they are to be taught would fall under the sole control of the state. This is not to say that the state would directly police (as if it could!) people's thoughts. However, as guardian of the universal faith, it would inevitably be tasked with disallowing public expression of anything that would contradict the minimal creed or even the state's particular interpretation of this creed. By reinforcing the teaching of the universal faith, it would seek to influence, by persuasion rather than force, both people's outward conduct and the ideas and attitudes that underlie it. There can thus be no clear distinction between outward and inward religion. On the problem of inward consent and outward obedience, see also Ramond's remarks (and his references to Matheron) in the introduction to the PUF edition of the *Tractatus Politicus* [18].

Yet, a more fundamental worry about Spinoza's project remains, one that equally threatens both strains of his philosophy of religion. The Dogmatic strain in his thought seeks to allegorically recuperate the truth of Scripture. This way, the authority of religion might be used to further the cause of philosophy and the intellectual perfection that is its highest goal. The critique of religion on the other hand, representing the anti-Skeptical strain, aims to sever the connection between theology and truth altogether. The state's control of religious authority can thus at least end the threat of religious strife in the commonwealth, as well as the theologians' interfering with philosophy. Both of these, however, depend on the notion, which Spinoza, in line with his predecessors, takes his rational theology to have demonstrated: that philosophy in the form of theoretical reason indeed has the capacity to cognize God and that such cognition is the sole genuine way of relating to the divine. The interpretation of historically occurring religious traditions in the light of the ideal of intellectual perfection can, after all, only be thought of as a *religious* project—rather than as, say, an exercise in the pacification of human wildness or a way of gratifying the pleasures of our idle curiosity—if the God that the philosopher would contemplate is, in fact, *there*. The same applies to Spinoza's critique of religion: It can only dispute the orthodox claim of ownership of the truth about God by offering an unassailable counter-model—that of God as the being who, causing all that is with necessity, is himself the necessary being.

However one might resolve the contradiction between these two strains, then, the viability of Spinoza's philosophy of religion will, one way or the other, depend on the availability to human reason of demonstrative certainty when it comes to knowledge of God. Only the rational bedrock that the proofs of God's necessary existence in the first eleven propositions of the *Ethics* form begins to provide such certainty.

5. Conclusions

One does well to take Spinoza at his word when he denies so forcefully the charge of atheism that is laid at his door. His thinking is throughout committed to the idea that there is a God and that our perfection as free beings depends on our relationship to him. That this God is nothing other than the eternally and necessarily self-causing cause of all beings and that one loves this God and becomes like him exclusively through rational knowledge of his necessary order does not change the matter. However, if the true worship of God is metaphysics, what remains of historical religious traditions and their Scriptures? We have seen that Spinoza holds onto two conflicting possibilities: religious inheritance is to be understood—and put to work—either as the imitation of truths that a priori reason alone can demonstrate or as a necessary instrument of statecraft that itself is not concerned with truth. There is, in either case, no domain proper to the religious. Whether one sees this as a blindness on the part of Spinoza's thought to what one might call a genuine dimension of human experience, however, or rather takes it as the conclusive sign of Spinoza's overcoming of *superstitio* will depend on one's wider philosophical commitments.

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Article

The Coherence of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise

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Abstract: Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus has been critiqued as contradictory and inconsistent. This is why I believe that the question with regard to Spinoza's 'neglected masterpiece' should be: How to read the Treatise as a coherent philosophical work? I suggest that the reason why the Treatise seems contradictory is because of the complex juxtaposition of its two main foci: the relationship between theology and philosophy, and that of theology and politics. In this paper, I will argue against the claim of contradiction and pursue to demonstrate a close correlation and mutual interdependence of both relations. While the domains of theology and philosophy may be separate, there is no contradiction between the salvation of the ignorant and the salvation of the wise. Similarly, there is no contradiction between the theological part of the Treatise—which focuses on 'piety' and the defense of the freedom of 'internal religion'—and the political part—which focuses on 'peace', and claims that the state should have absolute power over 'external religion'.

Keywords: political philosophy; philosophy of religion; enlightenment; modern philosophy; Spinoza; Theological-Political-Treatise; Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus; salvation; religion; philosophical religion; natural theology; Bible; scripture; philosophy

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1. Introduction

A host of commentators believe that Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus [1] (TTP, hereafter Treatise) is a muddled, confused and incoherent work. Leo Strauss asserts that the Treatise 'abounds in contradictions' [2]; a claim to which Yuval Jobani agrees. [3] Carlos Fraenkel states that the Treatise is inconsistent: Spinoza, according to Fraenkel, wavers between two mutually exclusive positions [4]. Theo Verbeek is struck by the incoherence of the Treatise; the reader, he writes, 'fails to see how things combine; how particular arguments fit into a comprehensive argument; how a single chapter or couple of chapters relate to the book as a whole and how the book relates to Spinoza's other work [5].'

In this article I will not, due to lack of time and space, defend Spinoza's Treatise against all these charges. Instead, I will try to resolve two of the main problems which apparently make it difficult to read the Treatise as a coherent work. First, I will address the subject of two accounts of salvation. Then, I will proceed to address the seeming contradiction in the two accounts of religion. Moreover, I suggest that the proposed solutions will offer greater clarity regarding other criticism pertaining to incoherence and "contradictions". Commentators find the Treatise to be incoherent because they view Spinoza on the one hand as a critic of religion who on the other hand claims religion is not only valuable but in fact indispensable for the well-being of society. Commentators also raise questions about Spinoza's claims that philosophy, theology, and politics are separate and yet very similar, though not in their means, but most certainty in their ends. What we need to understand in order to solve the difficulties is how the three separate domains can nevertheless form an interdependent, mutually reinforcing, philosophical-theological-political unity, necessary for a free, pious, and peaceful polity [6].

The first "problem" I address are Spinoza's two separate accounts of *salvation*: a 'salvation of the wise' and 'a salvation of the ignorant'. Some commentators detect here an unsolvable contradiction. Others believe that the two accounts can be bridged [7]. Alexandre Matheron's proposed solution (that Spinoza believed in a form of reincarnation) is

unconvincing [8] for reasons stated by Paul Juffermans [9]. Other commentators, following Strauss, maintain that the problem of the two accounts can only be solved when we assume that Spinoza engaged in 'the art of writing' or concealing the truth [10], a hermeneutical approach which has been rightly criticized [11]. Douglas den Uyl [12] and Michael Rosenthal [13] have tried to solve the problem by making a distinction between 'salvation' and 'blessedness', which, according to me, is not supported by the actual texts, because Spinoza uses these terms interchangeably, as will become clear in some of the citations below.

The second "problem" discussed in this paper is that Spinoza's Treatise gives two accounts of *religion*: internal religion as a matter of individual right and freedom; external religion falls under the authority of the state. The first seems to make Spinoza into one of the founding fathers of liberalism, the second seems to depict Spinoza's political position as conservative and autocratic. Strauss, paraphrasing the critique of Hermann Cohen, writes that while Spinoza in the first part of the Treatise 'takes the side of spiritual and trans-political Christianity against carnal and political Judaism, he contradicts his whole argument by taking the side of the State, not only against all churches but against all religion as well [14].' Writing about the distinction between internal and external religion, Balibar states: 'Even with the best will of the world one cannot remove a feeling of an underlying contradiction [15].'

The solutions I propose for these two problems may be criticized as yet *another* contradiction. For how can Spinoza separate philosophy from theology, and theology from politics, while he, at the same time, connects them respectively? In discussing the two contradictions I will regularly return to this third and deepest "contradiction" in the Treatise.

The first section of this article turns to Spinoza's descriptions of 'salvation' and 'religion' in the Ethics in order to show that Spinoza's *philosophy* is at the same time a *theology* (a study of God). I comment on the fact that Spinoza defines religion in the Ethics in the context of his exposition of political matters, indicating a connection in Spinoza's philosophy between religion (or theology) and politics. Furthermore, I point out that in the Ethics intellectual salvation is accompanied by a psychological and by an ethical salvation, and that the distinction between 'the ignorant' and 'the wise' is not a dichotomy, but a difference in kind.

The second section—on salvation in the Treatise—claims that it becomes most clear that Spinoza separates as well as unites philosophy and (biblically revealed) theology when the Treatise discusses 'prophecy' and 'divine law'. The salvation of the ignorant is compatible with the salvation of the wise, I argue, because the first kind of knowledge of God which the Bible provides can save people from superstition, hatred and conflict.

The third and final section argues—by clarifying the distinction between *internal and external religion*—that also theology and politics are both separated and connected, without contradicting each other.

2. 'Religion' and 'Salvation' in the *Ethics*

Spinoza is often labeled an atheist [16], and a harsh critic of religion [17], who claimed the Bible had no 'authority' [18]. However, others saw his philosophy as a 'religion of reason' [19], a 'philosophical-ethical path to salvation' [20], a 'philosophical religion' [21] or a 'philosophy that can function as a religion' [22]—'mystical to the core' [23], 'Judaic to the core' [24], a form of 'radical Protestantism'. [25] His philosophy, Donagan argues, is in fact a 'natural theology' [26]. Importantly, Spinoza's theology or study of God in the Ethics stands in sharp contrast to the anthropomorphic God found in the Bible. His theology is also far removed from the dualistic and teleological way of thinking found in the tradition of 'natural theology'. And yet, Spinoza's philosophical masterpiece begins with God, and ends with salvation by means of knowledge of God, a salvation which is obtained through the 'natural light', and not by 'supranatural' means.

It is reason, according to Spinoza, that helps us become more pious and loving towards our neighbors. In the fourth part of the Ethics Spinoza intends to prove the thesis that the dictates of reason command us to desire the good not only for ourselves, but for the rest of

mankind (E4p18s till E4p37s2, pp. 330–341) [27]. It is at the end of this proof that Spinoza defines religion: 'Whatever we desire and do, whereof we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, that is, insofar as we know God, I refer to religion' (E4p37s1, p. 339). We see here that Spinoza makes a clear connection between reason and faith: the person who is guided by reason will also be a religious man [28].

However, the connections do not stop there. Spinoza in the following scholium goes on to explain what justice and merit are. He shows that they cannot exist in a state of nature, and that they therefore have to be understood in terms of 'obedience' to the laws of the state. In order to do good to one another people need to unite in the state (E4p37s2, p. 340). Note that reason and religion also are related to the political dimension in Spinoza's thought [29].

The connections between reason, faith and the state are affirmed in the propositions at the end of Ethics 4, regarding the free man and in the Appendix that follows. 'The man who is guided by reason is more free in a state where he lives under a system of law than in solitude where [he] obeys only himself' (E4p73, p. 357). This free, 'strong-minded' man endeavors, Spinoza writes, 'as far as he can, to do well and to be glad' (E4p73s, pp. 357–358). In E4 Appendix, Spinoza refers to these propositions when he writes that the most important factors for winning the love of people 'are those that are concerned with religion and piety' (E4A15, p. 360). Spinoza argues in the Ethics, in other words, that reasonable religion strengthens the bonds of the state more than anything else, and this applies to its citizens as well as to its leaders. At the end of E2 Spinoza states the fourth and final advantage of his philosophical-religious 'doctrine': 'it teaches the manner in which citizens should be governed and led, namely, not so as to be slaves, but so as to do freely what is best' (E2p49s, p. 277).

In the Ethics Spinoza also explains how one can find 'salvation', which gives 'us complete tranquility of mind', with the further advantage of 'teaching us wherein lies our greatest happiness [summa felicitas] or blessedness [beatitudio], namely in the knowledge of God alone, as a result of which induces only such actions as urged by love [amor] and piety [pietas]' (E2p49s, p. 276).

> 'From this [that the love of God toward men and the mind's intellectual love toward God are one and the same] we clearly understand in what our salvation [salus] or blessedness [beatitudo], or freedom [libertas] consists, namely in the constant and eternal love toward God, that is, in God's love toward men. This love or blessedness is called glory [gloria] in the Holy Scriptures, and rightly so. For whether this love be related to God or to the mind, it can properly be called spiritual contentment [animi acquiescentia], which in reality cannot be distinguished from glory'. (E5p36s)

According to E5p36s, to be saved is to be blessed, to be freed, to be full of love, and to experience the greatest inner peace, but all this is made possible through the intellectual understanding of what God truly is. Fortunately, according to Spinoza, all minds possess the 'adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God', necessary for understanding things through the third kind of knowledge. Most people, however, cannot make the connection to this 'internal' knowledge of God. The 'external' things that affect their bodies continuously divert their attention, making them associate 'the word 'God' with the images of things which they commonly see', creating anthropomorphic and other false ideas of God (E2p47 and E2p47s, p. 271).

The Ethics explains that such confused ideas of God hinder the path to salvation. We are 'slaves' when the only thing the mind can do is continuously react to the ways in which the body is affected. The mind is then determined 'externally—namely by the fortuitous run of circumstances'; reason, on the other hand, determines the mind internally, 'through its regarding several things at the same time, to understand their agreement, their differences, and their opposition' (E2p29s, p. 262).

Spinoza often describes salvation in terms of positive psychological effects, such as the diminution of anger, hatred and fear of death, corresponding to their replacement by love, happiness, and peace of mind. These effects are made possible by the second and the third kinds of knowledge (E5p38, p. 379) as cognitive liberation logically precedes the affective-conative liberation [30]. Donald Rutherford has argued that reason in Spinoza's philosophy brings forth a different kind of contentment or inner peace than intuition: *acquiescientia in se ipso* (self-contentment or self-esteem) is related to reason and is 'the effect most directly expressive of the mind's movement towards greater virtue and understanding'. *Acquiescientia animi* (contentment of mind or spiritual contentment) is related to intuition. It is this second, spiritual contentment, Rutherford believes, to which the end of the Ethics refers as it states 'all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare' (E5p42s), because this type of contentment requires a 'rebirth' through the third kind of knowledge in which we no longer perceive ourselves as embodied beings that go through time, but 'take up the perspective of eternity' [31].

The concluding line of the Ethics suggests an 'elitist reading' of Spinoza's philosophy, endorsed by some commentators [32], but rejected by others [33]. I question the idea of an unbridgeable gap between 'the many' who are 'lost', living as they do under the sway of imagination, and 'the few' who are 'saved' because they have come to understand things through the second and third kinds of knowledge. My first reason for asserting that the divide can be bridged is based on Spinoza's own epistemological framework. Therein we find the rather commonsensical point that imagination categorized as the first kind of knowledge is a kind of knowledge. The imagination is the knowledge we receive through our senses, and through recollections, associations and fantasies, which are all essential for understanding ourselves and the world around us. The first kind of knowledge, Spinoza writes, taught him 'everything that is of practical use in life' (TIE 20, p. 7) [34].

The first kind of knowledge is the only source of falsity (E2p41, p. p. 268). Imaginings are 'inadequate'. They do not offer a complete picture of reality. However, partial knowledge can be supplemented. Spinoza writes that 'the imaginations of the mind, looked at in themselves, contain no error' (E2p17s, p. 257). Hence, the imagination can help us arrive at a more complete picture of reality. To use a metaphor, the imagination provides us with different pieces of the puzzle; it is the task of reason to arrange these pieces in the right order.

Secondly, it would be incorrect to claim that imagination makes people less reasonable. The imagination can stand in the service of reason, showing us 'what we ought to do in order to make ourselves more powerful and perfect' [35]. In the introduction to E4 Spinoza offers an example of how imagination can help us lead a better life: we should picture (imagine) a model of human nature. Spinoza presents this model in a number of propositions about 'the free man' (E4p68- 73, pp. 355–358). Imitating this model by memorizing and rehearsing the rules of living that this model embodies can help us find remedies against the (depletive negative) emotions (E5p10s, p. 369).

Thirdly, and most importantly, in the Ethics Spinoza consistently reminds us that knowledge is gradually acquired. In E5p24, E5p26, E5p38. E5p39 and E5p40 Spinoza speaks of the mind being able to come to understand and to love God more and more. Fraenkel [21], Viljanen [36] and Steinberg [37] have also written about the idea of salvation as a gradual process. Although at the end of the Ethics Spinoza juxtaposes 'the ignorant man' and 'the wise man', these should be considered ideal types. In reality no one is completely devoid of reason, and no one is completely wise. Rather, we move closer to idealized wisdom as we gradually come to understand more things. We can already be very content when we live under the guidance of reason and find *aquiescientia in se ipso* (E4p52, p. 347), even though only the perfection of the mind by means of the third kind of knowledge leads to *acuiescientia animi* and beatitude. Understanding that salvation is something that comes gradually can help solve the seeming contradiction between the two accounts of salvation; it enables us to view the salvation of the ignorant in the Treatise as one of *a lesser kind* than the salvation of the wise in the Ethics.

In order to be saved, we need not arrive at an awareness of what 'eternity' means. The importance of religion and piety remain, even if we did not know that our minds are eternal (E5p41, p. 381). The final two propositions of the Ethics emphasize the link between salvation and virtuousness. We are saved when we wholeheartedly do the right thing for our own good as well as for the good of others: 'Blessedness [beatitudo] is not the reward of virtue [virtus], but virtue itself. We do not enjoy blessedness because we keep our lusts in check. On the contrary, it is because we enjoy blessedness that we are able to keep our lusts in check' (E5p42, p. 382). The philosophical-religious account of salvation in the Ethics is in its final manifestation an ethical teaching.

Notably, the Ethics does not explore whether Spinoza's philosophical religion, which embraces natural theology, contradicts the teachings of revealed theology as found in Scripture. The relation between philosophy and (revealed) theology is, however, the main theme of the first part of the Treatise. Reason, Spinoza argues there, does not conflict with faith. Philosophical thinkers are exclusively interested in truth; religious believers only desire a life of obedient love. Philosophy and theology can coexist because their goals are completely different. Yet both lead to salvation.

3. Salvation in the Treatise

In the first fifteen chapters of the *Treatise* Spinoza separates philosophy from theology, establishing 'the freedom to philosophize which this separation allows to everyone' (TTP xvi-1, p. 189). Theology is defined by Spinoza, as 'revelation in so far as it proclaims the purpose which we said that Scripture intends, namely the manner of obedience that is the dogmas of true piety and faith' (TTP xv-6, p. 190). The Treatise starts with a discussion of prophecy because theology is dependent on it.

Spinoza defines 'prophecy' as 'certain knowledge about something revealed to men by God'. From this definition, Spinoza continues, 'it follows that we could apply the word 'prophecy' just as well 'to natural knowledge', because 'natural knowledge has as much right to be called *divine* as any other kind of knowledge, since it is the nature of God, so far as we share in it, and God's decrees, that may be said to dictate it to us' (TTP i-1, p. 13) However, biblical prophecy is different from philosophy in that it consists of knowledge from hearsay. The prophets only understood certain 'words and images', that is, the prophets understood everything by means of the first kind of knowledge alone. (TTP i-27, p. 25).

Prophetic imagination cannot give us 'mathematical certainty', only 'moral certainty' (TTP ii-6, p. 30). Spinoza's use of the term 'moral certainty' adds a normative, ethical element to its traditional meaning of a subjective kind of certainty [38]. The 'moral certainty' the Bible provides consists of elementary guidelines for ordinary men and women, meant to bring the common people under the guidance of reason. These guidelines are 'taught by experience', and not deduced 'from a few premises' (TTP v-14, p. 76).

Spinoza writes that the prophets only had access to knowledge of the first kind. They did not and could not teach philosophical, eternal truths. This was also not necessary. Faith does not require knowledge of astronomy or mathematics. One can even be pious without possessing adequate knowledge of God. The only knowledge about God that is necessary for faith is to know of God's justice and charity (TTP xiii-4, p. 174). These assertions clear the way to Spinoza's emphatic stance that *the freedom to philosophize* includes the freedom to have different ideas of God. Everyone should be allowed 'to worship God according to his own mind' (TTP, Preface 8, p. 6). Since the prophets also had varied ideas about God (TTP ii-18, p. 43), and since the prophets were all upright men, there is no reason to believe that it would be impious to allow people this freedom.

Furthermore, since biblically revealed theology consists of imaginative knowledge, and since imaginative knowledge is linked to private experiences, everyone should always be free—and even encouraged—to adapt the teachings of Scripture to his or her own level of understanding. Adaptation is a crucial aspect of Spinoza's theology. In order that everyone can wholeheartedly obey the divine law, everyone 'must adapt the doctrines of

faith to his own understanding and to interpret them in whatever way seems to make them easier for him to accept unreservedly and with full mental assent' (TTP xiv-11, p. 183). Note specifically the *Treatise's* subtitle: prohibition of this freedom would destroy piety, because it lies in the nature of the imagination that different people understand the same things differently. Besides, the divine law, to which we now will turn, demands that people should love their neighbor. To persecute others for their ideas would therefore be tantamount to sinning against this law (TTP xiv-13, p. 185).

In chapter 4 of the Treatise Spinoza's makes several distinctions within the concept of law. The first is between a law of natural necessity and a decree that people prescribe to themselves for some good. Within the law or decree that people prescribe to themselves he makes a second distinction between 'human law', meant 'to protect life and preserve the country', and 'divine law', which 'looks to the supreme good', consisting out of knowledge and love of God. Regarding divine law, Spinoza makes the further distinction between 'natural divine law', which comes forth out of the natural light, and 'revealed divine law', which is the result of prophetic imagination [39]. These categorical distinctions regarding concepts of law are essential for an adequate, non-contradictory reading of Spinoza's Treatise [40]. The third of these distinctions is, in the context of this article and the debate on the two accounts of salvation, most relevant for us [41]. Understanding the difference between revealed and natural divine law enables one to grasp how the two kinds of salvation can coexist without any degree of contradiction.

Both natural (philosophical) religion as well as (biblically) revealed religion teach the divine law which tells us that 'love of God is the highest felicity [*foelicitas*] and happiness [*beatitudo*] of man, his final end [*finis ultimus*] and the aim of all its actions.' From this, Spinoza continues, 'follows that he alone observes the divine law who is concerned to love God not from fear of punishment nor love of something else, such as pleasure, fame, etc., but from the single fact that he knows that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good. (. . .) For the idea of God requires that God should be our highest good: i.e., that the knowledge and the love of God is the ultimate end to which all our actions are to be directed' (TTP iv.5, p. 60).

The divine law also saves us from 'superstition', which Spinoza describes in the *Treatise's* Preface. People living in uncertain times never know what horrors the future might bring, making them prone to embrace all kinds of superstitious beliefs. The idea of God saves them from fluctuating between hope and fear (and therewith from superstition), and this happens irrespective of whether they understand God theologically (by means of prophetic imagination) or philosophically (the second and third kinds of knowledge). For the idea of God provides all people with a 'fixed plan' in life [35]. Religious believers can always find support and strength in the example of supreme love that God provides, while philosophers can always understand the necessity of the forces they see at work in the whole of nature and in themselves.

However, it is this second kind of salvation, Spinoza reminds us, that remains a preserve for the few. Which is why revelation is so important. It provides a path to salvation for 'the common people'. Hence his strong emphasis on 'the usefulness and necessity of Holy Scripture. (. . .) If we did not possess this testimony of Scripture, we would have to consider the salvation of almost all men in doubt' (TTP xv-10, p. 194). In the accompanying note he adds that 'it is not reason but rather revelation that can teach us that it suffices for salvation [*salutem*] or happiness [*beatitudinem*] to accept the divine decrees as laws or commandments, and there is no need to understand them as eternal truths' (TTP Annotation 31, p. 271). In chapter iv Spinoza concludes that 'God is described as a legislator or a prince, just, merciful, etc. due to the limited understanding of the common people and their lack of knowledge. In reality God acts and governs all things from the necessity of his own nature and perfection alone, and his decrees and volitions are eternal truths and always involve necessity.' (TTP iv-10, p. 64–65). The majority of mankind, Spinoza argues in chapter xiii, need not understand 'the eternal truths' that 'involve necessity' because they will comprehend the divine law in its adapted form, not as something that necessarily

follows from nature, but as something that depends on a decision of the divine will. In other words, both the natural and the revealed divine law can lead to salvation: the first does this by helping us understand ourselves and how everything follows necessarily from the nature of God, while the other gives us trust in an almighty and benevolent being who is also a perfect example that we can imitate and thereby be happy.

Spinoza's treatment of biblical revelation fits squarely in the tradition of 'philosophical religions' that Fraenkel describes, because Spinoza redefines revelation as 'a pedagogical-political program' used to bring the masses under the guidance of reason [21]. However, what seems contradictory to Fraenkel is that Spinoza simultaneously turns against the tradition of philosophical religions when he denies that the prophets were philosophers. But is this really a contradiction? Both philosophy as well as theology, Spinoza claims, have a similar *ethical* effect on people. Biblically revealed religion teaches that we should understand God as a king or a lawmaker who commands us (and the whole of nature), whereas Spinoza's philosophical religion makes clear that God is *identical* to Nature. However, both ideas of God give us a degree of knowledge that can help us on the path to psychological and ethical salvation. Spinoza's plea to separate philosophy from theology should therefore be restated: both natural theology as well as revealed theology teach us the right way to live, but differ with regard to their theoretical, speculative teachings. In other words, we can learn the good life from both revealed as well as natural theology, but we can only learn to intellectually understand God or Nature through philosophy [26].

The analysis of salvation in the *Ethics* in this paper's first section attempts to make clear that salvation can take on an intellectual, a psychological and an ethical form. Note that 'the salvation of the ignorant' includes but two of these distinctions: the psychological and ethical, but not intellectual salvation. This salvation is therefore of 'a lesser kind'. Spinoza contrasts this with the person unfamiliar with the Bible's stories, 'but who does know, by the natural light of reason, that there is a God and so forth (. . .) and who also possesses a true code for living, is entirely happy [*beatum*], and happier than the common people, because, besides true opinions, he possesses a clear and distinct understanding of them' (TTP v-16, p. 77). The philosophical religion which makes use of natural theology, Spinoza states here, leads to 'a higher kind of salvation' than can be derived from revealed theology.

It is therefore no great leap for even novice Spinoza readers to see how man's capacity for justice, charity and especially obedience tie into Spinoza's claims about the nature of political stability. Obedience is fundamental for a peaceful society. Political stability according to Spinoza is strengthened when we are aware that we obtain our highest good in the knowledge and love of God. However, we do not love God in order to have a stable state, which is temporal and external, but for the love of something everlasting and internal of which our highest good consists.

Spinoza writes in the *Treatise* that outward expressions such as rituals and 'ceremonies contribute nothing to human happiness [*beatitudinem*] and are only relevant to the temporal prosperity [*temporaneam foelicitatem*] of the state' (TTP v-3, p. 69). True and lasting happiness or salvation is connected to certain inner convictions that can always assist us, irrespective of the continuously changing (political) circumstances and vicissitudes of life (TTP Annotation 33, p. 271–272).

The TTP then not only aims at the separation of philosophy from theology, it also proposes the separation of theology from politics. The essential teachings of theology involve, among other things, finding a lasting love of God. Politics however, is concerned with matters of external laws and ever-changing circumstances. Spinoza argues that philosophy and theology are separate yet overlapping [42], as is the case with the theological and the political, to which we now will turn.

4. Internal and External Religion

Spinoza treats the relation between the theological and the political in the second part of the *Treatise.* 'The time has now come to enquire how far this freedom to think and to say what one thinks extends in the best kind of state' (TTP xvi-1, p. 189). In the final five chapters of the *Treatise* Spinoza endeavors to prove that allowing the freedom to philosophize is no threat to the peace in the Republic, but that forbidding this freedom would seriously endanger the peace (TTP subtitle).

Why does freedom not pose a threat to peace? Spinoza bases his argumentation on an analysis of natural right: that is the way in which nature determines, and, at the same time limits the power of each particular thing. The state, Spinoza argues, does not have the power, and therefore not the right, to force people to think in a particular way. In society people retain their natural right to judge for themselves. And although they have relinquished *some* of their freedom to act on their own judgment *as agreed to in the social contract*, nonetheless, the state cannot force them to think in another way than nature determines them to think and feel (TTP xvii-1, p. 208). There can only be peace if a government is wise enough to understand and respect the necessary laws of human nature which affirm that there are many differences in how people think, feel, and act (TTP xx-4, p. 251).

According to Spinoza the best kind of state is a democracy, defined by him as 'a united gathering of people who collectively has the sovereign right to do all that it has the power to do' (TTP xvi-8, p. 200). The people's representatives, assembled in the 'supreme council' (TP xi-1, p. 752), need the freedom to think and speak in order to determine the best laws (TTP xx-7, p. 242). Furthermore, forbidding citizens the right to voice their true thoughts will inevitably lead to a society in which flatterers and hypocrites are valued, while honesty and love of truth is outlawed, which will undoubtedly lead to protests, that is, disturbance of the peace (TTP xx-11, p. 244).

But does peace—i.e., collective harmony—not require the curtailment of individual freedom (the individual right to think and say what one wants), and inversely, does not a society's endorsement of individual freedom and diversity necessarily threaten collective harmony? Spinoza does not deny that there exists tension between the two: 'Undeniably, there are sometimes some disadvantages in such freedom' (TTP xx-10, p. 254). An excessive, licentious freedom would disturb the peace, whereas a tyrannical order and 'harmony' would end all freedom: '(. . .) experience seems to teach us that peace and harmony are best served if all power is conferred on one man. (. . .) But if slavery, barbarism, and desolation are to be called peace, there can be nothing more wretched for mankind than peace' (TP vi-4, p. 701). This is why he searches for a balance between collective harmony and peace on the one hand, and individual freedom and diversity on the other. He also warns that upsetting this balance is a problem for peace as well as freedom. In other words: in the best kind of state there is no freedom without peace, and no peace without freedom.

My premise that the *Treatise* is a unified and coherent whole requires not only understanding a necessary balance between individual freedom and societal peace but also the distinction between internal and external religion, something which is also discussed by Rosenthal [43], Frank & Waller [44], Giardino [45] and Juffermans. The underlying importance of these related distinctions in fact *connects* the theological part of the *Treatise* to its political part. One's inner *idea* of God, Spinoza explains, should be of no concern to the state. The state authorities should not care whether people think of God as a legislator or as nature's fixed order. It is of no concern to the state whether its citizens understand the divine law by means of the imagination or by means of reason. For them the only thing that matters is that people obey God. However, how one *acts on* this idea of God, i.e., 'outward piety' and one's behavior in terms of justice and charity—are expressions of external religion which fall entirely under the jurisdiction of the state.

In chapter ixx of the *Treatise* Spinoza proceeds 'to demonstrate that religious worship and pious conduct must be accommodated to the peace and interests of the state and consequently must be determined by the sovereign authorities alone.' (TTP xix-2, p. 328). In Spinoza's view, state laws would prohibit church ministers (who are in fact civil servants)

from using their power and influence against the state. Furthermore, the state has the legal authority to prosecute and enforce strict public criminal justice. Nevertheless, laws cannot ensure salvation because the knowledge of God required for salvation rests not in authority but in the *heart*. In this sense theology and politics are most definitely separate domains.

Yet, the practice of justice and charity has 'the force of law only via the authority of the state' (TTP xix-4, p. 239). However, the idea that religion falls completely under state jurisdiction is modified by Spinoza when he adds:

> 'I speak expressly of pious conduct and formal religious worship [*externo Religionis cultu*] and not piety itself or private worship of God or the means by which the mind is internally directed wholeheartedly to revere God. For internal veneration of God [*Dei interno cultu*], and piety as such, are under everyone's individual jurisdiction (as we showed at the end of chapter vii) and *cannot be transferred* to another. Furthermore, what I mean by 'the kingdom of God' here is plain enough, I suppose, from chapter xiv (. . .) (. . .) that a kingdom of God is a kingdom in which justice and charity have the force of law and command'. (TTP xix-3, p. 239)

At the end of chapter seven Spinoza alerts us to the difference between civil authority and individual rights, arguing that the interpretation of laws rests under the authority of the sovereign, while the interpretation of religion is an individual (and private) right. Since religion, he writes,

> 'does not consist so much in external actions as in simplicity and truth of mind, it is exempt from state authority. It requires rather pious and fraternal advice, a proper upbringing and, more than anything else, one's own free judgment. Therefore, since freedom of thought and freedom of conscience belong to each and every individual, and it cannot be conceived that anyone could surrender this right, every individual will also possess the supreme right and authority to judge freely about religion and to interpret it for himself'. (TTP vii-22, p. 116)

Spinoza understands internal religion as an *intentional disposition*. The state cannot force its citizens to either love and respect their fellows or else be punished by law. To love justice and charity, to love God, is something that people find within themselves. Religion is not a matter of coercion. People can find meaning and the importance of the divine natural law, the understanding of which is an internal process best nourished where people are free to think for themselves.

However, this does not mean that everyone has an absolute right to say and write what they want. People are not free to express subversive opinions that deny the sovereign's legislative rights (TTP xx-9, p. 254). Additionally, denial of the fundamental articles of faith is prohibited (TTP xiv-11, p. 178). It is important to note that the freedom to philosophize as described here is not the same as the 21st Century Western conceptions of freedom of speech and freedom of expression.

Spinoza writes in chapter xx of the *Treatise* that governments do not have the power, that is, the right 'to control people's minds to the same extent as their tongues'. To a certain degree sovereign powers can ensure that 'a very large part of the people believes, loves, hates, etc. what the sovereign wants them to' (TTP xvii-2, pp. 210–211). However, it will never be possible to have all people think exactly the way the state-powers want them to think. No sovereign power can take away the individual freedom to think, judge and feel as one naturally does.

What *can* be enforced is behavior. Since behavior is the defining feature of faith in the theological part of the *Treatise*, this has created the 'contradiction' that some have found particularly troubling in Spinoza's account of internal and external religion. For what is the difference between internal and external religion when Spinoza writes:

> 'Any pious act becomes impious if it entails harm for the whole state, and, conversely, there can be no impious act against a neighbor which is not deemed pious if done for the preservation of the state. It is pious, for instance, if I hand over my cloak to someone who is in dispute with me and aspires to take my tunic, also. But in a situation where this is judged prejudicial to the preservation of the commonwealth, the pious thing, rather, is to bring him before a court, even if he will be condemned to death'. (TTP xii-10, p. 242)

When Spinoza writes that a pious citizen brings a law breaker to court Spinoza does not imply that such a citizen should do that out of a desire for retribution. For a philosopher who denies that people have a free will this would make no sense. Laws are necessary in order to protect society against those who have not understood—either by means of the imagination or by means of reason—that our highest good consists in the love of God and our neighbor.

However, to better understand what is at stake in the perceived contradiction between the individual freedom of internal religion on the one hand, and the state-controlled religion on the other hand, requires a two-pronged approach: firstly to differentiate between *internal* intentions and *external* behavior, and secondly to connect *theological* obedience to *political* obedience. Internal religion we have defined as an intentional disposition in which we desire to do good for no other reason than out of love for God and our fellow man. This inner drive, this 'good will' as Kant would put it, cannot be instilled through coercion, and in this sense theology and politics need to be kept strictly apart.

However, there is also a sense in which theology and politics belong together. The divine law states that we should love our neighbor wholeheartedly through acts of justice and charity. However, that which is just and charitable in a society is *decided* by the sovereign powers. Without society there would not be justice nor charity as everyone would decide for himself what is good and bad. For the faithful therefore this means that obeying the laws of the state is *also* a religious matter, because in matters of justice and charity, state law and divine law are one and the same. In other words, it is in *obedience* that we find the key matter on which theology and politics overlap.

We may conclude that on the one hand, aspects of theology and politics are separated by Spinoza. The internal religion, the knowledge and love of God that leads to salvation, is a matter of the individual alone. The external religion, the rule over public religious life, its doctrines, its judgments about morals, its ceremonies and its stories (TTP xix-15, p. 245), is a matter of the State alone, ensuring that the church not become 'a state within the state'. Yet, on the other hand, Spinoza sees the necessary unity of internal and external religion because without religion, piety and obedience no state would, as Seneca put it, 'last for long', and without the state there would be no 'kingdom of God'.

5. Conclusions

In this article I argued that Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* is a coherent work.

First, I argued that the *Ethics* makes clear that intellectually derived salvation is a gradual process which takes place in this life, including cognitive, affective and ethical elements. In the salvation of the wise reason and faith combine, because the man who is led by reason is also the religious man who desires the good for himself and for the rest of mankind, or, what amounts to the same thing, loves his neighbor as he loves himself. When we examine spiritual salvation and its love of God as described in the *Treatise* it too occurs as a gradual process although it lacks an *intellectual* understanding of God's eternal nature. The revealed divine law is understood by the common people as God's commandments, rather than his eternal decrees, and God is imagined by the common people to be as an exemplar of justice and charity, rather than the cause of the fixed order of nature. In this way simple men and women will be eager to obey God, and to imitate God, and perform acts of justice and charity. This will guarantee the *ethical* salvation of the ignorant. Furthermore, because they can put their trust in a loving father who is at the same time imagined as the almighty, but just king of the universe, they can enjoy peace

of mind. In this way the *psychological* salvation of the common people is also possible. In Spinoza's hands, I argue, one can understand without contradictions, the two kinds of salvation, and that both theology and philosophy can lead to a life of peace and love. However, only philosophy leads to *intellectual* salvation.

My second premise regarding cohesion in the TTP concerns the relation between theology and politics. Here too the separation and interdependence model apply. The moral element of theology I argue is intrinsically linked to the legislative nature of politics. Among the various basic distinctions between 'internal' and 'external' religion in the *Treatise*, I argued, is the important distinction between the *moral sphere* that lies outside the control of the state, and the *legal sphere* that falls under state authority. Therefore, Spinoza separates theology from politics, but also connects the two. He separates theology from politics because he stresses that theological knowledge of God, which we need for our salvation, is an individual and internal affair in which governments must not interfere. However, he also brings the theological-political together, because Spinoza argues that without piety the state's stability is at risk. If the sovereign engages in coercion and violence to enforce authority, it undermines the kingdom of God which could be realized by the laws of the state.

Religion, and the obedience it teaches, according to Spinoza, is therefore indispensable for a well-functioning society. It helps prevent that civilians become rebels, and leaders become tyrants. Furthermore, true religion allows each individual to think and say what they want. Spinoza's *Treatise*, in other words, sketches an ideal religious society where theology, philosophy, and politics work together—each within its limitations—to ensure a democratic Republic that is pious, peaceful, and free.

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Article

From Reality without Mysteries to the Mystery of the World: Marilena Chaui's Reading of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

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Abstract: This article offers an overview of Marilena Chaui's reading of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP). Chaui has published numerous books and essays on Baruch Spinoza. Her two-volume study *The Nerve of Reality* is the culmination of a decades-long engagement with the Dutch philosopher, and her research has been a valuable resource for generations of Latin American scholars. From this extensive output, we focus on Chaui's main texts on the theological-political, concentrating on her analysis of the concept of superstition and the philosophical language of the TTP, which Chaui calls a "counter-discourse". Spinoza's enduring relevance for the interpretation of contemporary phenomena is clarified by Chaui's analysis of the TTP, which establishes a fundamentally political understanding of superstition.

Keywords: Baruch de Spinoza; theological-political treatise; political philosophy; superstition; Marilena Chaui

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1. Introduction

This article seeks to introduce readers to the work of Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chaui, with particular focus on her valuable contributions to the study of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TPP). This is no small task, since Chaui's work, devoted to different aspects of the work of Baruch Spinoza, spans more than five decades. According to Santiago, Chaui's reading "constitutes one of the richest, most substantive readings ever performed of the Dutch philosopher (. . .), endeavoring as it does to rigorously analyse Spinozian philosophy as a whole, while renewing numerous aspects of the specialized literature and offering original perspectives" ([1], p.2). In order to avoid a superficial overview of Chaui's Spinozism, we will concentrate on two main issues in Chaui's reading of the TTP, which, together, formed a guiding thread in her decades-long reflection and writings, namely *superstition* and *philosophical language* in Spinoza's TTP.

For different reasons, Chaui can be seen as participating both directly and indirectly in the powerful, renewed interest in Spinoza which took place in France in late 1960s[1] [2,3]. There, some of the standout works of the period include Martial Guéroult's *Spinoza: Dieu*, Gilles Deleuze's *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, Alexandre Matheron's *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, and Louis Althusser and his group engaged in rereading Marx based on a decisive "detour" through Spinoza[2]. Already a professor and researcher in the Department of Philosophy at the University of São Paulo (USP), in October 1967, Chaui arrived at Clermont-Fernand University to continue conducting research for her dissertation, under the direction of Victor Goldschmidt. It was at that moment that Chaui

[1] To read more on the biography and thought of Chaui, see [2,3].
[2] Montag, W. Preface [4], p. xii.

began her work on two vital issues of Spinoza's philosophy: the critique and rejection of the negative and of contingency.[3]

As a PhD student, Chaui attended courses taught by Deleuze and Foucault in Paris VIII University, and became familiar with, and eventually a close friend of, Claude Lefort. Additionally, "through a tremendous stroke of luck, she was on hand to witness the Parisian May 68, which, in her own words, left her with a lasting impression of the 'experience of revolutionary possibility'. Chaui's political-intellectual adventure, however, would come to a premature end when she decided to cut her grant short and return to Brazil" ([1], p. 3.) in December, 1969. In 1970, Chaui completed her doctoral dissertation, entitled *Introduction to a Reading of Spinoza* [Introdução à leitura de Espinosa], and defended it following year at the USP.

Chaui's return to her native Brazil was a sobering experience of contrasting national realities. The South American country was undergoing one of its darkest moments in recent history: by 1968, the military-civilian dictatorship entered a new, more repressive phase in which basic individual rights and liberties were undermined. Policies of control and terror found their way into the universities too, and it was for that reason Chaui decided to cut her research short and return to Brazil, forming part of resistance efforts against state-intervention into the USP's Department of Philosophy.

In this political context, Chaui changed her dissertation topic and gathered together her studies of the TTP—comprising the same notes that this article will examine. She said about this period:

> Given the terrible circumstances the left was facing, I felt I had the political and moral obligation to write something that made sense to people living in Brazil. I continued working on my doctoral program, but I left behind the topic of negation and contingency (or better still, embraced the concept of self-cause and absolute necessity) and began to study Spinoza's political texts, focusing on superstition and violence in a work that at that time no one was focusing on—the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [. . .] In the early 1970s, we not only had to fight for the existence of the department, we also had to cope with state-led terror and the dwindling hope that underground revolutionary groups could, at least, physically survive, since, as far as their political viability was concerned, their days were numbered. When we left home for the university, we never knew if we would come back that night. We did not know if our students or colleagues would be there the following day. The DOPS (Department of Political and Social Order) was in the classrooms and the teachers' lounge was wired with listening devices. A colleague would sometimes disappear, and nobody knew if they had gone into exile, if they were being tortured in prison or if they were dead. It was a period of pure fear. ([5], pp. 305–306))

In a later statement, Chaui claimed that her analysis of the TTP was written "under the sign of the dictatorship", where philosophy is practiced as a "critique of the instituted". It was, Chaui insisted, thanks to Spinoza that she managed to comprehend Brazil[4]. From that moment onward, Chaui employed a Spinozian perspective in order to understand the origin and function of authoritarianism in Brazil, as well as the question of ideology. That she could do so, and so convincingly, is a testament to Spinoza's enduring relevance regarding the interpretation of contemporary phenomena.

The aim of this article, however, is not to explore how the Brazilian dictatorship influenced her reading of the TTP, or how she "applied" Spinoza's philosophy to understand a contemporary political reality. Instead, the principal objective of this paper is to present

[3] "My idea was to study the absence of the negative in Spinoza's philosophy, because I was influenced by Gérard Lebrun's interpretation of Hegel. Lebrun was my undergraduate professor and taught our first course in graduate school, explaining Hegel's negation of the negation, using the example of Spinoza as a perfect counterpoint to the Hegelian position. Thanks to Merleau-Ponty, I was also very interested in the issue of indetermination and contingency, whose counterpoint was the Spinozian absolute necessity", in ([5] p. 299).

[4] Cf. the interview titled "C'est grâce aà Spinoza que j'ai pu comprendre le Brésil". *Le Monde*, Paris, 04/07/2003.

Chaui's singular study of Spinoza's philosophical-political categories, which is strictly philosophical and universal. As Gayatri Spivak stated in her presentation of Chaui's collected works in English: "Chaui's specificity is Brazil, as Étienne Balibar's is France, and Partha Chatterjee's India. Readership of English and French have had no difficulty in finding what is universalizable in the texts of these latter two. We hope that they will proceed in the same way with Chaui"[5] ([3], p. xi).

But what is it that makes Chaui's analyses universalizable? Chaui's choice to focus on Spinoza's understanding of superstition offers one possible clue. Better still, it is the method she chose to address this topic that holds part of the answer. Chaui distanced herself from systematic or structural readings, as were common under the historiographic paradigm of Guéroult in the 1960s ([1], p. 6); by contrast, under the influence of Merleau-Ponty, Chaui sought to find "a constellation—an invisible grouping of stars, an issue that by being absent-present plays an organizing role [. . .] The constellation is a mesh. We shall not seek out the Spinozian system, but rather, a certain mesh. In doing so, will we lose sight of the systematizing intention behind the *more geometrico*? Perhaps. But on a different level, we will recover the polemical intention in Spinoza that, if philosophy finds itself lacking, reduces that philosophy itself to a skeletal structure" ([6], pp. 129–130). As Santiago underscores, by choosing to search out Spinozism at the site where it is "absent-present"—incidentally, an area largely denigrated by Spinoza's interpreters—one may find the driving force or motivation behind his philosophical system.[6] According to Chaui, that site centers on "the topic of superstition—based on which the Spinozian discourse calls for further research and itself becomes available for acquisition" ([6], p. 130). Santiago adds:

> Why does superstition deserve such centrality, and how does it enable this near-miracle by which a classic allows us to speak of ourselves and think through our own problems? In Spinozism, the entire problematic of inadequacy is connected to the issue of superstition, and, by extension, imagination, finalism, and falsity; furthermore, the philosopher's innovative approach, rooting the phenomenon of superstition in our very nature, banishes the facile images of the philosophical tradition: brute ignorance, credulity, and all the residual thoughts that science is meant to overcome. By tracing all of these intricacies, Chaui's analysis establishes a fundamentally political understanding of superstition. Superstition is a form of power exercised through fear, of violence as a resource in the political field. It is, in sum, authoritarianism. "The theory of superstition is the theory of violence", since it possesses an "authoritarian character", and it is therefore "necessary to extirpate superstition and the authoritarianism it engenders". Several passages of [Chaui's] dissertation reinforce this association, making the case that, by studying superstition, what is at stake is to understand how political authority establishes the social field from which it emerges as the enemy, making use of political violence to such an extent that politics itself becomes impossible. ([1], p. 7)

In *Imagination and Power: A study of Spinoza's Political Philosophy* [7], Diogo Pires Aurélio stated that the components of Spinoza's political theory are not to be found in his explicitly political texts—where the parallel with Hobbes is on display—but more in the "depths of his ontology". Similarly, Chaui established, with her own method of detection, that political implications can be drawn from the most elemental bases of the Dutch philosopher's thought. It is our intention to show how Chaui uncovered Spinoza's practical politics by focusing on superstition. But this is not all. More specifically, we shall address how the issue of superstition is explored and made evident through the logic and method proper to the philosophical language of the TTP, which Chaui calls a "counter-discourse". Chaui reads in the *Theologico-Politicus* a philosophy that is practiced

[5] In the mentioned book [3], two articles are connected to the thematic of this special issue: "Power and Freedom: Politics in Spinoza" and "Religious Fundamentalism: The Return of the Political Theology". We decided not to bring both articles to this text since they are already translated to English.

[6] "The key is the central motive that gives meaning, or origin, "not as a past 'cause', but as an uneasiness that guides the work to make itself present" ([1], p. 6).

as a "critique of the instituted". That critique, in her view, is addressed to the "theological imagination of the era", a critique with which "Spinoza destroys the divine foundations of religion and the state" ([8], p. 95).

In this article, we will examine first how Chaui explores Spinoza's participation in the religious debates of his time, showing that the theological-political crystallizes context-dependent themes. Then, offering a philosophical approach, she investigates the Spinozian notion of imagination by considering the problematic of finalism and inadequacy. In this way, she highlights the connecting links between the first part of the *Ethics* and the TTP, as if Spinoza, writing the TTP, had put to work the ontological critique and argument present in the first part of the *Ethics*.

The second section will be on Chaui's analysis of superstition as a fundamentally political concept. Chaui studies the application of the imagination and desire in Spinoza, where what is at stake is the adequate comprehension of a given people's imaginative regime and their singular *ingenium*. This perspective is concerned with the anthropological and symbolic realm, wherein certain beliefs, habits and customs thrive and are reproduced, wherein the anthropological and symbolic universe of the Hebrew social body constitutes the material base for the development of a specific political field and a form of State. That is, on this second point, Chaui explores the Spinozian notion of imagination by considering its *productive* quality, which allows us to grasp, in a more adequate way, the relations of power, authority, and obedience of a determined social body.

Finally, in the last two sections, we will consider how Chaui interpreted Spinoza's philosophy as containing a special method to comprehend political realities, and studies opaque experiences that ask to be understood and deciphered. The TTP, then, is the lens that Spinoza's philosophy offers to readers to uncover the mysteries of a given reality.

2. Debates on Religion in the 17th Century

In the preface to TTP and in several letters, Spinoza clearly explains the factors that led him to write the work, which can be summarized in two objectives: to demonstrate that there is no form of speculative truth in the Scriptures, but only moral and religious teachings; and to explain the contradictions in prophetical narratives being not divine mysteries, but products of precise material conditions related to cultural, historical, linguistic, psychological, and political variations, by means of a historical, critical, and philological method. Undoubtedly, the character of this method is in sharp conflict with the basic religious and cognitive habits of his time. However, as Chaui observed, it should not be missed that, when writing the TTP, Spinoza intervenes in the debates of the early modern rationalism and among Protestants of the 17th century. The first part of Chaui's great work on the Dutch philosopher—*The Nerve of Reality* [8]—is dedicated to this historical context.[7] The analysis is justified by the way Chaui understands the role of the history of philosophy in an author's approach: to show that "a philosophy interrogates the experience of its time, it is constituted by that experience and it is also constitutive of it, so that history is not a mere context external to the work, but history emerges from the work itself, clarifying itself in it and clarifying the work too" [9]. In other words, in her view, the relationship between the oeuvre and history is internal. Such an approach captures Spinoza's subversion clearly, in comparison with his predecessors and contemporaries, and unravels problems and arguments which are stated only implicitly in his works.

The 17th century was the golden age of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands in economic, social, cultural, and political terms. Baruch Spinoza experiences both its heyday and decline, and the TTP is written in the interim period of political upheaval leading to the decline of the Republic. It should be added that the book was published two years before the brothers Johan and Cornelis de Witt had their bodies mutilated in public by a mad horde poisoned by the provocations of the monarchists and orthodox Calvinists.

[7] In the first chapters of the book [8], Chaui addresses the main philosophical themes in the 17th century, the Dutch historical context, and the misinterpretations that led Spinozism to be considered a fatalistic philosophy, and Spinoza a deist, atheist etc. The following chapters are devoted to the misinterpretation of Spinozism in Europe after the "Spinoza" entry in Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*.

The fields of faith and thought are no less agitated. Stimulated by the Renaissance, the Reformation, the new natural philosophy and Baconian rationalism, and then, by Descartes and Hobbes, there is a dispute about different meanings of reason, inner light, and faith. These debates are also, to some extent, influenced by the clash between revealed theology and natural religion ([8], p. 155). About the Dutch Republic of this time, Chaui notes:

> Religiously and theologically, it is permeated by dramatic divisions: conflicts between Marranos, disputes between fundamentalists and rationalistic deists, controversies between Talmudists and mystical Kabbalists, between conservatives and Messianic millennialists, willing to do all the sacrifices to realize the 'hope of Israel'. (...) Thus, the community's social, economic and political conflicts always arise overdetermined, that is, always appear in the form of religious and theological conflicts in which by the use of ancient terms—such as Sadducee and Pharisee—it seeks to translate the present tensions that divide spirits, wealth, and authority. This Netherlands experienced a time of naturalistic rationalism, promoted by the renewal of stoicism by Justus Lipsius, reinforced by Grotius and Bacon (introduced by Constantijn Huygens), Descartes (endorsed by Heidanus and Coccejus), and Hobbes (who Koerbagh and Velthuysen admired), but it also underwent a time of prophets, messianisms and millenarianisms. ([8], p. 44)

Spinoza entered into the intellectual exchanges between Christian groups, initially with English *Quakers*,[8] and later with Collegiants, unorthodox Calvinists, and libertines. In the *Nerve of Reality*, Chaui deals with the theme, paying special attention to the effects of the enthusiasm of "spiritual radicals" among the Reformed[9]:

> Enthusiasts are in a Catholic country, nicodemitas, the Spanish alumbrados, the millenarians of Marguerite of Navarre's court; in a Reformed country, the German theosophists and alchemists, the Dutch Anabaptists and Collegiants, and, in the mid-17th century, the radicals of the English Revolution (...). At its core is the *spiritus phantasticus*, the idea of inner light as inspired spiritual evidence, considered crazy by the Reformed and Roman orthodoxies, because, as they repeat to satiety, *finitus non est capax infiniti* (the finite is not capable of the infinite). ([8], p. 218)

The theological-political crystallizes some of these tendencies. A first important reflection of the Reformation is the inauguration of a kind of ontological democratism and a new type of relationship between the individual and God. The Reformation, by declaring most rites and ceremonies *adiáphora* and renewing the tension between spirit and letter, provides individual freedom for the Christian. The effects of these tendencies frightened the authorities of that time: "This spiritual intimacy between God and man could not leave the image of divine transcendence intact. Spiritual radicals find here the highest expression of what they seek in religion, that is, an ethical rebirth, not through a supernatural act performed by God through Christ, but through the experience of the union of each one with Him as parcels of life or divine heart" ([8], p. 224). That is why we have to look beyond the accusations of atheism that fell on Spinoza and understand that Spinoza does not simply oppose philosophy versus religion and faith, but philosophy versus the image of a divine transcendence, or how it will appear in the *Tractatus*, philosophy versus superstition. More specifically, Spinoza incorporates such discussions by developing the difference between *revealed religion* and *natural religion* in Chapters XIV and XV, not by coincidence, before the political chapters.

Marilena Chaui argues that the TTP is divided into three major parts. The third part is composed of the last seven chapters of the work, including Chapters XIV and XV, which,

[8] According to Chaui in [8], Spinoza's exchanges with quakers can justify the TTP's epigraph, a citation of John, the favorite apostle of quakers and others radical reformists: "*Per hoc cognoscimus quod in Deo manemus, et Deus manet in nobis, quod de Spiritu suo dedit nobis*" ("By this we know that we remain in God and that God remains in us, because he has given us of his Spirit"—John 4:131).

[9] In one of the chapters in question [8], special attention is given to the texts of Thomas Münzer, Jacob Böhme (*Aurora*) and the texts of the digger Gerrard Winstaley.

Chaui argues, operates on two simultaneous levels that interpenetrate and determine each other. At a first level, Spinoza contrasts the essence of revealed religion with what he calls another form of religiosity (natural religion). Unlike the revealed, which is caused by prophecy (the revelation of the divine will) and needs external elements (laws, rites, food prohibitions, jurisprudence), the cause of natural religion is the inner feeling of the presence of divinity in us, as the "spiritual radicals" defend. For this reason, the practice of this form of faith does not give rise to rites or ceremonies, and does not require laws. It is a relationship of each ones spiritual interiority with the others, echoing Christianity's beginnings, establishing an ethic of justice and fraternity among human beings.

This distinction is followed by another important one, that is, the difference between the Hebrew and Christian religions. Unlike the former, the latter is neither inaugurated as a political regime nor is it erected in the form of a state. Christ, unlike Moses, is only a teacher, not the founder of a state. He teaches truths for the salvation of the spirit. One is a particular religion for the Hebrew people, having a singular essence, while the other's character is universal. Thus, in Chaui's reading of the TTP, Spinoza concludes that the Christian religion only embraces politics when it is deformed into a revealed Christian religion, when the theological authorities appeal to the Old Testament. Only by fraud, violence and a desire for domination, she highlights, are the two Testaments combined and political principles produced from the Bible. In other words, in the Christian world there is no written and mystical foundation for the defense of theocracy or monarchies under divine law, which is why defending them with the support of the Bible is fraud and domination.

Having demonstrated in the opening chapters of the TTP that the theocratic nature of the Hebrew State must be seen as a historically determined singularity, the cause of which is the particular nature of the Hebrew people, it follows that it could only impose itself as a universal model of politics and religion in an aberrant, violent manner. Therefore, after excluding the revealed religions as a device to conceive political reality, Spinoza suggests to the reader a form of a natural religiosity, in which it is easier to see that religion concerns the private space, the intimate personal forum of each one, which is opposed to the public space of politics where other subjects, the *multitudo*, are located. By completely distinguishing religiosity from the political field, a space is opened to deduce a new, general foundation for politics.

Even more subversive, Baxter clearly perceives, is the consequence of this idea as it appears in Chapter XVI of the Theological-Political Treatise, which does nothing but repeat what enthusiastic diggers do not cease to proclaim when they break the natural and divine foundation of the hierarchy (consequence of the identity between God and Nature or of immanentism): the use of natural law to affirm that democracy is the most natural of political regimes and, with this, to destroy the natural and divine system of patriarchy in the family and in government, and, therefore, to affirm the children's right of revolt against the father and the subjects against the ruler. (...) Thus, Chapter XVI comes to the definition of democracy as "the union of a group of men who collectively hold the full right to everything that is in their power". Since law (*ju*s) and power (*potentia*) are the same, the first extends as far as the second; because, in democracy, the identity of law and power is the institutional cause of the political body and its conservation, Spinoza can write: "I think, with this, having clearly and sufficiently shown what are the foundations of democratic power (...) Furthermore, I wanted to specifically express that power because it is the one best suited to my purpose: to show the usefulness of freedom in a Republic" ([8], p. 230).

3. Superstition as a Political Concept: Spinozian Counter-Discourse

According to Marilena Chaui, the Spinozian corpus is appreciated most fully when we grasp it as rooted in its time. That is, Spinoza's body of work does speak to us or offer us lessons because it is directly relevant to our times, or, alternatively, because it somehow addresses questions that are timeless in nature. Spinoza's writing speaks to us as a form of

thought, i.e., "as a way of confronting opaque experiences that ask to be understood and deciphered, demanding that a new thought be developed and an unprecedented utterance be spoken, since what needs to be understood and enunciated has yet to be thought or spoken. This is the instituting dimension of Spinoza's work that reaches us when we are attentive to the temporal difference that gives it identity and posterity" ([8], p. 45).

Through his concept of substance—singular, absolutely infinite, complex, and the free, efficient and immanent cause of the universe (*causa sui*)—, Spinoza finds the bedrock for the demonstrative and positive dimension of his discourse, a device which illuminates the confusion of an entire epoch. That is, his discourse confronts the opaque and confusing images which impede free thought and action ([8], p. 94). The TTP forms part of Spinoza's effort to discern and elucidate opacities, and it is the contemporary "theological-political edifice" ([8], p. 96) in particular that Spinoza's seeks to critique. According to Chaui, the "Spinozian counter-discourse" attacks its three main pillars: (i) the theological-religious; (ii) the theological-metaphysical presupposition; (iii) the moral theological. Spinoza is interested in more than just mechanisms of concrete power and domination within a broader repertoire of knowledge. He addresses his critique to the "theological imagination and its images" that are rooted in all imaginative activities. That is, Spinoza does not "just" criticize religion or those particular religions that establish the common ideas about God and Nature. His attack on the contemporary theological tradition is against the commonly reproduced and widely held images—the theological image of passions and a determinate image of politics and power (of its origin, legitimacy, and quality). Regarding these "pillars", Chaui writes:

> The first target of the Spinozian counter-discourse is the religious-theological pillar, in which God and Nature are grasped through the prism of analogy: both would be substances, however in different senses. His second target is the theological-metaphysical presupposition of that analogy and its consequences; that is, the images of creation, finality and divine, omnipotent and unknowable will, from which is born the image of infinite transcendence, the separation of being and power, and negative theology, which precludes the finite from ever knowing the infinite, promoting the idea of ecstasy and fusion in the absolute as a regenerating act of faith and grace. The third target is the moral-theological pillar, built on the imaginary union of freedom and willpower in God, and freedom and guilt in humankind, with all its consequences: predestination, chosenness and final judgement by God, sin, repentance, salvation or damnation for human beings. ([8], p. 94)

These pillars hold an image-producing structure, which acts in concert with inadequate ideas about God, Nature, and the human condition. Worth noting, in the Spinozian vocabulary, a "structure"—in this case, a system of life endowed with values, duties, penalties, explanations of the world, in terms of its origin, functioning and ends—is denoted by the Latin word *fabrica* ([1], p. 10). In several sections of Spinoza's work, we see direct attacks on this type of formulation. There are two examples from the *Ethics* that are of special interest here: the appendix of Part I (dealt with in the next section of this article) and the preface to Part III. In the latter, Spinoza asserts that the geometric deduction of human affects will surprise those who treat them as only vices and against all reason. As Chaui points out, Spinoza "rejects theological morality's double denaturation of human being" ([8], p. 94).[10] We should recall Spinoza's words in the *Ethics*, III, Praef.:

> Most of those who have written about the Affects, and men's way of living, seem to treat, not of natural things, which follow the common laws of nature, but of things which are outside nature. Indeed they seem to conceive man in nature

[10] Chaui explains: "Where does the terrible theological image of passions come from?"; "Combining the Adamic myth, the Platonic concupiscent soul and the stoic idea of passion as a counter-nature, adding to this combination the Aristotelian metaphysics of the plurality of substances and the Jewish idea of creation, in which man is a substance created immediately by God, superior and better than Nature, but endowed with corruptible free will", ([8], p. 94).

> as a dominion within a dominion [imperium in imperio]. For they believe that man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself. And they attribute the cause of human impotence, not to the common power of nature, but to I know not what vice of human nature, which they therefore bewail, or laugh at, or disdain, or (as usually happens) curse. And he who knows how to censure more eloquently and cunningly the weakness of the human Mind is held to be Godly. ([10], p. 491)

This brief detour through the *Ethics* serves to bring into focus one of the most powerful legacies that modernity has inherited from the theological tradition—produced and circulated among the four "pillars"—and which forms part of the battle waged by the TTP: "the theological tradition produces the image of *imperium in imperio* (dominion within a dominion" ([8], p.94)[11]. As Chaui points out, "the choice of the word *imperium* is far from accidental":

> Originally meaning the unconditional power to impose laws, enforce them, and apply the use of the sword, imperium in modern language means "sovereignty". The words become central in Protestant morality, seeking it out in the Reformed version of the Apocalypse of John ("And hast made us to our God a kingdom and we shall reign on the earth") and in the Cabalist interpretation of the structure of the universe, the Tree of Life in which the final sephiroth, Malkith and the Kingdom of God and first man's sin, the seditious desire to become an "empire within an empire", a sovereign against a sovereign. Now, Spinoza not only says that the theological imagination regards humans as a vice-ridden imperium, but that it also conceives Nature imperialistically. The mark of the imperium, as its origin suggests, is its unique being. The human being and Nature therefore can only be rivals, destined for mortal struggle, and ethics can only be found beyond Nature, that is, in sovereign mankind—the cause of both virtue and of the powerlessness and volatility of passion. By man's own volition he transgresses natural law, wishing to impose on Nature his own law, which, being that its source is corrupted, violated and disturbs Nature. Natural law is the divine law that is accessible to reason, the decree of the will and the divine intellect that is comprehensible to mankind. To violate and disturb it, the human will raise up against God in an irrational gesture, "vain, absurd, horrifying". In one fateful act, the theological imagination either elevates man—placing him as sovereign before another sovereign—or brings him down and demonizes him, disowning, deploring, mocking and censuring him, demanding he abandon his own nature, taken as a contravention of nature, and that he finds another nature to make him virtuous and praiseworthy, since, if passion is deformed freedom, virtue must be obedience to the decree of the true sovereign (...). The serenity to "not laugh, not deplore, not censure, but rather understand" suggest that ethics remains to be written and that in order to write it, the moral pillar built to deny man—by denying his being, having been found to be falsely elevated—must itself be demolished. ([8], p. 95)

This passage demonstrates the value of reading the TTP in connection with this part of the *Ethics*. Spinoza confronts the "double denaturation of human beings posed by theological morality" with a philosophical manoeuvre that seeks to naturalize affects. As Chaui shows, this naturalization does not mean simply taking affects as natural in the sense of empirically demonstrable feelings: "it is because we are, by our very nature, *metaphysically* affective beings" ([8], p. 95). It is obvious: we are not in fact all-powerful beings in control of our affects nor possessing sovereign free will. We are our appetites and

[11] It should be observed that the term *imperium* is difficult to translate with a single word in English, since neither sovereignty, nor State, nor dominion, nor government express the complexity of a political structure which is composed by laws and institutions, but also by a collective imagination and affects.

desires—efficient natural causes determined by the relations between the power internal to our being and the power of external causes. Therefore, the passions are as natural as actions, that is, properties of human nature. If so, a fundamental conclusion can be drawn about the theological tradition. Chaui writes: "virtue is not found in voluntary obedience to decrees and ends imposed by divine will, but through the increased intensity and strength of our internal power, by which we become adequate causes of our own thought and action" ([8], p. 95).

In order to become the adequate cause of our own thoughts and actions, we must know ourselves; that is, we must demand of ourselves that we build knowledge. The theological pillars and their images, as discussed above, act as unbreakable barriers to create knowledge. To the same extent, the need to combat theological tradition is not just about defeating dogmatic tenets, censorship, and the creation of mystery-enshrouded worlds, in contrast to a form of thought grounded in faith. It is instead an attack on the theological tradition which obstructs the search for adequate knowledge, the true knowledge of human nature that allows us to be the causes of our own actions and thought, i.e., that we should be allowed to create the liberty to think and act. The theological tradition is therefore an *active* nonknowledge, a powerful structure that constantly impedes the exercise of reason.

The confusion surrounding human nature has repercussions in the political field. Chaui reminds us that while the *Tractatus Politicus* is not manifestly concerned with theological matters, that work opens in a manner similar to the preface of the third part of the *Ethics*.[12] Beyond doubt, the decisive step towards achieving the complete and perfect conclusions of the TP was the "counter-discourse" of the earlier TTP, whose target was, as previously described, the "theological-political pillar". There too the notion of *imperium* plays an important role, showing that "Christianity, founded on divine transcendence, built the legal-political pillar of *imperium* as a voluntary (. . .) and theocratic will, because it comes directly from God's grace or special favour bestowed on his representatives as the *imago Dei* on Earth" ([8], p. 96). Despite the fact that Christianity provided early modernity with the foundational political model of *imperium*, it is important to recognize that Christianity has roots in Hebrew theocracy:

> Of all the countless Christian formulations—orthodox or heretical, Catholic or Protestant, medieval or modern—there is a prevailing conception of God without which politics cannot be thought. It is this same concept that interests Spinoza, much more so than the different political theories that he does not even bother to mention nor examine, with the exception of that which serves as the foundation of all others—Hebrew theocracy. Endowed with intellect and will, God is a Person, as defined by Roman Law, and a triple Person, according to the creed of Nicaea. As a person, he is the subject of law, owner of his dominium, the world (. . .) The State, incarnated in the ruler, as per the mediaeval and modern theologians, is a Mystical Person. Even when bathed in clear Aristotelian light, theology seeks to attenuate the shadowy nature of theocratic power (. . .) Even when the state is no longer defined in theocratic terms, as mystical person, it does not cease to be person. ([8], p. 97)

Chaui's position can be clarified by her interpretation of the concept of *causa sui* or the single absolutely infinite and complex substance, which is the free and efficient immanent cause of the universe, based on the simple formula *Deus sive Natura* in the fourth part of the *Ethics*, which constitutes the bedrock allowing Spinoza to confront and shed light on the confusing, opaque images of his time[13].

[12] "Philosophers conceive the affects by which we're torn as vices, which men fall into by their own fault. That's why they usually laugh at them, weep over them, censure them, or (if they want to seem particularly holy) curse them", in ([11], p. 503).

[13] "*De Deo* is not, explicitly, a political text. However, because in it we follow the most incisive demolition of the theological imaginary, in it we find the demolition of the foundations of theological-political power and, therefore, the conditions for the determination of the political field without the bounds of theology", in ([8], p. 95).

Chaui summarizes Spinoza's conclusions in the first part of the *Ethics* in a wonderful expression: a "necessary ontology" ([12], pp. 95–128)[14], without contingency or mystery. Contrary to what is maintained by Judeo-Christian thought, Spinoza shows that the world is not the result of a contingent cause—that is, from God's free will, which could have not created the world if he either felt disinclined or did so with inscrutable designs. In last instance, if the existence of the world were necessary, God's omnipotence and divine freedom, as far as the theologians and philosophers are concerned, would be effectively annihilated. The TTP embraces this "counter-discursive" thrust unique to its era, also levelling its critique against the idea of a voluntary cause that acts contingently—that is, a divine or human will whose freedom would be proven by the contingency of its actions, by the power to do or not so something. In that sense, in Spinoza's thought, God also operates as a principle of knowledge that, in its *counter-discourse*, opposes the principle of personhood and mastery that the theological tradition imputes to God, with images of God *persona*. It is that same principle that allows Spinoza to attack the image of the state *persona*, contrarily deducing the foundation of the state and its sovereignty from the power of the multitude and human nature.

While the first part of the *Ethics* offers demonstrations at the level of ontology, in the TTP those formulations are applied against the genesis "of the same conception of God without which politics cannot be thought (. . .), Hebrew theocracy". The TTP thus goes to the heart of the superstitious system, grasping its historical causes, revealing and confronting it as system and *factory* of epochal images. Even more concretely, in the TTP Spinoza builds a philosophical-political critique of the inseparable bond between European monarchies and religion, and a transcendent model of power.

Theoretically, Spinoza's critique of superstition inaugurates a new relationship with language and provokes a displacement from the meaning of the sign to the idea, from the imagination to the intellect. (. . .) Historically, the critique of superstition takes a different tack: it takes politics and religion in its sights. It attacks the Calvinist clergy's use of the Old Testament in order to transpose to Dutch mercantilism the theocratic state of the Hebrews. The theocratic regime follows the Old Covenant—between God and the chosen people, the Hebrews. The New Testament displaces the divine pact onto men and the New Covenant refutes the clergy's pretense to control temporal matters. Superstition is allowed to dominate men by preserving their fear, flattering them with rewards, castigating them with punishments. To transform Christianity into the state religion is to use the superstition of the many for the benefit of a caste: the clergy and the royalty. The royalty thus receives a religious foundation for its political authority, while the clergy enjoys a legal cover for its ideological tyranny. The pairing of political and religious authority –therein lies what the critique of superstition sets out to combat ([6], p. 132).

This specific theological conception of divine personality—given by the Christian tradition—as transcending will and intellect continues to mark the contours of still-emerging political modernity and its definition of the nature of good governance—its origin, proper forms, and legitimacy, enabling the passage through which "theology becomes political theology" ([8], p. 98). Chaui adds: "[Political theology], based on the idea of revelation and the Roman precept of the authority of *antiquitas*—which allows it to use the legal foundations of Roman Law and Hebrew Law—feeds superstition and is fed by it" ([8], p. 98). The question then becomes: "What is the secret link uniting superstition and political theology?" "Could there be a theology that is not also political?" ([8], p. 98).

4. The TTP as Lens: Desire and the Genesis of Superstition

"If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, no one would be in the grip of superstition. But often, they are in such

[14] In an interview, Chaui asserts the following about this expression: "Spinoza performs an unprecedented philosophical subversion because it is the rigorous and flawless elaboration of what I call the necessary ontology. It is a subversion, because Judeo-Christian theology, modern metaphysics and contemporary ontology are dimensions and stages of the construction of hegemonic western thought, that is, the ontology of the possible, entirely rejected and criticized by Spinoza", cf. [9].

a tight spot that they cannot decide on any plan. Then, they usually vacillate wretchedly between hope and fear, desiring immoderately the uncertain goods of fortune, and ready to believe anything. While the mind is in doubt, it is easily driven this way or that—and all the more easily when, shaken by hope and fear, it comes to a standstill. At other times, it is over-confident, boastful and presumptuous. Everyone, I think, knows this, though most people, I believe, do not know themselves. [. . .] That's how crazy fear makes men. The reason, then, why superstition arises, lasts, and increases, is fear" ([11], pp. 65–67).

Introducing here in the preface of the TTP the topic of superstition, Spinoza states the two main conditions which make superstition impossible:[15] wherever individuals can always decide with certainty (universally), or if chance shows them the way (by way of luck). By revisiting a classic topic dealing with the relation between human beings and contingency, the philosopher transposes his hypothesis already demonstrated in the *Ethics* onto the plane of experience[16], while at the same time offering an unprecedented response to the discussion of how humans relate to chance. Unlike the "classical responses" on offer (Stoic or Aristotelian; virtue or praxis), Spinoza does not argue that the uncertainty experienced by individuals resides in the aleatory character of events or in the distribution of the good. For that same reason, Spinoza does not offer a means—deliberation or reason, both regarded as insufficient—to deal with contingency. According to Chaui, uncertainty is one of the core points in Spinoza's argument. Uncertainty leads Spinoza to introduce a new element in the debate around contingency: the nature of the goods that are desired—that is to say, their uncertainty. By arguing that, behind uncertainty, there is an *instability regarding the possession of the things* one regards as good or bad, Spinoza sheds light on the fact that human beings consider those goods as things uncertain. Contingency then does not refer to whether good things will come to pass or not, i.e., their distribution by fate, but rather, to the uncertainty of the things themselves. We should recall here the definition presented in the *Ethics*: men and women do not desire something because it is good, but rather, consider something to be good because *they desire it*[17]. As Chaui argues, Spinoza here subtly introduces a new idea: uncertainty lies at the heart of each individual's *desire* for that which they consider good. We are here in the realm of the passions, although Spinoza does not take this to mean vice, but rather, desire, that which defines things as good. After a certain point, excessive desire and uncertainty regarding the desired object can create superstition, and, as Chaui observes, this can make human beings slaves of that dynamic. The game to which contingency subjects us is, in the final instance, a game of passion—much less to do with temporality—waged, by degrees of *intensity*, between my passions and the passions of others.

Therefore, what is uncertain is not the aleatory distribution of benefits, but rather, the good itself. The desired object is uncertain, finding itself—whatever its nature may be—subject to contingency, whereas our desire, as an extension of our *conatus*, strives to conserve itself. Spinoza here effectively introduces two new elements into the classic topic of chance: the movements provoked by the excesses of desire and the object that is desired. This intense passion regime gives way to powerful affects, caused by the recognition of the uncertain presence of that which is desired by whomever either desires it or already has obtained and wishes to hold on to it: fear and hope. As demonstrated in the *Ethics* and in

[15] "The preface begins with a conditional and negative proposition, a peculiar characteristic of Spinoza whenever, in order to demonstrate the need for a concept, it passes through the hypothesis to be rejected—any negative proposition is an absence of definition and, therefore, of reality. (...) The hypothetical judgment allows the disjunctive, and one of the disjunctions is apoditic, the other, therefore, absurd. The use of this type of judgment appears whenever the exhibition starts at the level of experience, where there is a quarrel of opinions that can only cease when one of the disjunctions is demonstrated in its apodicity. It is this passage through the apoditic that determines the final categorical judgment", in ([6], p. 133).

[16] The productive principle of *causa sui* allows us to understand the "ontology of the necessary" and the causal network that determines all existing things. Following this principle, Spinoza demonstrates in the first part of his *Ethics*, Proposition 33: "Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced". Therefore, in the scholium 1 of this same proposition, he deduces: "that there is absolutely nothing in things on account of which they can be called contingent". The contingent is "a defect of our knowledge", "because the order of the causes is hidden from us". ([10], p. 436).

[17] Cf. *Ethics*, III, Proposition 09, Scholium, ([10], p. 500): "So *desire* can be defined as *appetite together with consciousness of the appetite*. From all this, then, it is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it".

the *Brief Treatise*, both affects, fear and hope, must be thought of concomitantly[18]. What characterizes the two affects is their relation with the future and its uncertainty. Fear is defined by the risk of expecting some bad thing to pass, around which there are feelings of doubt; hope, in turn, deals with the aspiration than an uncertain good should come to pass—"whoever fears waits and whoever waits fears", in Chaui's pithy phrasing. Grasping this rationale is fundamental for shedding light on the three elements that are at the root of the genesis of superstition. In summary, the path taken to arrive at this realization consists of: (i) rejecting or recognizing the impossibility of a rational deliberation or action that could always and in every case handle chance (being that the matter at hand pertains to the passions); (ii) the immoderate desire felt by individuals for certain good things, which are independent of them; (iii) the uncertainty surrounding the act of obtaining and maintaining the enjoyment of those good things, which is expressed through the simultaneity of fear and hope[19]. In light of this argumentation, Spinoza is able to also conclude that superstition is not only connected to a hypothetical aleatory regime—determined by chance and beyond our powers to control or reason. Before that, it takes as its principle the immoderation of desire and the consequent fluctuation of spirits that this dynamic subjects us to[20]. As Chaui observes with respect to the TTP, we find ourselves here fluctuating between doubt and petulance; the fluctuation of the spirits (*fluctuatio animi*)—one of the main characteristics of superstition—consists in the impossibility to follow a certain path.

Spinoza grasps superstition as belonging to the realm of the passions and the imagination, not attributing it, as theologians do, to the hypothetical weakness of human beings when faced with divine purposes. The cause of superstition is not a cognitive problem, nor an indication of intellectual feebleness or mere "gullibility", but rather, the natural effect of the human condition. Contrary to that vision, the passions and fear are grasped as those affects that set us in search of portents, signs, rituals, promises, and so on. As Chaui observes, this is what drives human beings to interpret "extravagantly" the laws of nature (following Spinoza's words from the preface—"in amazing ways"), "as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are [*et quasi tota natura cum ipsis insaniret, eandem miris modis interpretantur*]. Few sentences later, in the third paragrapher, Spinoza writes about the "delusions of the imagination" [*imaginationis deliria*] ([11], p. 66). A similar idea, we find in the appendix of the first part of the *Ethics*: "they seem to have shown only that nature and the Gods are as mad as men" [*nihil aliud videntur ostendisse, quam naturam deosque aeque ac homines delirare*] ([10], p. 441).

Chaui here reminds us of the etymological origin of the Latin word *delirare*: to lose the *lira*—to fall out of the groove, pass the limit, as in a wanderer who loses their way. This word was associated with madness, extravagance, senselessness, the foolish—all those who have lost their senses and all "contact with reality". Not by chance, Chaui draws on the Spinozian text to grasp that the effect of this loss of contact is to draw away from and cast scorn on reason. In the latter instance, Spinoza writes, "Everyone, I think, knows this,

[18] Cf., *Ethics*, III, Definitions of the Affects 13 ([10], p. 534): "XIII. Fear is an inconstant Sadness, born of the idea of a future or past thing whose outcome we to some extent doubt. See P18S2. Exp.: From these definitions it follows that there is neither Hope without Fear, nor Fear without Hope. For he who is suspended in Hope and doubts a thing's outcome is supposed to imagine something that excludes the existence of the future thing. And so to that extent he is saddened (by P19), and consequently, while he is suspended in Hope, he fears that the thing [he imagines] will happen. Conversely, he who is in Fear, i.e., who doubts the outcome of a thing he hates, also imagines something that excludes the existence of 15 that thing. And so (by P20) he rejoices, and hence, to that extent has Hope that the thing will not take place."

[19] Cf. *Ethics*, III, Propostion 50, Scholium ([10], pp. 521–522): "P50: Anything whatever can be the accidental cause of Hope or Fear. (. . .) S: Things which are accidental causes of Hope or Fear are called good or bad omens. And insofar as these same omens are causes of Hope or Fear, they are causes of Joy or Sadness (by the definitions 11/178 of hope and fear—see P18S2); consequently (by P15C), we love them or hate them, and strive (by P28) either to use them as means to the things we hope for, or to remove them as obstacles or causes of Fear. Furthermore, as follows from P25, we are so constituted by nature that we easily believe the things we hope for, but believe only with difficulty those we fear, and that we regard them more or less highly than is just. This is the source of the Superstitions by which men are everywhere troubled. For the rest, I do not think it worth the trouble to show here the vacillations of mind which stem from Hope and Fear—since it follows simply from the definition of these affects that there is no Hope with out Fear, and no Fear without Hope (as we shall explain more fully in its place). Moreover, insofar as we hope for or fear something, we love it or hate it; so whatever we have said of Love and Hate, anyone can easily apply to Hope and Fear."

[20] Cf. *Ethics*, III, Proposition 17, Scholium ([10], p. 504): "This *constitution of the Mind which arises from two contrary affects* is called *vacillation of mind*, which is therefore related to the affect as doubt is to the imagination (see IIP44S); nor do vacillation of mind and doubt differ from one another except in degree".

though most people, I believe, do not know themselves". The preface thus reinforces the notion that human beings are drawn to superstition because they first ignore themselves, falling prey to the easily manipulated forms of fear and hope, taking them as external references to paper over the absence of self-knowledge.

At this point, it is necessary to return to the appendix of the first part of the *Ethics*, in which Spinoza seeks, based on his genetic and geometric method of exposition, to grasp why, in the mist of immanence, transcendence, with all its images and prejudices, emerges. In a certain sense, some of the arguments marshalled in the *Ethics* can be found summarized in the preface of the TTP. It is on account of their being at one and the same time *desiring and ignorant* that human beings are led to prejudice, produce images of finalism (upon which all other prejudices depend) and presuppose that "all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end" ([10], p. 439). Finalism is an *all-encompassing structure* of reality that interprets the real along a schema of means and ends, be it natural things or God.

Finalism is neither a vice nor a weakness, but derives from the experience of human nature itself and from the relationship established between the mind and the real. The *Ethics* presents two clauses that allow one to grasp this experience: first, all human beings are born ignorant of the causes of things; second, all human beings have an appetite to seek out what is useful to them, being conscious as they are of their desire. That is to say, human beings project onto reality, as if the subjective *modus operandi* with which they act were itself an objective explanation. It then follows throughout the text that (i) by being conscious of our appetites and volitions, we believe ourselves to be free, ignoring the causes of these desires and simply finding satisfaction as if they were their final cause. For that reason, human beings attribute to God that He is governing nature in function of human use. The finalist doctrine thus completely inverts the nature of things—"this doctrine concerning the end turns nature completely upside down" ([10], p. 442). Spinoza concludes, along these same lines, that referring to "the will of God" can equal taking refuge in "the sanctuary of ignorance" ([10], p. 443). Beyond that, (ii) human beings, by judging everything to take place in relation to themselves, also judge that what is most important is what they deem to be useful, leading them to hold as superior that which affects them favorably. The consequence of this is that they are led to create notions to explain the nature of things, such as good/evil, order/disorder, good/bad, and so on, finding themselves free of appetites and fully conscious of their desires—from which are born dualist notions like sin/virtue, and others. This merely suggests that each individual judges, first, according to the disposition of their own mind, in what Spinoza calls the mode of *imaginari*, a partial knowledge of the causes that lead us to act—and secondly "takes the imagination for the intellect" ([10], p. 444). That is, we take the affections of our imaginations as the things themselves (creating, "entity of imagination"), which, in the last instance, says more about our imagination than it does about the world.

Where all prejudice is based in finalism—in the formula deduced from the combination of desire and ignorance—superstition is treated in the *Ethics* as a broader, more systematic version of that same dynamic:

> So it has happened that each of them has thought up from his own temperament [*ingenio*] different ways of worshipping God, so that God might love them above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed. Thus this prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds. This was why each of them strove with great diligence to understand and explain the final causes of all things. But while they sought to show that nature does nothing in vain (i.e., nothing which is not of use to men), they seem to have shown only that nature and the Gods are as mad as men. See, I ask you, how the matter has turned out in the end! ([10], p. 441)

Superstition is thus taken not merely as prejudice, but as that which is transformed and *takes root in the mind*. What does this mean? In Chaui's reading, superstition has a complex

structure—recalling the use of the term *fabrica* from the previous section.[21] Superstition spreads throughout the real, like an explanatory "pillar" or principle of intelligibility of the real—explaining what human beings are, why they are, how they must act, and so on; it is also the internal structure which reproduces superstitious images responsible for a *determinate* social and political reality with its own *ingenium*. Therefore, Chaui asserts that:

> Superstition sheds light on what history is. The Spinozian conception of history is not evolutionary, but rather, if the word can be allowed, is structural. Each form of the state is created through the determinate relation of political institutions and socio-ideological customs. The succession of balances and imbalances has a determinate meaning within the form itself and obeys no other totalizing principle that would provide it with a law to pass from X to Y. This is because Spinoza does not think in evolutionary terms of superstition as a residue of the past in the present, but as a structurally determined fact that can appear in any moment and in any political form. ([6], p.224)

On the use of the word "structure", Santiago offers an important insight:

> One could be led to thinking that the formula "structural history" is a tribute to the intellectual fad of its time, when everything was structurally analysed. But that is not the case (. . .). In truth, the basis for the notion of "structural history" is Merleau-Ponty, and it links up with Chaui's deft insight regarding the concept of structure and specifically the (mistaken) opposition between structure and event that embroiled parts of the Left; for her, it is a matter of undoing this false opposition by historicizing structure ("the structure is event"). ([1], p. 9)

We shall return to the "historicization of structure" in the next section. Before continuing, we must add one additional observation regarding fear as the cause of superstition. In the preface of the TTP, Spinoza links superstition and its cause—fear—in a manner that is not repeated in the appendix to part one of the *Ethics* (where the emphasis falls on finalism and inadequacy). However, the close proximity between superstition and *a fearful reality* is evident in both texts. As we read in the first lines of the above-cited passage of the appendix: "Hence, they maintained that the gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honor. So it has happened that each of them has thought up from his own temperament different ways of worshipping God, so that God might love them above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed" ([10], p. 441).

Therefore, the fundamental elements of Spinoza's theory of superstition are present in both texts: desire, the relationship with uncertainty, the irregular sadness of fear, the madness of *fluctuatio*, the imagination, the possession of the desired good things, their common nature (according to the inclination of a given people), even the question of governability that must take into account for human benefit. It is based on the combination of these elements, including the desire that "God might love them above all the rest...", that the TTP will explore the topic of superstition in a practical register, that is, in terms of how it reverberates in experience. Here, Chaui argues, superstition loses its apparently weak or

[21] Santiago further explores this issue and develops it in the following excerpt calling superstition the "system of fear": "Superstition is the name that can be given to what emerges from the moment when all this is systematized; as a result of the elevation of these elements to a form of system that explains, structures, organizes the real, including ourselves, our desires, our life. Superstition is a system of servitude. Its secret is the transition from the occasional and fortuitous to the necessary, systemic, structural. Qualitative transformation of the elements of our condition that superstition achieves precisely by disregarding variation, by the rarity of transitions, by the suppression of the environment; in the end, it ends the story so that your empire is as perfect, as perennial as possible. Its finished form is fatalism, to be understood in the precise sense of mystification of tensions, stiffening of the world, exhaustion of the new, ontologization of freedom and happiness (only in the beyond, paradise, the post-revolution, the post-reforms), of servitude and unhappiness (everything in this world, in this modern condition), of conscience (a substantial fact), of ignorance (which either could not be diminished or, on the contrary, would be easily overcome). We would like to understand the term superstition in this broad sense, which allows us to think of the "order of common life" that Spinoza speaks of in the Nazi camps, blind obedience, hatred of the different. But also think about the means to face it. Having recognized its secret—the dampening of variation—and its greatest effect—fatalism—the first gesture of struggle can only consist, without illusions, of restoring variation, returning to the environment and tensions, in such a way that even rediscovery of natural servitude, that is, restored to its place in the coming and going of our power, is already a gain", in ([13], p. 17).

inoffensive attributes in which, mistakenly, we could regard it as "just" a form of madness, delirium, inadequacy of thought or irregularity. The concept of the theological-political denudes the authoritarian and violent face of superstition by transposing it onto the plane of political experience. Drawn from fear and accompanied by the sad passions (anger, ambition, deceit), superstition gives way to conflict and civil war, interminable conflicts between different superstitious structures, and, most serious of all, is the cause for power to reign over the spirits. Citing a section of the preface of the TTP, Chaui reminds us that "nothing is more efficacious than the superstition that governs the multitudes" ([8], p. 212). Rulers recognize that nothing is more effective for maintaining their rule than control over the fear of the collective, and rendering uniform all fear, hope and expectations.

In the 17th century, the source that gave superstition a degree of stability was religion, or more precisely, the theological tradition. There too lies its foundational political role –along with its texts, cults of worship, rituals, ceremonies, and laws—as the site where the *fluctuatio animi* is stabilized. As previously mentioned in relation to the theological tradition and its images, theological power formulates not only a metaphysics but also a theory of *imperium* without which European monarchies could not have maintained their rule. This involves a great deal more than religious interference in political affairs. As Chaui suggests, Spinoza is instead targeting something much more serious: that imbrication involves the invasion of a particular superstitious structure, that is, the incursion of a certain structuration of social life in the political arena formatted according to a "system of fear" that both ruins that sphere while producing servitude. Theological domination is even worse because it is invisible—"the complete possession of the other", "creating desired obedience". Politics then becomes political theology: a form of power exercised through fear, the control of the spirits, confused obedience, actively impeding the search for freedom and, above all, the recourse to violence and the authoritarian exercise of power.

As Chaui recognizes, the problem is not properly speaking the violence or authority "invariably present in social life and therefore the obligatory material of political science"[22]. Instead, the problem, and precisely what characterizes the political expression of superstition, is what Chaui terms the "*aggravation*": the aggravation of violence and authority that characterize the expression of superstition when it invades and conquers the political sphere. Aggravated superstition in politics is a form of tyranny.

The theory of superstition is the theory of violence. With it, one can delineate a philosophy of history, a political science, and a date. If in the capitalist world thus constituted, violence is determined in the form of the class struggle, in the emerging capitalist world, the historical particularization of violence is accomplished by the permanence of ideology and feudal politics, that is, by the intrusion of the clergy into temporal power. With Spinoza, the critique of superstition has a starting date.

Structurally, the critique of superstition operates as a focal point, spreading through the doctrine in a constellation of three questions: the ontological question (the critique of providence and finalism brings with the demonstration of the true nature of substance and causality); the ethical question (the critique of voluntarism and servitude clears the way to freedom of the soul in the search of bliss); the political-religious question (the critique of civil tyranny and religious fanaticism lead to a typology and a realist theory of power, as well as an absolute separation between faith and knowledge, faith and power). The idea of superstition connects a dual scheme. One is ascendant: it is its definition; the other is descendent: it is its manifestations—the origin and deformations of authority and the phenomenology of intolerance. Passion and imagination define the conditions of superstition. Obedience, tyranny, and fanaticism are its figures ([6], p. 225).

Finally, in light of this perspective, the distinctions between belief, thinking, and institutions assume a new relevance. Rational theology (an oxymoron) has the function of instilling religion with a "more solid base than the fluctuation of human passions",

[22] "The Political Treatise and the Theological-Political Treatise were written to define the possible field of violence, and not to deny it. Neither satire nor utopia. Politics.", in ([6], p. 190).

a stability that religion alone cannot attain ([12], p. 10). In doing so, rational theology is present as "the imposition of the image of authority as the source of constancy and solidity". Along those same lines, Chaui, advances a foundational reading based on the TTP: theology and philosophy differ not based "on the type of truth they attain, but on the type of practice they produce":

> Theology is the imaginary theory of contingency. Centred on the image of an omnipotent and transcendent will that creates and governs the world, the theological imagination offers explanations that preserve fear and hope, leaving humans in suspense before the unforeseeable plan of a higher power; (. . .) This is why the *Theological-Political Treatise* categorically declares that the only truth of theology is in teaching obedience (...). Hence, what separates theology and philosophy is not a sensible distribution of competencies, each one possessing exclusive, non-negating truths, where each could be considered a different arena of knowledge. Philosophy and theology are not distinguished by the content of their truths but rather by the different demands they pose to whomever wishes to think: theology demands obedience and intellectual submission; philosophy the free exercise of thought. ([12], p. 9)

In the TTP, the terrain of dispute between theology and philosophy is thus not concerned with the kinds of knowledge or the truth they instantiate. They are cast in opposition due to the different effects of practice they produce. The political register of theology is theocracy, authority, obedience, and servitude; and the practical register of philosophy—how does it then consist in the realization of the freedom to think?

5. The TTP as Lens: Creating a Counter-Discourse

Above we cited one of Chaui's most celebrated phrases: "theoretically, the critique of superstition in Spinoza inaugurates a new relation with language and stimulates a displacement from the sign to the idea, from the imagination to the intellect" ([6], p. 132). She stands: "From Xenophanes to Lucretius, the criticism of superstition has always been the privileged theme of Naturalism. Theoretically, Spinoza's criticism is inaugural. Its radical novelty is the relationship it establishes between the reader and the text (. . .)" ([6], p. 131). In the book *From reality without mysteries to the mystery of the world* [14], Chaui analyses in greater detail this relation, concluding that Spinoza develops a discourse in the TTP that is both capable of disassembling the imaginary discourse and its images, and laying the groundwork for a counter-discourse. According to Chaui, Spinoza neither sets out to inaugurate a "more" rational—or truly rational—truth, nor even less a truth different from theological truth. However, Spinoza practices a philosophy which creates a new language containing his method, committed to developing adequate knowledge. To that end, Spinoza, employs a critical method, providing a determinate discourse—based on a given socio-political reality—and its modes of structuring and grounding itself in the real, even where that means impeding free thinking and action. Chaui observes: "The true and free discourse can only be born and develop according to an internal necessity that unveils the engendering of all things and human practices, and which is offered as reflection and critique. Free discourse is that which is capable of proffering its own inside and that which makes possible and impossible—it is both *discourse and counter-discourse*" ([14], p. 97). The first step along that path is the employment of a real and genetic method of definition.[23]

Accordingly, Chaui structures the *Treatise* in three large parts. The first is composed of a preface and six first chapters in which Spinoza employs a deductive approach, offering a real definition of religion. In Chapter VII Spinoza offers his interpretive method for *Scripture*. That method is inaugurated in the second part of the TTP, and follows an exegetical path of biblical interpretation based on the principle *ex sola Scriptura*. Finally, the third part returns

[23] "The reader of the TTP will see this operation take place on two levels: philology and etymology set out in search of the place of spontaneous emergence of words, (...). However, a third, underground level runs through the investigation: one that interprets the emergence of rhetoric and metaphor as instruments of political manipulation of the text", in ([14], p. 79).

to the deductive approach, offering a real definition of *imperium* and its natural foundation in politics. Many scholars diverge over the issue why Spinoza describes his method only in Chapter VII, and not in the beginning of the work. Another striking element is the manner in which Spinoza distances himself from the Cartesian method typical of the era, implying an ideal rationalist reading of Biblical texts, as his friend Lodewijk Meijer, in *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* ([12], p. 30). As stated before, Spinoza is not interested in the truth of these texts, but rather, in their unique meaning. This is the guiding principle behind Spinoza's use of the Protestant principle of *ex sola Scriptura*, removing any idea or concept external to the sacred text.

Chaui notes that it is quite understandable that Spinoza would only present his method after the first chapters. After all, according to Spinoza, to proceed to the knowledge of something, one has to start from the real definition of the thing that is to be known. Just as in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza proposes a real definition of the circle based on the cause that produced this object to be known, in the TTP, he investigates the productive causes of religion in order to subsequently develop, in an immanent fashion, a method that satisfies his object. It follows that it is necessary to understand the genesis of religion before trying to interpret the texts in which it is enshrined:

> Historian, ethnologist, philologist and political writer, Spinoza approaches the document and deciphers it through the figure of its authors, recipients, and censors, in such a way that reading leaves the singularity of the discourse intact and makes with that a plot of the text in such a way that the existence of a singular people comes into focus. The Hebrew people are the document, but they have a meaning that can be deciphered by their own way of constituting themselves as a document. Thus, not only will the text tell us about who were the people who produced it, but also, by making these people known to us, it will enable us to understand the peculiar nature of the text that it produced. ([12], p. 17)

Chapters I through VI address a particular revealed religion. Therefore, it is necessary to define that religion and provide a method of interpreting the texts in which that revealed religion manifests itself:

> Spinoza therefore constructs the real definition of the object "revealed religion" and presents its general properties in light of a particular revealed religion, the Hebrew religion. What is a revealed religion? A revealed religion is made up of divine messages or prophecies, given by determinate agents, the prophets. Therefore, it is necessary to know what a prophecy and a prophet are and if they indeed exist in every revealed religion—Chapters I, II and III deal with this very topic. (. . .) Rather than establishing the uniformity of beliefs and conduct (...) the diverse array of disputes, controversies and violence have always depended on the different ways in which they were read. It is therefore a question of what would have caused this variation and its terrible consequences, and, in the light of the answers found, to propose a new way of reading that respects the revelation, without infringing on religious precepts (of worshiping God and loving others) and ensuring the unity between peace and piety—this is the subject of Chapter VII, concerned with methodological innovation. The chapter on the method presupposes, therefore, the real definition of its object and offers an approach to revealed religion that proffered revelations in writing. Thus, the first six chapters (offering a rational definition of the object) are not incompatible with the seventh chapter (interpreting *ex sola Scriptura*), because their objects are not the same and the interpretation that will be carried out does not intend to rationalize the contents and the form of religious writings, but rather find its meaning, coming to know the language in which they were written and the history of the people who wrote and read them. ([12], p. 32)

This admittedly long analysis is fundamental for grasping Chaui's argument about the structure of the TTP: to understand how the TTP establishes a new relationship with

language and affects a shift from the sign towards the idea. Unlike Meijer, Spinoza does not intend to rationalize the contents and forms of religious writings, but rather, to find their meaning. However, the question remains: how is the text capable of constructing a philosophical language capable of effecting the transition from imagination to intellect?

As mentioned, according to Chaui, the three parts of the TTP form a logical and interlocking course of demonstration. In the initial part, Chapters I to VI, in keeping with the principle of developing a real definition of the object, Spinoza explores the symbolic field, grasping a given people according to their idiosyncratic madness while scrutinizing their imaginative regime in order to understand the structuring history of this superstitious system. The appropriate method then flows logically from that part, in Chapter VII. There, the exegetical method is applied to the *Scriptures*, until reaching Chapter XV, whose main consequence—made possible only as the groundwork had already been laid—is to propose a distinction between faith, natural light, and reason, and between theology and philosophy.

These two parts of the argument are premises for demonstrating that theology and philosophy follow different paths. However, this is not done by invalidating or denying the underlying superstition of the theological system. On the contrary, Spinoza acknowledges their points of contact and difference, trying to conceive the singular nature. Prophecy, Spinoza concludes, is also knowledge, but it is *imaginative* knowledge, which, in Chaui's words, "goes beyond what the intellect allows one to know and therefore falls *short* and is not true knowledge. This does not invalidate the prophetic imagination, as Spinoza makes clear that the prophet is not a theologian" ([12], p. 84). In Chapter XV, Spinoza states that, because revelation constitutes a productive system of images, i.e., of indicative and imperative signs, we cannot obtain true knowledge of God's essence and *potentia* through it. He thus outlines the proper place of theology, which, according to Chaui's reading, consists of:

> a system of images with a conceptual pretence whose scope is to obtain, on the one hand, the recognition of the theologian's authority (and not the intrinsic truth of his interpretation) and, on the other, the submission of those who listen to him, all the greater if it is achieved by inner consent. The theologian aims at the desire to obey and to serve. In this way, the difference between philosophy and theology becomes clear. Philosophy is to know. Theology, non-knowledge, is a practice of religious origin designed to create and preserve authorities by encouraging the desire for obedience. ([12], p. 84)

Having outlined the practical consequence of theology, which is none other than the authoritarian intervention in the field of politics, Spinoza at the end of the second part of the TTP, Chapter XV, ensures that "before moving on to politics, readers have been made to understand that the Hebrew state was a theocracy and why that state cannot be seen as the perennial rational model of all states" ([12], p. 84). If that state cannot be a model for others, then where should the foundations of a state be derived from? From Chapter XVI on, Spinoza in a third movement presents the foundations of political power, and the genesis of the State (or *imperium*), by making a rational reconstruction of political foundations. Thus, in the same way that Spinoza gives, from Chapter I to VI, a real definition of his object, justifying the use of his chosen exegetical method, from Chapter XVI onwards he develops the real definition of *imperium*, which will then require another method of demonstration. The TTP's argumentation takes us "by the hand" ([10], p. 446) to understand, following the uniqueness of each human activity (believing, thinking, and organizing), the need to apply another method to deduce the foundations of politics. If the basis of those three activities is different, their authorities must follow the same principle. That is, just as the first object ("revealed religion") led to the need for a method of interpretation all its own, the second will lead to the need for a *purely rational* deduction of the foundations of political power. In Chaui's words, the freedom of thought proposed in the TTP is the full visibility of political practice; the text, from within and from its foundations, "*creates its reader as a philosopher*"; a "speech without a master", which, on the contrary, denounces the source of authority.

> The genius of the Spinozian work is precisely in offering us the necessary separation between religion and politics, faith and reason, theology and philosophy through the discursive structure itself: it is in the form, not the construction of the text, that Spinoza lets us see the content or the theses proposed by the *Tractatus*. (...) The reader-philosopher also notes that, despite the sinuous and intricate form of the arguments, each of the chapters and the book as a whole always follows three main lines: the first traces the specificity of Scripture in the face of theological manipulations and thus indicates the way in which theological power is exercised; the second traces the difference between theology and philosophy and, therefore, the difference between authoritarian nonknowledge and free knowledge; the third, finally, traces the uniqueness of the Hebrew people and their document and then points out the difference between ideology and historical knowledge. Whatever the topic addressed, these lines will always be present, determine each other and allow not only to demonstrate the impossibility of theology to attain true knowledge, but above all to determine the origin of theology itself from the historical knowledge of the document from which it is an effect; an origin that it needs to hide in order to guarantee the exercise of a power that the text guarantees by sacralizing it and concealing it as a document ([12], p. 33).

As the TTP shows, the mystery is neither in the *Scriptures*—in its content or in the form of its text—nor in the impulse to consider it as mysterious; it is in the interpreters, "in the skill to turn words on and off, the theological adventures of theology created a book unable to survive without authorized interpreters. Reading has become the power of the few and the obedience of many" ([14], p. 96). For this reason, Chaui affirms that the TTP is not only a book where power and authority are considered, but a place "where speaking *is already an act of freedom*, because the form of that speech/writing has taken a position with respect to power and freedom in their links with knowledge".

Due to its content and form, the Spinozian discourse is internally articulated. His philosophy is born out of the radical criticism of a transcendent authority, installed in the movement of the *causa sui* and the *conatus* (...). At the same time, it reveals the intellectual and affective operations that support the movement of the true and the imaginary machinations, which activate devices for the concealed exercise of authority. (...) His discourse is also liberation. And the opening of the theological-political meets up with the final lines of Ethics: "If the way I have shown to lead to these things now seems very hard, still, it can be found. And of course, what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare"([14], pp. 97–98) [24].

We can now return to the question that was left open in the previous section: "and the practical register of philosophy—how does it then consist in the realization of the freedom to think?" The answer can be found in the *Theological-Political Treatise* itself, a work realized as a form of a "critique of the instituted" in past and present, where speaking is already an act of freedom and where discourse causes liberation, creating the reader as philosopher, to use Chaui's terms.

This is the case even after 350 years, according to Chaui. On the first page of *The Nerve of Reality*, she wonders about the possibility of recovering a classic in the present. Echoing Spinoza's Ovid-inspired words in the TTP, she wonders: how to reach the meaning of texts written in a language where words, idioms and motifs have been lost, in which the meaning of countless words has become incomprehensible and for which "we do not have

[24] On this point, Chaui adds: "If thinking is acting, putting yourself in the immanent movement of true ideas, thinking is already a practice of freedom. If man appears in all Spinoza's works, originally submerged in the waves of the imagination, ignorant and slave, it becomes essential to find the place where Spinoza's speech can be born, marking his own possibility as a speech of freedom. In the excavation of immediate experience, in the conflicting practices of each man in his relationship with others and with things, in breaking the obstacles that the hammer of intellect reduces to dust, the space opens up where freedom and happiness will excavate their paths. The place where Spinoza's discourse will be born is demarcated by the internal criticism of what would make it impossible: the critique of the limit form of authority, that is, of theological, metaphysical and moral tyranny and of its legitimate political manifestations", in ([14], p. 88).

dictionary, grammar or rhetoric?" With what strength will we overcome "the voraciousness of time that abolishes everything from the memory of men"?

Although we have presented a very specific aspect of Chaui's reading of the TTP, i.e., her interpretation of the political meaning of superstition, her method reveals a very original dimension, insofar as it combines a philosophical with a political reading of Spinoza's work, articulating several dimensions of his philosophy through textual analysis. Ontology, theory of knowledge, method, language, history, and philology, the same layers present in Spinoza's thought, are mobilized for the reconstruction of the discourse of the Dutch philosopher. Chaui's reading allows us to understand Spinoza's discourse in all its uniqueness, in its relationship with time, with history, and with the philosopher's own experience. By doing so, she unveils what is properly subversive in his philosophy, i.e., the way in which he simultaneously criticizes the dominant thought of his time while introducing a difference in the very way of enunciating that critique. Chaui reconstructs his discourse as a "counter-discourse" that dismantles dominant thought, asserting itself as an instituting discourse of an unprecedented thought. In other words, the construction of a discourse that is not only "against", but a discourse that, by criticizing that which exists, situates itself as a new way of enunciating the problems of an era. This is what Chaui's reading teaches us: a way of deciphering the opaque experiences of our present, as the author did and continues to do in relation to the Brazilian reality, or, as Jorge Luis Borges poetically expressed it: "Free of metaphor and myth, he grinds a stubborn crystal: the infinite map of the One who is all His stars" ([15], p. 285).

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Article

The Reception of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract: In the form of a case study and based upon novel material about the reception of Spinoza's Theological–Political Treatise (TTP) in Iran, this paper studies issues with the interactions among political, theological and philosophical ideas in the reception of Spinoza's TTP. The paper starts with the first Iranian encounters with Spinoza's philosophy in the Qajar era in the nineteenth century and then focuses on the reception of the TTP in the period after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The first translation of the TTP was prepared in the 1990s by Muḥsin Jahāngīrī, but he withheld the manuscript from being published. I discuss the arguments that led him to withhold the publication of his translation; in this context, it will be important to consider the tumultuous religious and political debates, and broader questions as to the legitimacy of political power will also prove relevant. The first doctoral dissertation in Persian about the TTP will be described, followed by a description of a digital translation of the twentieth chapter of the TTP, which was published after the 2009 election protests. The article ends with discussing translator Ali Ferdowsi's motivation to produce the first complete Persian translation of the TTP, published in Tehran in 2017. In conclusion, it will be discussed to which extent the theocratic political context in the country caused interest in the TTP.

Keywords: Spinoza; Theological–Political Treatise; Iran; Shia; Qur'ān; chain murders; democracy; Judaism; Enlightenment; freedom of thinking

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1. Introduction: A Historical Encounter between Spinoza and Iran

Numerous publications describe the translation of Spinoza's Theological–Political Treatise in Western languages and its reception in Western countries, but the ways in which Spinoza's 'second masterpiece' has been studied in Persian remains largely unknown. The reception of Spinoza's TTP in Iran can illustrate the entanglement of the European Enlightenment and the Middle East. Iranians of different backgrounds and political orientations started to read the TTP in the 1990s; that is, after two important dates in recent Iranian history; the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the Iran–Iraq war that ended in 1988. It seems the downfall of the Shah did not influence the reception of Spinoza directly. At first, the reading remained in line with the view that was developed throughout the twentieth century in Iran, namely that of the Dutch philosopher as a metaphysician that could be understood through the lens of Islamic doctrines. In the twenty-first century, however, explicit political readings emerged and the TTP became more prevalent and was studied with the context of the Enlightenment in mind.

The first Iranian encounter with Spinoza dates back more than 150 years to the French romantic race theorist Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, who twice worked as a French diplomat in the Qajar Iran, first as a chargé d'affaires (1856–1858) and then as ambassador (1862–1863). During his stay in Iran, Gobineau gave a copy of Descartes' *Discours de la méthode*—the first translation of Descartes' book into Persian—to an Iranian Jewish *Hakham* (wise man) named Mullā Lālihzār-i Hamidānī. In so far as we know, he was, probably, the first Iranian scholar to have expressed an interest in Spinoza's philosophy. Gobineau believed that the Iranian people needed the philosophy of Descartes more than the philosophies of Spinoza or Hegel because, unlike Cartesianism, they are

'oriental' and offer the Persian scholars nothing new [1]. Spinoza and Hegel are much closer to the thought of the peoples of 'Le pays du soleil,' Gobineau wrote [2] (p. 139); [3] (p. 135).[1] Instead, he wished to introduce 'Western' modernity to Iranians, which above all is represented by Cartesian rationalism and dualism, because these notions were unknown to the Orient, according to Gobineau.

Spinoza's works were discussed in greater detail in the twentieth century, which mainly coincided with the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979). In 1931, Prime Minister Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī (1878–1942) authored a Persian-language history of European philosophy in three volumes titled *The History of Wisdom in Europe* (*Sayr-i ḥikmat dar Ūrūpā*). Forty are dedicated to Spinoza in the second volume, in which the TTP is mentioned only once without any more detail. After the biography, Furūghī introduces Spinoza's thought, based on the *Ethics* and the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. In other texts of the same period, by Mullā 'Abdullāh-i Zanjānī (1891–1941) and Abul Hassan-i Sha'arānī (1902–1973), Spinoza is characterized as a Sufi-philosopher whose 'pantheist' ideas are comparable to previous Islamic mystics, such as Al-Hallāj and Ibn 'Arabī. In the Pahlavi period, however, there are no signs of Iranians paying heed to Spinoza's political and theological philosophy. Even Western philosophers working in Iran, such as Henry Corbin, emphasized the metaphysical nature of Spinoza's thought in comparative studies such as the comparison of Spinoza and Mullā Sadrā.[2] The first Persian translation of one of Spinoza's works was of the *Ethics*. It was completed in 1955 by an engineer named Manūchihr Dāvarī. He translated the work from a Russian version, as he writes in the foreword, which gives no further information. In addition to Spinoza's biography, the five pages of the translator's foreword also include the reflections of his own on the book. The translator writes about the God of Spinoza: 'The God that Spinoza introduces to us in the *Ethics* is far more logical and is superior to the one taught by most religions, and the method that Spinoza proposes is a very practical and rational, and is free from any superstition'. Using the *Ethics* IVp37s2 the translator adds: 'One of the pristine aspects of Spinoza's thought in the book is that, unlike the philosophers who claim that one must fight the emotions by the weapon of reason, Spinoza proves that reason cannot suppress the emotions and affects. Consequently, it results in a clear theory of state that proves that the idea of establishing a utopia is utterly baseless, and far from the facts' [7] (pp. 3–4).[3]

In the first few decades after the Islamic Revolution, there began a wave of professional translations of works of Western philosophy into Persian. At first the new regime did not counter/ban Western philosophy. Spinoza is no exception to this rule. The *Ethics* (1985) [9] was translated first, followed by the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (1995) [10]. An *unpublished* translation of the TTP was completed by Muḥsin Jahāngīrī in the 1990s. Other translations followed, e.g., chapter eight of the *Theological-Political Treatise* on the inauthenticity of the Pentateuch (1999)—in the following section, I will explain the strange choice for this little-known chapter [11], *The Principles of the Philosophy of René Descartes* (2003) [12], the twentieth chapter of the *Theological-Political Treatise* (2009) [13], the *Political Treatise* (2014) [14] and finally, in 2017, the whole of the *Theological-Political Treatise* [15]. It is notable that the TTP, translated by Ali Ferdowsi, is the last work by Spinoza to appear in Persian.

[1] 'Mais, toutefois, les deux hommes que les philosophes de ma connaissance ont la plus grande soif de connaitre, c'est Spinosa et Hegel; on le comprend sans peine. Ces deux esprits sont des esprits asiatiques et leurs théories touchent par tous les points aux doctrines connues et goûtées dans le pays du soleil. Il est vrai que, pour cette raison même, elles ne sauraient introduire là des élé-ments vraiment nouveaux'. Seidel [4] (p. 339); and Manāfzāda [5] (pp. 105–107) also discuss ths section of Gobineau's book.

[2] Notwithstanding the title of this chapter, (Did Spinoza adapt his philosophy from Mullā Sadrā?), Corbin himself does not believe that Spinoza took his philosophy from Mullā Sadrā, see [6].

[3] 'How it can happen that men who are necessarily subject to affects (by P4C), inconstant and changeable (by P33) should be able to make one another confident and have trust in one another, is clear from P7 and IIIP39. No affect can be restrained except by an affect stronger than and contrary to the affect to be restrained, and everyone refrains from doing harm out of timidity regarding a greater harm. By this law, therefore, Society can be maintained, 21 provided it appropriates to itself the right everyone has of avenging himself, and of judging concerning good and evil. In this way Society has the power to prescribe a common rule of life, to make laws, and to maintain them—not by reason, which cannot restrain the affects (by P17S), but by threats. This Society, maintained by laws and the power it has of preserving itself, is called a State, and those who are defended by its law, Citizens' [8] (p. 519). I adopt the system of the Studia Spinozana in referring to the *Ethics*.

This article is based on translations of Spinoza's works as well as Persian academic articles and books on the TTP. Further sources are newspaper essays and interviews with the translators, which I conducted in 2020–2021. Two major periods will be distinguished. Until 2009 the initial comparative reading of Spinoza, outlined above, dominated Iranian TTP studies. We find this view also in the first doctoral dissertation on the *Risālah Ilāhī-Sīyāsī*, as the TTP is named in Persian. It was defended in 1995 and published as a book in 2000. In the same period, the translator of the *Ethics*, Muḥsin Jahāngīrī, also translated the TTP, but he never published it. These thinkers construed Spinoza through an Islamic lens. To date, this reading of Spinoza is reflected in course syllabi on the history of philosophy at Iranian universities. The translation of the twentieth chapter of the TTP—commissioned by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation—inaugurated a new reading. The translation was started before 2009 but was published after the protests that followed the contested 2009 election. Spinoza's political views gained in popularity in this period, mostly as a reaction against the Iranian theocratic government led by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who decreed the Islamization of the humanities in 2009.[4] Since reformist governments promoted Western-style education, after the election and the protests that followed it, the Iranian authorities wanted to turn away from Western-style education to one more deeply rooted in Islamic Shia beliefs and values. To achieve that goal, a larger proportion of humanities curricula had to be devoted to the study of Shia Islam, while religious education also occupied a significant status both in curricular and extracurricular activities. This theocratic assault on the humanities, however, only increased demands for freedom of inquiry. In the following, I reconstruct this path to Spinoza and, in particular, the growing popularity of the TTP.

2. A Book Not to Be Given to the Vulgar

The *Ethics* was newly translated into Persian by Muḥsin Jahāngīrī in 1985. It was reprinted twelve years later when Mohammad Khatami became president. The latter's election in 1997 marks the beginning of the Reform Period (Iṣlāḥāt)[5], which initiated a second wave of translations of philosophical works into Persian. Spinoza's works were translated and soon translations of Western commentaries on his philosophy appeared as well.[6] This wave became possible due to the low cost of paper and the popularity of the idea of a Dialogue Among Civilizations (Guft-u-gū-yi Tamaddun-hā). Western philosophy became popular because it supported the idea of civil rights in Iran, combined with widespread protest against arbitrary governmental action. At that time, there were many protests against the regime's notorious chain murders of intellectuals and seizure of newspapers. Although the reformation project ultimately failed, during his presidency, Khatami, who himself had studied Western philosophy, supported intellectuals and stimulated them to redefine and adopt European Enlightenment thinking.

It is in this Reform Period that Muḥsin Jahāngīrī finished the translation of the TTP and gave it the title *Treatise on Religion and Government* (*Risālah-yi Dīn va Dawlat*), but he left it unpublished. According to his pupils[7], Jahāngīrī's religiosity prevented him from giving it to a publisher and thereby making the book available to a wider public. Before I examine this and other explanations, I will outline the translator's life and thought.

Muḥsin Jahāngīrī was born in 1929 in Qazvin to a rich and religious family. After some basic schooling, he left for Qom and Isfahan with the desire to learn Islamic religious sciences ('Ulūm al-dīn) such as fiqh, ḥadith and kalām pursued by the Islamic scholarly class. At this time, he was taught by Shia jurists ('ulamā) and achieved a great command of the Arabic language and became strongly attached to Islamic mysticism. He continued

[4] In 2009, and at the same time as the widespread protests in Iran, the current supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, ordered the purification or cleansing of the humanities, 'Teaching many humanities in universities causes disbelief in God and Islamic teachings'.

[5] Islamic Republic of Iran's 'reform era' lasted from 1997 to 2005—the length of Khatami's two terms in office. On the structure of power in Iran after Revolution, read more in [16].

[6] For instance, in 1996 Muḥammad Hassan Luṭfī translated the Karl Jaspers's Spinoza, in Die grossen Philosophen into Persian [17]; published by Tarḥ-i Nu in Tehran.

[7] Call interviews with Yūsuf Nawzuhūr and Muṣṭafá Shahrāeīnī in October and November 2020.

his seminary schooling through the upper Islamic grades (Ijtahād) and, thus, became a trained Shia jurist. Although Jahāngīrī studied Islamic philosophy, he was also interested in Western philosophy and, after finishing high school in 1954, entered the department of philosophy at the University of Tehran where he attended the courses of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Abul Hassan-i Sha'arānī, Yaḥyá Mahdawi, and Henry Corbin.

As a master's project, Jahāngīrī translated Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and received praise for it from his supervisor, Nasr.[8] It was not published, apparently on account of his scrupulousness in accurately translating Kant's terms. In 1972, Jahāngīrī completed his doctoral dissertation entitled 'A Comparative Study of Ibn 'Arabī's Unity of Being and Spinoza's Monism' under the supervision of Sayyid Aḥmad Fardīd and the advice of Seyyed Hossein Nasr. From 1975 onwards, Jahāngīrī taught graduate courses at the University of Tehran such as 'logic and methodology,' 'Western early modern philosophy from Bacon to Hume,' 'Theoretical Islamic Mysticism' for undergraduate students and 'Descartes' Philosophy' or 'Spinoza's Philosophy'.[9] Unhindered by the new rulers he continued to teach Western philosophy after the Islamic Revolution.

Jahāngīrī's works can be categorized into two types; first, those related to Islamic philosophy, mysticism and kalām, and second, the works related to Western philosophy. Of the former type, his book on Ibn 'Arabī (1980) is considered high-standard research and has also been translated into Arabic and Urdu [18]. An example of the second category is *Francis Bacon: The Man and His Work* (1990) written for the course 'Early modern history of philosophy'. His compilations of Western philosophy were mainly about the early modern age. Jahāngīrī also wrote a three-volume Persian book entitled *A Collection of Essays* [19], with the third volume (2011) dedicated to Western philosophy. His last work was entitled *Three Western Philosophers: Bacon, Hobbes, Spinoza* (2019), and updated the two previous books.

After the *Ethics* and the TTP, Jahāngīrī translated *The Principles of the Philosophy of René Descartes* in 2003. He was celebrated in 2002 as a prominent figure in Spinoza and Ibn 'Arabī studies during the second festival of Immortal Figures (Chihrahhā-yi Māndigār) [10], before his official retirement in 2008 and passing away in 2019. According to his students, politically he was a conservative figure who never overtly supported a political party or faction and always insisted that scholars should adhere to religious principles, and that philosophy and wisdom should be separated from politics.

Spinoza was already part of Jahāngīrī's 1972 doctoral dissertation, which he wrote in three years.[11] He was fascinated by Spinoza's behavior, life and devotion to philosophy and always insisted that Spinoza was an outspoken and honest philosopher whose outer self and inner self were in harmony, and whose life reflected his thought and philosophy. Spinoza, according to Jahāngīrī, is rightly considered as one of the most important post-Renaissance European philosophers. In spite of being free from all revealed religious

[8] 'After Dr. Nasr had read the translation, he told me it was very good but too much. I hope to publish this book after editing'. See the interview Mehr News Agency with Jahāngīrī.

[9] Additionally, several other universities in Tehran, including Shahid Beheshti University (1973–1975).

[10] Chihrahhā-yi Māndigār is the title of an annual festival held in cooperation with Iranian academies to celebrate the leading scientific, cultural and artistic figures of the country. See [20], See also [21].

[11] See [22] (pp. 203–204). See also, an interview with Jahāngīrī conducted by Mehr news agency on 15 November 2007. 'I consider Spinoza the deepest and most accurate philosopher after the Renaissance. Descartes, predecessor and according to Spinoza, the brightest star of that era, was more knowledgeable than Spinoza, but Spinoza was more philosophical than Descartes. Descartes wanted to develop a philosophy based on the modern sciences of his time, which was as far as possible compatible with, or at least not opposed to, the principles of Christianity. Thus, he was always concerned and not free in his philosophical reflections. However, Spinoza had no worries, he thought completely freely and independently, his philosophical thoughts were only based on the principles and findings of human reason, and neither the Torah of Moses nor the Gospel of Jesus has any sway on him, so to speak. Although Descartes seemed more religious than him, I think he is morally superior not only to Descartes but to all Western philosophers. According to Bertrand Russell, he is the most noble and beloved great philosopher of the West. Among post-Renaissance European philosophers, I do not know any philosopher who is as fascinated by philosophy as he is. Spinoza devoted his whole life to philosophy and thought of nothing but philosophy: neither did he marry, nor amass wealth, nor seek a position. Unlike Descartes, he was indifferent to courts and courtiers and did not even accept a university professor position. He loved philosophy undeniably and was so preoccupied with scientific thought and philosophical reflections that he seemed to have forgotten everything else, so that once when he was in Rijnsburg did not even leave house for three months'; see Jahāngīrī's foreword to the Ethics [9] (p. 13). Frederick Pollock and Will Durant are two scholars whose works Jahāngīrī referred to.

doctrines, Jahāngīrī believed that Spinoza should be studied by Islamic philosophers, because the Dutch philosopher was a like-minded soul and had himself, in a different way, benefited from Muslim thinkers. According to Jahāngīrī, through Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* and also through Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza knew al-Fārābi, Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Averroes. To give a concrete example of how Jahāngīrī compared terms within Spinoza's philosophy with Islamic kalām; of the scholium of *Ethics* Part 2: Proposition 3, Jahāngīrī writes that it is totally consistent with Ash'arism, remarking that 'most likely Spinoza learned it from '*The Guide for the Perplexed*'' [20] (p. 75); [22] (p. 203).

Despite his admiration for Spinoza, Jahāngīrī left his TTP translation unpublished. In a conversation at the beginning of a book published to honor him (2007), he explained this remarkable decision, saying 'I do not consider the publication of the TTP translation in the interest of myself and society' [23] (p. 21). About his personal interest, his pupils unanimously say that Jahāngīrī always asked God to forgive his sins in his classes, especially for translating the TTP, because he 'feared being the incarnation of the Qur'ān's verse about the fate of those who broke the convent with God'.[12] If students showed interest in the translation, his response was that they should mind their own business. Although Jahāngīrī states that Spinoza was a deist who believed in the existence of God, he also realizes that Spinoza did not practice any religious laws (sharī'a) himself, 'however, he advised others for going to church and practicing prayer. This is a moderate deism that can be found in Spinoza'.[13] Jahāngīrī justified his decision not to send the translated TTP to the press, by citing Spinoza's preface, arguing that the public should not gain access to it.[14] For Jahāngīrī, the TTP interprets the Torah rationally and philosophically, which implies 'that Spinoza expresses opinions that are not compatible with common religious beliefs' and would arouse the emotions of the masses. Jahāngīrī was anxious, especially, that Spinoza's critique of religion would be applied to Islam's holy and revered texts.[15]

Another reason for not making the book available to the public is the sensitive nature of Spinoza's argument in a period of tumultuous religious and political debates on the very idea of the religious state. The question as to whether ayatollahs should rule at all, was highly controversial. So, it is not hard to imagine that the publication of an Iranian TTP would add fuel to this kind of fiery debate and probably carry it to an Iran-wide audience as even far less radical religious debates had become immensely popular. A famous participant in these debates was Abdolkarim Soroush, who denounced Islamic government. Soroush was a teacher of young Iranian scholars who were inspired by Karl Popper's fallibilism and political ideas.[16] They were more interested in the form of rulership than in discussing who would be fit or unfit to lead a nation. Although Soroush has not written a text on the TTP and its criticism of priestcraft, we may in part infer his view of Spinoza's attitude towards the concept of prophecy from a Persian lecture in Paris, which also clarifies his ideas on revelation, the Qur'ān, etc. He said:

> Almost all Muslim philosophers after al-Fārābi were inspired by his idea that prophets are different from philosophers. My own opinion more or less has been based on al-Fārābī's attitude. Of course, you can find the reflection of these ideas in Spinoza as well. Someone who wrote an article criticizing me said that 'Soroush has taken his words from Spinoza'. Spinoza took his words from Maimonides who took his words from al-Fārābī. The fact is that if someone does

[12] Interviews with Yūsuf Nawzuhūr and Muṣṭafá Shahrāeīnī, October and November 2020; Qur'ān 3: 193: reference to translation used 'Our Lord!, we have heard The call of one calling (Us) to faith, 'Believe ye In the Lord,' Additionally, we Have believed. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, Blot out from us of Our iniquities, and take To Thyself our souls In the company of the righteous'.

[13] See a short documentary on Jahāngīrī's life, February 2012, prepared by Society for the National Heritage of Iran.

[14] See the interview Mehr news agency with Jahāngīrī, 'As Spinoza himself noted in the Preface to the book, he wrote it for philosophers who have the power to understand the meaning and non-philosophers he advised to refrain from reading it. I also do not consider it advisable at the moment to publish the translation that makes it available to the public'.

[15] Eventually, as will be seen later on, he said so to a student who wanted to write a thesis on the TTP. It is interesting to know Ali Ferdowsi, on the contrary, translates the whole book in the hope the Shai clerics will read it.

[16] For an analysis of Popper's political ideas, see [24].

> not know these roots, he will wrongly attribute these ideas to Spinoza, since Spinoza took them from al-Fārābī.[17]

These words of Soroush, however, were criticized by other Iranian intellectuals including Ali Ferdowsi, the translator of the TTP. He argued that Soroush did not consider what is new and radical in Spinoza. 'Fārābī, Ibn Tufail, Avicenna, even Khayyam, understand philosophy and theology as equivalent; two paths that produce the same knowledge about all things. For Spinoza, philosophy produces truths that theology cannot. Theology is an imposter, not an alternative to philosophy'. In reaction to Soroush' Popperian ideas Ferdowsi held that Soroush does not understand Popper either, 'otherwise he would have been unable to make that nonsensical statement that Khomeini is the greatest leader Iran has ever had since its inception by Cyrus the Great millennia ago! Soroush missed the most crucial point in Popper, the pertinence of a judgement to a proper context or function'.[18] Ferdowsi refers to Soroush's recent controversial interview in which he said 'Khomeini was the most literate and popular leader in the history of Iran'.[19]

Soroush's view, on government, however, was opposed by Shia jurists, during the 1990s, above all by ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi[20], who defended the Islamic Republic's doctrine of the absolute political guardianship of an Islamic jurist, being the lieutenant of God.[21]

During these controversies, publishing a translation of the TTP would have endangered Jahāngīrī. He was certainly aware of the risks of publishing books that discussed sensitive matters, as he was living in a time of regime-orchestrated assassinations of translators and intellectuals. Mohammad-Ja'far Pouyandeh, translator of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, was last seen alive leaving his office at four o'clock in the afternoon of 8 December 1998. His body was discovered 11 December in the Shahriar district of Karaj, south of Tehran, and he appeared to have been strangled. Majid Sharif, translator of *The Will to Power*[22], was found dead on the side of a road in November 1998. Mohammad Mokhtari, writer, poet, and colleague of Pouyandeh in the Iranian Writers Association left his house for shopping, but a month later, in December 1998, his corpse was found on the estate of a cement factory. These and many other intellectuals were assassinated in the so-called 'chain murders'. The first philosopher killed by the regime, however, was perhaps the Baha'i professor 'Alī Murād Dāvūdī who was Jahāngīrī's former colleague. During a wave of persecution of Bahā'īs, he was kidnapped on his walk to Laleh Park in the heart of the capital on an afternoon in November 1979 and never returned home, presumably one of the first victims of the emerging Islamic Republic.[23]

Yet, Jahāngīrī took the trouble to translate Spinoza's disturbing book, he saw in the TTP a guide to read the *Ethics* and found in it a device to understand its technical terms and the concept of 'method'. In addition to the translator's foreword and his footnotes to the *Ethics*, in varied works one will find Jahāngīrī's account of the TTP such as the chapter 'Spinoza's Political and Social Thoughts' in *Three Philosophers* and in two articles, 'The Life of Spinoza (in two parts)' and 'Spinoza's methods: Experience'.[24] For example, in order to clarify the concept of evil in Spinoza, Jahāngīrī makes use of chapter two of the TTP where 'the melancholy of Saul is called 'an evil spirit from God', i.e., a most profound

[17] See the Persian lecture by Abdolkarim Soroush in Paris 'Guftan az Hiss-i Nahān', transcribed on (drsoroush.com) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[18] The written English response, 15 April 2021.

[19] See YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXtRmu8EoZg) accessed on 2 March 2019.

[20] He has been named as 'having encouraged or issued Fatwā, or religious orders' for the 1998 chain murders assassinations of five Iranian dissidents. See, Akbar Ganji, The 'Master Key' in Chain Murders (iran-press-service.com) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[21] Ironically, Soroush himself, was once one of the earlier fans of orthodox movements leaded by the Ayatollah Khomeini to the degree that he was one of the key decision-making members in the Cultural Revolution council, which after the 1979 revolution closed universities for three years (1980–1983) and, after reopening, banned many books and purged thousands of students and lecturers from the schools.

[22] Daryoush Ashouri, Iranian translator of Nietzsche's works, considers the Majid Sharif version fluent and authentic. Call conducted on January 2021.

[23] 'Alī Murād Dāvūdī was professor in ancient philosophy at the University of Tehran. One of his most enduring works is a Persian book called *The Theory of Reason in the Peripatetic School: From Aristotle to Avicenna*, which still is one of the main sources for philosophy students in Iran.

[24] Many articles of *A Collection of Essays* are elaborations of publications that had appeared previously in different Iranian Journals. For example, see [25].

melancholy' [26] (p. 22); and chapter four where' . . . we ought to define and explain things by their proximate causes. . . . we are also ignorant . . . of how things are really ordered and connected' [26] (p. 58). On the TTP's method, Jahāngīrī holds that Spinoza followed the empirical method in his different books in spite of the fact that, according to Spinoza, experience does not give us true knowledge of the nature of things. Sense experience alone could never provide the information conveyed by an adequate idea, 'for instance, in the *Treatise on Religion and Government*, God does not rule people directly. Rather, His rule is through the rulers and experience confirms this' [25] (p. 14).

3. Spinoza's Critique of All Revealed Religion

Jahāngīrī not only translated the *Ethics* and the TTP but also supervised the first Ph.D. research about the TTP. In 1995, Jahāngīrī's pupil, Yūsuf Nawzuhūr (b. 1967), was the first to defend a thesis on the TTP. It dealt with pre-modern issues such as the relation between reason and revelation and between religion and government [27].[25] After his graduation and becoming an assistant professor at the University of Tabriz, the thesis was published in book form in 2000. At the University of Tabriz, Nawzuhūr taught early modern philosophy to undergraduates and gave courses to more advanced students on Spinoza's and Kant's philosophy. In 2015, when he was appointed social secretary to the Minister of Science for two years, Nawzuhūr, associated with the reform-wing tendency (Iṣlāḥāt) in Iranian politics, came to Tehran and, simultaneously, carried on teaching Spinoza's philosophy at the largest public university leading in the humanities, the 'Allāmah Tabātabā'i University.

Although Jahāngīrī had eventually approved the idea of writing a thesis on the TTP, he warned his pupil to 'be aware that Spinoza's critique of religion concerns only Judaism and Christianity. Although Spinoza had sufficient knowledge of Islam and the Qur'ān, his critique had nothing to do with our religion'.[26] Not only did Nawzuhūr want to write a thesis, but he was also eager to translate the TTP, but at his supervisor's advice he refrained from doing so. However, in his thesis he discussed Spinoza's main ideas in the TTP[27], such as 'Spinoza's method of interpretation'; 'Spinoza and the concept of divine law and the laws of religious tradition'; 'Spinoza's critique of Jewish exclusivity'; and 'The government in Spinoza's philosophy'.

More than twenty years later, Nawzuhūr, politely disagreed with Jahāngīrī's distinction between the Abrahamic religions, because, as he said, the need to reconcile science and revealed religion applied to all monotheistic religions both in 17th century Holland as well as in modern Iran.[28] In the preface, Nawzuhūr explained his motivation to do research as follows:

> During the doctoral course in philosophy at the University of Tehran, I felt the need to dedicate my doctoral thesis to that part of Spinoza's philosophy that is not welcome in Iranian academic research, that is, his theories of reason, revelation, religion, and government. [27] (p. 2)

In the last two pages of the preface, he makes two points that are clearly in line with Jahāngīrī's thoughts. He first reminds the reader that he is by no means an advocate of Spinoza's philosophy, and continues by saying that the purpose of academic research is not to defend, but to criticize ideas, and of course the first step in a critique of Spinoza is to understand his system. Nawzuhūr said that he had tried to express Spinoza's views with a kind of empathy, with Spinoza writing, 'in this research, I have tried to bring my written language somewhat closer to the language of theology and politics' [27] (p. 3). However,

[25] He used the English version of the TTP by Elwes, and the secondary literature of Pollock, Alisson, Parkinson and Wolfson.

[26] The interviews in October and November 2020. See also, An interview in the short documentary on Jahāngīrī's life. See also, Jahāngīrī's foreword to the *Ethics*, [9] (p. 17), 'although Spinoza benefited from great philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna, he remained alien to Islam during his life'.

[27] The interviews, October and November 2020.

[28] Call interview, January 2021, 'the scientific need of the early modern time was clearly in conflict with the religious prevailing, especially with regard to natural laws, and it appears to be a fact that Spinoza sought to resolve theological problems of his era through scientific interpretation of the Bible, which is to be found in all Abrahamic monotheistic religions'.

Nawzuhūr's critical view of Spinoza[29] simultaneously approved Jahāngīrī's words and reflects the academic climate in the departments of philosophy during the 1990s up until the present. Thus, there is nowhere in Nawzuhūr's works a direct reference to the idea that Spinoza's method of interpretation applies to the holy texts of all monotheistic religions. However, his argument indirectly implies that Spinoza's views could be extended to all these religions. Furthermore, there is a section in Nawzuhūr's book titled 'Is reason subject to the sacred texts or are the sacred texts subject to reason?' that tried to explain the notion of kalām.[30] He believes that Spinoza rejects the views of Jehuda al-Fakhar and Maimonides because neither observed the distinction between kalām and philosophy; for the realm of reason is truth and wisdom, and the realm of kalām is piety and obedience.[31]

We have reason to assume that although Nawzuhūr expressed his thoughts in the interviews more than two decades later, as far back as 1995 he believed that a critique of religion provides the only way out of the current crises of Iran, because if theological traditions remain untouched by reason, they will prevent the integration of Enlightenment values, such as the rule of law and human rights into Iranian culture. For him, the humanities and religion have different methodologies or are different kinds of scholarship. That would imply, we may conclude, that 'Islamizing the humanities', as the regime wanted, is opposed to the separation of theology and philosophy for which Spinoza argued in the TTP.[32]

4. Spinoza and Judaism

In November 2011, Mihr-Nāmih—a magazine in humanities affiliated with a now defunct reformist Iranian party—published an introduction to the philosophy of Spinoza in which six people were involved. It included the interview with Jahāngīrī cited in the previous section. Nawzuhūr also had a short note entitled 'The Origin and Nature of Civil Society in Spinoza' which helps us to understand his descriptive account of Spinoza's political philosophy.[33]

However, for Nawzuhūr, Spinoza's critique of religion does not imply an anti-religious stance, instead Spinoza puts forth a universal religion that captures the moral core. In his thesis, Nawzuhūr described Spinoza's critique of Jewish exclusivity and argued that 'Spinoza supports the possibility of distortion in the texts' of Judaism [27] (p. 247), i.e., a well-known Islamic trope.[34] It was another scholar, however, who used Spinoza's ideas to underpin Islamic anti-semitism.

In the spring of 1999, almost at the same time as Nawzuhūr's dissertation was published, chapter eight of the TTP was translated by an anonymous Shia mullah in the first issue of *Haft Āsimān*, a journal edited by the University of Religions and Denominations in Qom. Two other articles in this issue are devoted to Judaism; 'Jewish Revelation and Prophecy' and 'Proofs of the Penal Claim in Judaism'. This suggests an explanation as to

[29] See [27] (pp. 3–4), 'Although explicitly stated in the text, it is important to note here that Spinoza's assessment of revelatory knowledge, prophecy, miracles, etc. in the context of 17th-century European thought, especially his philosophy in relation to Judaism and Christianity are understandable. Since Spinoza, like many Western philosophers, did not well know the truths of the religion of Islam and the Holy Qur'ān, his philosophy has nothing to do with this comprehensive religion with its divine dimensions. Therefore, it is not even applicable to Islam. Everything Spinoza has thought and written is only about Judaism and Christianity'.

[30] See [27] (p. 245), where he argues that 'according to Spinoza, those who do not observe the distinction between philosophy and theology are inevitably caught up in the debate over whether to make the sacred texts subject to reason or vice versa. That is, whether the themes of the Bible should be reconciled with reason, or whether reason should be used in such a way that it would not come into conflict with the contents of the scripture'.

[31] See [27] (pp. 248–249), 'This means that the task of the Kalām is to determine the principles of human belief because they are necessary for obedience. ... what Spinoza means by Kalām here is revelation, and in this view there is no conflict between the precepts of revelation and reason, but not in the sense that they are compatible with each other, because each forms an independent domain'.

[32] Call interview, 10 January 2021.

[33] See [22] (p. 207), 'in Spinoza's political philosophy, there is an element of libertarianism, and this is what distinguishes him from Hobbes, and brings him closer to Locke and Rousseau. According to Spinoza, religion can also play a social role and support civil society by pervading the moral life of the masses promoting justice and goodness'.

[34] The importance of this trope can be seen as fear of censorship forced Ali Ferdowsi, the translator of complete Persian translation of the TTP, to delete a discussion of it in the introduction of his TTP translation, as he wrote to the author of this paper.

why this little-known chapter of the TTP was translated. The claim of 'Distorted Scriptures' has always been a topic in Islamic kalām. Shia theologians, citing verses from the Qur'ān, argue that the holy texts of Christianity and Judaism are distorted, although according to the Qur'ān, both the Old and New Testaments are the word of God.[35] If only the Qur'ān is free from any distortion, the argument goes, it manifests the true word of God all the more. If Islamic theologians are asked by which criteria the word of God in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Qur'ān should be judged, the answer will inevitably be that the word in which there has been no distortion is truer than the rest.

Accordingly, one of the best ways for Islamic theologians to justify the claim of distortion is to cite the words of people with a Christian or Jewish origin. Therefore, the importance of chapter eighth of the TTP is that a Jew has taken a critically eyed look at the Pentateuch and other books of the scripture, asking whether they were written by several authors or by one, and who they were. To the reader unfamiliar with the Iranian context, the suggestion that chapter eight was translated for use in inter-confessional polemics may seem far-fetched, but anti-semitism is deeply ingrained in Shia Islam and its populist contemporary forms. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, it was even argued that the Jewish people invented the Holocaust and Israel was denounced as the 'Little Satan'. The attitudes behind the things Ahmadinejad said are shocking but not unusual in Iran. Iranian politicians routinely describe Israel as a 'tumor' in the region. In 2001, Khamenei delivered a speech arguing that Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis in order to produce 'exaggerated statistics on Jewish killings' and thus facilitate the establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine [28] (p. 389).

As an example, in this context of political–religious anti-semitism, Spinoza was called anti-semitic by Abdollah Shahbazi, a well-known historian in Iran and a former key member of Hizb-i Tūdih-i Iran, the Iranian communist party before the revolution. Shahbazi became a Tawwāb after the revolution, which is someone who has repented or regretted their past involvement. In 1988, he founded the Political Studies and Research Institute (PSRI). He was and probably still is one of the advisors of Khamenei. Under Khamenei's command, Shahbazi became the director of the center for archives at the Mostazafan Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in 1995. The Mostazafan Foundation is a charitable foundation in the Islamic Republic of Iran that is affiliated with the intelligence organization of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Later, Shahbazi reorganized and changed the center's name to the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies (IICHS). He denied the Holocaust and described Spinoza as anti-Jewish in the second volume, 'The Jewish Oligarchy and the Genius of Global Plutocrats,' of his book, *The Jewish and Parsi Plutocrats, British Imperialism and Iran* (1998–2004) in 5 volumes (Zarsālārān-i Yahūdī va Pārsī, Isti'mār-i Birītānīā va īrān) which contains conspiratorial anti-Jewish themes related to modern Iranian history, and which has been uploaded to his website[36] [29]; [30] (p. 210). Moreover, he regularly translated the title of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise as *A Treatise on Metaphysics and Politics* (Risālah dar bāb-i Mitāfīzīk va Sīyāsat), in which no passage in the TTP gives rise to these kind of remarks [29] (p. 222).[37]

Shahbazi gave a scathing anti-semitic description of Spinoza, and to do so, without giving detailed attention to the TTP and even without giving a correct Persian translation of its title, he aimed to show Spinoza as supporting anti-semitism by using secondary sources. He quotes from *A History of the Jewish People* edited by Ben Sasson—I give his quotation in the English original with additional words in Shahbazi's Persian translation in parenthesis:

> According to him (Spinoza), the Jews hate all other peoples. This hatred has become second nature to them because they foster it every day in their liturgy.

[35] See verse 3 of Surah Āl 'Imrān: 'It is He Who sent down To thee (step by step), In truth, the Book, Confirming what went before it; And He sent down the Torah (Of Moses) and the Gospel (Of Jesus)'.

[36] See (shahbazi.org) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[37] See Jewish Studies Center (jscenter.ir) accessed on 12 May 2021.

> Their manner of worshipping God not only differs from that of other peoples but is also contrary to them. . . . Even good qualities that he may find among his brethren derive from their (Satan) evil nature. (In Spinoza's view) The unity of Jewry and their present affection for one another derive from their hatred for all other peoples, and as a result all other peoples hate them. The destruction of their kingdom (Palestine) was because the Lord also hated them'. [31] (p. 721 in the original); [29] (p. 223)[38]

However, this highly selective use of the TTP's rationalistic method of reading the Old Testament is a double-edged sword. As we saw in Nawzuhūr's case, it might provoke Muslims to ask questions about the Qur'ān, similar to those Spinoza asked. Unlike the eighth chapter, the translation of the twentieth chapter opened a new view to the Iranian reader.

5. A New Reading of the TTP

In 2009, the translation of the twentieth chapter of the TTP entitled *Freedom of Thought and Speech in a Free Government* (*Āzādī-i Andīshah va Guftār dar yek Hukūmat-i Āzād*), was published on the website of the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation.[39] To honor the memory of their father, Abdorrahman Boroumand, and all other victims of state violence, his daughters Ladan and Roya established a foundation dedicated to the promotion of human rights and democracy in Iran in March 2001 [33] (p. 214). It was awarded the Lech Walesa prize for human rights in 2009. Ladan Boroumand is research director at The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation for the Promotion of Human Rights and Democracy in Iran. A former visiting fellow at the International Forum for Democratic Studies, she studied history at École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris with Claude Lefort, Mona Ozouf and François Furet. She is the author of *La Guerre des Principes* (1999) and has written several articles on the French Revolution, the Iranian Revolution, and the nature of Islamist terrorism [33]. She met Khomeini when he went to Paris in October 1978 and was horrified by his ideas, saying:

> After reading Khomeini's ideas on the notion of the theologian as political guardian of the people (Vilāyat-i Faqīh), I was petrified. I started to ask questions about the hijāb and human rights, but Khomeini said 'now is not time to think about that'.[40]

> My father was sent to Paris by the [Iranian] National Front to figure out what Khomeini's plans were. Khomeini told him to tell his friends that they would know about his plans in due time. [33] (p. 194)

Her father Abdorrahman was an important pro-democracy figure, who was assassinated by agents of the Islamic Republic on 18 April 1991 in a brutal knife attack at his home in Paris. In 1979, he had supported the government of the social-democrat Shapur Bakhtiar, who opposed Ayatollah Khomeini's idea of an Islamic republic and whose government was overthrown on 19 February of that year.

The translation of chapter twenty of the TTP started before 2009 but was published after the uprising of the so-called Green Movement (Junbish-i Sabz), which started in response to the proclaimed results of the elections held on 12 June 2009. Within a few days, the number of protestors grew to hundreds of thousands, and there were estimated to be a million or more on 15 June.[41] Alleged election fraud[42], the violations of women's

[38] See also the TTP 17, § 80, [32] (p. 1105).

[39] See (iranrights.org) accessed 12 May 2021.

[40] Call interview with Ladan Boroumand, conducted in August 2020.

[41] In Persian, 25 Khurdād 1388. A presidential election took place on 12 June 2009 and caused a significant controversy when the office of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad almost immediately announced that the sitting president had won the election as he had received approximately two-thirds of the votes.

[42] See 'How Iran is trying to win back the youth', by Narges Bajoghli, in *The Guardian*.

and LGBT rights, and the high number of political prisoners during Ahmadinejad's first presidency, pushed people onto the streets.

The Green Movement caused a legitimacy crisis for the government, which undermined civil freedoms. The reason is clear, the Islamic Republic of Iran is axiomatically and constitutionally undemocratic, because the will of the people expressed through elections does not determine the nature of the ruling government. It also became obvious that the regime had no intention to protect the rights of its citizens. In this political climate, the TTP's twentieth chapter, with the famous lines, inspired the Iranian reader that 'from the foundations of the Republic . . . it follows most clearly that its ultimate end is not to dominate, restraining men by fear, and making them subject to another's control, but on the contrary to free each person from fear, so that he can live securely, as far as possible, i.e., so that he retains to the utmost his natural right to exist and operate without harm to himself or anyone else' [32] (p. 1127).

The Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation already began selecting classical Western political philosophical texts for translation in 2006, such as texts by Locke, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Arendt. The translations were made available online in a period that witnessed the rise of Twitter and Facebook in Iran. The foundation sought to make a virtual library of the most important human rights instruments and classical texts on democracy [33] (p. 215). Sīrūs-i Ārīān-Pūr (1938–2013) translated the twentieth chapter of the TTP, and Ladan Boroumand compared it to the French 1965 version of Charles Appuhn. According to translator Ārīān-Pūr's friend Daryoush Ashouri, he lived in France from the 1980s until his death. Ārīān-Pūr had obtained a doctorate in economics in Austria and knew German, English, and French, and probably used these languages to translate Spinoza's TTP.[43] However, his translation begins with introductory lines by the foundation:

> If the shocking message of the execution of a young Kurdish Iranian fighter[44] proves the correctness of the philosophical ideas of Spinoza who lived and thought and wrote in another language more than three hundred years ago, it is because they are both warriors in a constant human battle. They are unknown friends of each other who unite to defend the natural right to freedom of thought and judgment. The weapon of one is thought and pen, and of the other action and life.[45]

These lines imply that chapter twenty is translated to defend freedom of inquiry and to overcome theocratic obstacles to democratization. Therefore, it is clear that, in 2009, Spinoza's TTP began to be read more politically and, from that year onwards, Spinoza's political philosophy received increasing public attention to such an extent that the TTP was used at least once, in response to Spinoza's popularity among government critics, to defend clerical positions and to deny human rights. A decade after the events of the Green Movement, a mullah[46] highlighted the issue of women in the last and unfinished chapter of Spinoza's *Political Treatise*, probably with the intention to criticize the Iranian sympathizers of Spinoza, or the enlightened features in his philosophy, saying 'Women have no any place in Spinoza's political theory, ... the Persian translators of the book thought that if Spinoza lived to finish the book, perhaps he would reconsider his views on women, but

[43] Call interview with Daryoush Ashouri, conducted in January 2021.

[44] Ehsan Fatahian was a Kurdish Iranian activist, who was executed on Wednesday, 11 November 2009, in Sanandaj Central Prison after being sentenced to death by the Judiciary of the Islamic Republic for allegedly being a member of the armed wing of Komalah. He was 28 years old.

[45] See (iranrights.org) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[46] Named Dāvūd Mahdavī-Zādigān.

that is completely ruled out'.[47] It is a bit of ironic that contemporary Shia jurists share the presumed anti-feminism of Spinoza.[48]

The online translation of chapter 20 was widely shared among Persian speakers. The Boroumand foundation provided a webpage statistics report, showing that the translation was viewed over 9500 times between 2010–2014. In an interview, Ladan Boroumand argued that one of the main motivations to publish this chapter was that Iran faces the same crisis that took place four centuries ago in the Netherlands and other parts of war-torn and wounded Europe. So much so that, in 2009, according to a report by Reporters Without Borders, Iran ranked 172nd in the world in censorship, press freedom and freedom of expression. Indeed, she believes that Spinoza, in his criticism of the De Witt brothers' killers, conveyed his concern to us that we should never cease to stand up for freedom of thought and expression. The twentieth chapter is for Boroumand one of the most important texts on human rights and she believes every Iranian should read it.[49] As she stated in a 2020 article, by suppressing protests, the regime intensifies anger and pushes people toward behavior that may be less visible but will, by the same token, be more radical and subversive [37] (p. 178). She also explained in an interview[50] that Spinoza's defense of the freedom to philosophize, to think in liberty, combined with his interest in the problems of mass superstition and state-religion relations, invite us to consider the future role of religion in Iranian society and politics. Learning to understand sacred texts as natural, human, and historical phenomena, she believes, is a key to stimulate critical thinking about Iran's past, present, and future. In addition, Boroumand pointed to the secularization of Iranian society as another reason why she believes Spinoza's ideas can be relevant for democratization. She defines secularism not as being antireligious, but as a call on the state to be neutral in religious affairs. According to her, we are now also witnessing the development of a secular, liberal, and democracy-friendly theology within Shia Islam [37] (p. 175).

As we noted already, 2009, the year the translation of the TTP's twentieth chapter appeared, coincided with an order by Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to Islamize the humanities. However, people remained interested in political ideas of the Radical Enlightenment. An overview of Persian graduate theses and articles about the TTP points to the increasing attention given to Spinoza's political philosophy among Persian reading audiences.[51] *The Political Treatise* (TP) was published in 2014 and in 2017, finally, the TTP was translated into Persian.

[47] See (qudsonline.ir) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[48] Read Hasana Sharp's view for more precise discussions on Spinoza and women: Spinoza's paternalistic concern in the Political Treatise is that women depend on men to such an extent that they cannot desire their own advantage because they are constrained to reflect the desires of those on whom they rely to survive. If this is grounds for excluding them from the commonwealth, it is because this dependency obscures in women an adequate knowledge of what is genuinely good for them, and thus what is good for all. Likewise, Spinoza notes that male rationality is undermined by female presence, and men, too, are prone not to desire the genuine conditions of freedom, but instead to pursue the parochial pleasures of feminine favor. Spinoza seems concerned that men and women legislating together would result in an inability to live by the divine and rational precept that is imaginatively conveyed in the history of the first man: "He who does good from a true knowledge of good, acts freely with a constant purpose, but he who does good from fear of suffering injury, is simply driven to avoid what is bad, such as a slave, and lives at the command of another [*sub imperio alterius vivit*] [34] (p. 577). In the final words of the Political Treatise, he presents women as provokers of irrationality, and thereby, similar to beasts, contrary to the nature of men. He observes that feminine beauty arouses passion in men such that they become changeable, inconstant, and contrary to one another and even to themselves [34] (p. 578). See also [35].

[49] Another contemporary Iranian thinker who emphasizes the importance of the twentieth chapter of Spinoza's TTP is Sayyid Javād Tabāṭabāī who called it 'a declaration of freedom of philosophizing and critical thought'; read more in [36].

[50] Video call interviews with Ladan Boroumand, August 2020 and January 2021.

[51] According to the Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc), since 1991, about 46 theses on Spinoza have been defended in Persian. Many universities have not registered student theses in this database for many years. Therefore, it is assumed that the number of theses about philosophy of Spinoza, which are mainly Master's theses, is more numerous. There are also 75 Persian articles about Spinoza registered at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies Tehran. Most of these theses and articles reflect topics that are most frequent in Spinoza courses in Iranian philosophy departments. Based on a document provided by the Supreme Planning Council of the Ministry of Science of Iran—revised 2 May 2017 at the University of Tehran, (p. 35)—the Ph.D. curriculum in the major of Early Modern Philosophy, Spinoza course, mainly dealt with traditional topics. The first master thesis dates back to 1991. It is only in recent decades that the popularity of Spinoza's political and theological views has increased among humanities departments and non-academic approaches to Spinoza have been applied through Marxist readings.

However, years before these translations were made, we already see a growing interest in Spinoza's political ideas. In January 2005, Ramin Jahanbegloo, Iranian philosopher and currently director of the Mahatma Gandhi Centre for Peace, organized a conference at the Iranian Artists Forum with the participation of Antonio Negri, his teacher, and the Italian ambassador Roberto Toscano. Two hundred people, including families, journalists, and students, arrived for the first day under the banner 'Spinoza and Democracy'. Jahanbegloo presented the case for Spinoza as an eminently liberal, secular and even ecological thinker, pointing to a progressivist understanding of politics.[52]

Jahanbegloo also later became one of six authors invited to write about Spinoza in a special section of Mihr-Nāmih [22]. In two columns he dealt with the concept of 'democracy' in Spinoza, based on various parts of the TTP and TP. After referring to Spinoza's idea that the purpose of a democratic state is 'to avoid the follies of appetite and as much as possible to bring men within the limits of reason' [26] (p. 201), Jahanbegloo argued that the state is a rational system which is directly related to Spinoza's definition of politics as the science of state survival [22] (p. 214). Relying on the notion of 'potentia agendi' and that no one unconditionally transfers his natural right to another, Jahanbegloo explains that, in Spinoza, unlike Hobbes, there is no such thing as 'transferring rights' and therefore, no conflict between natural and civil rights [22] (p. 214). Based on the contents of chapter twenty, above all, this idea that the true purpose of the state (res publica) is in fact freedom [26] (p. 252), Jahanbegloo shares with Boroumand the opinion that 'the most important part of TTP is the last chapter and his support for free thinking. This is how Spinoza should resonate in today's Iranian society'.[53] This need is also demonstrated in the table of contents of the magazine, which did not name Jahanbegloo or publish his picture due to censorship and to avoid bringing attention to Jahanbegloo, who was himself abducted and imprisoned in 2006.[54]

The interest in Spinoza's politics continued in another event held on 22 May 2011. *Bukhārā*, a well-known cultural journal of art, literature, and Iranian studies, hosted Spinoza Night (Shab-i Spinoza) at the Dutch Embassy in Tehran. It was the second international event focusing on Spinoza's political philosophy. While Michiel Leezenberg, Dutch philosopher, spoke on the metaphysics of Mullā Sadrā and Spinoza, 'Izatullāh Fūlādvand, Iranian translator and author, dealt with Spinoza's political philosophy. The latter described Spinoza as a realist who preferred politicians to philosophers and democracy to both monarchy and aristocracy. Fūlādvand argued that, for Spinoza, democracy was superior because it is the better protector of the equality and freedom of the people and the stronger guarantor of wise legislation. He concluded that many of Spinoza's ideas about democracy are contained in the TTP, writing that 'further discussion of this subject was to take place in his last purely philosophical work, the *Political Treatise*, which was left unfinished with the utmost regret with his death on 21 February 1677, at the age of 44'.[55]

6. The First Complete Translation of the TTP

In a climate of growing interest in religious–political questions and the legitimacy of the theocratic regime, the TTP was translated and published in 2017. The translator, Ali Ferdowsi, is an emeritus professor of sociology living in the United States. Ferdowsi was born in Isfahan, and grew up in Torbat-e Jam, Iran.[56] He obtained a doctorate in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania in 1985 and has taught at the University of Notre Dame de Namur. He also spent five years as a visiting professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, among others. In addition to the TTP, he translated other works, including

[52] See Nina Power: Antonio Negri in Iran, 4–6 January 2005, House of Artists and Centre for Dialogue Among Civilizations, Tehran; 7 January 2005, Isfahan/Radical Philosophy. See also the online session about Spinoza in the Agora Philosophical Forum (in Persian) organized by Jahanbegloo. A year later, he was kidnapped on his way to an international conference in Brussels by agents of the Islamic Republic.

[53] The written English response to the author of this article, 26 January 2021.

[54] See 'I Am Not a Spy. I Am a Philosopher.' (chronicle.com) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[55] See (bukharamag.com) accessed on 12 May 2021.

[56] I interviewed Ali Ferdowsi twice, on 1 September and 15 December 2020.

Philosophy and the Event by Alain Badiou, and *New Jerusalem, The Interrogation of Baruch de Spinoza at Talmud Torah Congregation, Amsterdam, 27 July 1656*, a drama by David Ives [38]. He is currently editing the Divan of Sultan Ahmad.[57]

Ferdowsi's translation of the TTP was published by Sahāmī-i Intishār in Tehran. This press was founded in 1958 by academicians describing themselves as Muslims, Iranians, constitutionalists and followers of the Iranian National Front. To the surprise of various intellectuals and translators, Ferdowsi's translation was not censored and was even reprinted five times at the time of writing this article.

The study of sociology helped Ferdowsi, in his own words, 'to examine the social impact of philosophers in their own context and their role in the future'. The Persian translation of Spinoza's TTP also serves this purpose and attempts to change the Shia political and ideological discourse in contemporary Iran. Unlike Jahāngīrī, he translated the book for the public and, above all, for the seminarians to read. Asked by me he explains:

> I translated the book for the public, and as an intervention in the current situation in Iran and, god-willing, Afghanistan, and not for a scholarly audience ... my face was turned more in the direction of the seminarians than the university students, sort of the Collegiants and Socinians of our own out of joint time. So, I was trying to hint that Spinoza's original insight into the salutary or at least acceptable function of religion, that is obedience to God and charity to one's fellows, is in harmony with the Qur'ān and in reading the Qur'ān in light of Spinoza's approach, they might very well begin with this verse.[58]

Ferdowsi is referring to verse 177 of the second Surah (the Cow), which appears on the front page of his translation above Hegel's famous saying 'You are either a Spinozist or not a philosopher at all'. The subject of this verse is 'absolute piety' and was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad when the prayer direction was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca. God points out:

> It is not righteousness That ye turn your faces Towards East or West; But it is righteousness To believe in Allah And the Last Day, And the Angels, And the Book, And the Messengers; To spend of your substance, Out of love for Him, For your kin, For orphans, For the needy, For the wayfarer, For those who ask, And for the ransom of slaves; To be steadfast in prayer, And give Zakat, To fulfil the contracts Which ye have made; And to be firm and patient, In pain (or suffering) And adversity, And throughout All periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing.[59]

By quoting this verse, it seems that Ferdowsi wants to make clear that, according to Spinoza, piety is not specific to Muslims, Jewish people, and Christians, and religion neither belongs to the East nor the West. Muslims should acknowledge that true religion is universal. According to Ferdowsi, the word 'piety', which performs a pivotal and strategic function in TTP, helps the believer in holy texts to acknowledge that the core of prophecy is a moral one. Piety teaches men obedience and charity, demonstrating that Spinoza is not anti-religious, let alone denouncing a particular religion, such as Judaism.[60] Ferdowsi had two purposes. One is to communicate that TTP is not against the core teaching of any religion, including Islam, and hence put the censors' minds and pieties at ease and, secondly, in his own words, he wanted to establish, right off the bat (before all else), that

[57] A collection of poems by Sultan Ahmad, a Jalayirid king who ruled parts of the present-day Iran and Iraq in late 14th and early 15th century, and corresponded with Hafiz, his great contemporary poet.

[58] The written English response, 17 December 2020.

[59] Qur'ān 2: 177.

[60] The written English response to my questions, 17 December 2020. 'I do believe that what Spinoza says about the Old Testament and Moses and all the other prophets applies to the Qur'ān and to Mohammad and wished to suggest that one could profitably extend the whole method, most of the arguments, and the book's core understanding of the place of religion in the life of our species to Islam too. In other words, I was trying to direct the reader's attention inward, and foreclose the often defensive move of reading such books as if they are about other religions, or peoples or times and not ours. More specifically, I did not want TTP read as if it was simply a rejection of Judaism, and an endorsement of any other religion. One can never be sufficiently careful about anti-semitism'.

Islam is and should be, *mutatis mutandis*, subject to what Spinoza says about religion and scripture, both about its core teachings, as well as its history of textual transmissions, the appetites of its priesthood, and its entanglements with philosophy and politics. He writes:

> I was after denouncing theology, not ordinary people's religion, as I believe that Spinoza identifies religious evil at the down of modernity not with religion per se, but more with theology and the lofty political and intellectual ambitions of those who wish to exclude our understanding of religion from our understanding of nature, in the sense he has of nature, of course. So, I was at the same time honest when I placed that verse at the beginning of the book to protect it from evil eye! But I also placed a verse of Quran as the epitaph of the book to, performatively as it were, nail Islam and its holy book right inside and onto the TTP's translation and graft it into the reader's mind throughout the entirety of the course of reading it. I wanted to foreclose any possibility of evasion and distantiation, and to make sure, in so far as possible without provoking unwelcome reaction, that the reader was unable to avoid thinking about himself, his own faith and his own time, that is of Islam, Muslim scripture, the political ambitions of Muslim theologians, and the ruling theocracy, while reading about them in the stories of others.[61]

Although the main purpose of using a Qur'ān verse on the front page might be to circumvent censorship[62], Ferdowsi returned to the idea that the TTP is directed to all the faithful. Spinoza had at least basic knowledge of the Qur'ān and theological literature in Islam, and Muslims will definitely find the TTP 'familiar', he argues in the translator's foreword [15] (p. 11). In order to illustrate Spinoza's only reference to the Qur'ān in the fifth chapter[63], Ferdowsi writes in a footnote:

> Never does Spinoza intend to insult the Qur'ān here; this is a mockery of the readers of the Bible who read the Qur'ān superficially and casually. As if it were a book from a strange land that, although it has exciting adventures, its moral teachings have nothing to do with themselves. By now it should be clear to the reader that, to Spinoza, reading scriptures in such a way means reading them in an inappropriate and superstitious manner. [15] (p. 205)

Ferdowsi is one of those Iranian intellectuals who are critical of the comparative philosophy the regime popularized. For him, comparisons, for example, between Spinoza and Mullā Sadrā, simply because they lived in the same time, neglect such works' social roles and 'suspend' their system of thought in the air.[64] In Iran, comparative philosophy is both political window-dressing and of purely academic value:

> Spinoza did not complete his TTP for a scholarly purpose, because it is a book of practical wisdom. This becomes clear when we understand why Spinoza put aside the Ethics for a while in order to compose the TTP, of course without abandoning his fundamental philosophical insights. Spinoza aimed to intervene in the affairs of his time and to contribute to the betterment of his world.[65]

Ferdowsi translated the TTP after the four English translations by Edwin Curley, Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, Samuel Shirley, and R.H.M. Elwes. The seven-

[61] The written English response, 15 April 2021.

[62] 'To assuage any fears the censors might have by showing that this book is not against the Qur'ān as a religious book. I could do so because this did not contradict my own beliefs. TTP is against theology, a misreading and misappropriation of the holy books, and not the books themselves' (the written English response, 17 December 2020).

[63] See [26] (p. 78), 'Hence if anyone reads the stories of holy Scripture and believes all of them without paying attention to the doctrine that the Bible uses them to teach, and without amending his life, he might just as well read the Koran or the dramatic plays of the poets . . . '.

[64] ' . . . although I cannot deny that I was tired of the kind of appropriation that (forgetting ontology, epistemology and historical context) compares Sadra and Spinoza as if they were modern university professors in the analytical tradition debating scholarly theories. Spinoza was not a scholar of that sort, as were neither Nietzsche or Marx. I believed then at the time of deciding to translate the TTP, and believe it even more strongly today, that Spinoza himself too saw TTP as an urgent and timely intervention in the course of history. This choice of objective by Spinoza, which I assumed to belong to the very nature of TTP, had implications for my approach to the translation'; the written English response, 17 December 2020.

[65] Call interview, 15 December 2020.

page translator's foreword was adapted to the Iranian context. Furthermore, Ferdowsi added a chronology of Spinoza and an introduction based on Jonathan Israel's introduction and Curley's preface [15] (p. 21). He explains in the translator's foreword that Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* motivated him to translate the TTP into Persian. Given the importance of Spinoza in the Enlightenment movement, Ferdowsi argued that his philosophy will make Iranians feel the need to reconsider the Enlightenment project in contemporary Iran [15] (pp. 7–8). He writes:

> If we look at the growing number of translations of his [Spinoza's] work, and the books and papers published on his life and philosophy, we see clearly that his thought is becoming ever more popular. One could perhaps attribute this welcome to the necessity for the rethinking of the Enlightenment project in our time, a time that if we cannot say is altogether bewildered, we can say of it that it sees in astonishment that the problems it thought it had put behind for good are catching up with it, and confront it once again, as if the specter of the past is out pacing it into the future. Consequently, such problems as the relationship between state and religion, religion and morality, and morality and state are once again occupying our minds. Luckily, our country and our language Persian are expeditiously making us a contemporary of the world, such that it can be confidently said that we are more than ever before in modern times close to the edge of human progress and its troubles to an extent that it is no longer possible to disentangle our destiny from the destiny of the world . . . . It is for this reason that Spinoza is no longer unknown among us. [15] (p. 8)

Regardless of the potential influence of Spinoza on Iran's theological discourse, Ferdowsi believes that we should not overlook the importance of the concept of security in Spinoza's TTP. Ferdowsi gives the example of the Federalist paper, No. 51, in which James Madison emphasized that a system of checks and balances is necessary because all men are not necessarily angels. It is as if Madison quoted from the TTP. Ferdowsi says that 'I know for a fact that is indeed very likely that Madison might have quoted Spinoza. Both he and Jefferson had read Spinoza, and regarded him highly'.[66] To adopt Spinoza's concepts of security and multitude in Iranian philosophical debates, Ferdowsi says:

> If you were a Bahā'ī[67] in Iran, you would precisely understand what a predator the multitude can be. I am therefore a complete Spinozist and Machiavellian. And I consider Spinoza to be a completely revolutionary philosopher because of his emphasis on the concept of security and the paradigm shift in the philosophy of politics. This strand of Spinoza's thoughts is important for us Iranians now not to enter it as a stereotype, but to enrich our thought by entering into an augmenting relation with the thought of Spinoza, in other words, to make a comparable philosophical attempt.[68]

The protection of the rights of minorities and their religious practices, such as the Bahā'ī in Iran, as Ferdowsi argued for, is not excluded by Spinoza's own focus on security and transforming the multitude into a unanimous citizenry. To single out the guaranteeing of stability and security as the highest function of state, Ferdowsi believes, is not, however, to suggest that it is its only function, or that the state is not obligated to protect the rights of its minorities. 'Concretely speaking, if a state is going to be legitimate, and hence genuinely stable and secure, it must be just to all its citizens, which requires a particular degree of

[66] The written English response, 15 April 2021.

[67] As discussed earlier, 'Alī Murād Dāvūdī was one of the first victims of violence against the Bahā'ī. 'Bahā'īsm emerged as an independent religion in the 1860s from the heterodox Shī'ī sects of Shaykhism and Bābism and was named after its founder Husayn 'Alī Nūrī Bahā'ullah (1817–1892). Bahā'īsm promoted a cosmopolitan worldview which stood in contrast to Islam's claim to universality and Shī'īsm's ethos as a persecuted minority [39] (p. 234). 'The 1979 Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic elevated the otherization of the Bahā'īs into an integral component of the official state ideology and policy. Although the Shī'ī clergy now dominated a powerful state apparatus, they still regarded the small Bahai minority as both an ideological and political threat to Iran and Islam' [39] (p. 238).

[68] Call interview, 1 September 2020.

vigilance when it comes to protecting the rights of its minorities, because here not only the state itself, but the majority must be kept in check'.[69] This is precisely why, along with Ferdowsi and Jahanbegloo, and above all according to Spinoza himself, with who the author of this paper is truly in agreement, democracy is the best, that is, the most secure and stable, of all forms of state.

The Spinozistic critique of religion in the TTP, which aims at limiting religious–political power, is considered fundamental to the democratization of Iran in the new Iranian approach to Spinoza. On this point, it seems, the more recent readers of Spinoza are all in agreement. Jahanbegloo, for instance, has argued that Spinoza is a philosopher who rejected a church, which is a 'state within a state', because it would destroy the institution of the state. This means that 'Spinoza, by departing from the theological–political logic and secularizing the logic of politics in the modern age, allows us to form a political subject and highlights the ability to shape democratic action'.[70] Moreover, according to the TTP, chapter nineteen, authority in scared matters belongs wholly to the sovereignty. However, this does not mean that the sovereign powers abrogate man's natural rights, according to Jahanbegloo. This might imply that a religious minority has a natural right to survive, as Spinoza wrote in the TP ' . . . those who are attached to another religion must certainly be allowed to build as many houses of worship as they wish, but these should be small, of some definite size, and at some distance from one another' [40] (pp. 1338–1339).

7. Conclusions

Opposed to traditional readings of the *Ethics* that mainly emphasize the pantheist strands in Spinoza, to be easily compared with Muslim thinkers, the TTP recently provided Iran with a unique conceptual and argumentative apparatus to face its theological and political crises. Supporters of today's theocracy in Iran make use of the TTP for inter-confessional polemics on behalf of the Islamic regime, as we find in the references in the section Spinoza and Judaism, or in the reference to Spinoza's view towards women in order to establish the non-enlightened nature of his thought. Yet, there are still other thinkers who, looking into the mirror of the TTP, have suggested that the state cannot foster support for itself by using religion and that freedom of thought would not undermine the stability of society and piety. It is truly sad that the Iran of today, in a Hobbesian sense, remains in a state of war, where the freedom of judging and thinking is severely restricted. As Spinoza expresses in the last chapter of the TTP, 'what is more dangerous than for people to be treated as enemies and led off to death, not for misdeeds or wrongdoing, but because they make a free use of their intelligence . . . ?' The fact that the freedom of expressing one's ideas and opinions is under pressure in today's Islamic Republic of Iran may, therefore, help to explain the growing interest in Spinoza's TTP.

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[69] The written English response, 15 April 2021.

[70] See (blogfa.com) accessed on 12 May 2021; see also the online session about Spinoza in the Agora Philosophical Forum (in Persian) organized by Jahanbegloo.

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Conspiracy Theories as Superstition: Today's Mirror Image in Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus

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Abstract: The contention in this paper is that the theological-political disputes Spinoza was concerned with 350 years ago are similar to the conspiratorial disputes we experience today. The world in Spinoza's Tractatus theologico-politicus, a political intervention in his time, serves as a "mirror image", that is to say, it deals with the same problem we face today albeit in a different mode. Understanding our contemporary condition under the auspices of a Spinozist perspective, problems in countermeasures to the conspiratorial disputes come to light. Scholarly work and practice focus on the epistemological dimension of conspiracy theories, tying in the extent to which they are problematic to the degree in which they deal in untruth. However, the lesson from Spinoza's analysis of the theological-political disputes is that such theories do not deal in truth, but, in affect, they do not spring from a lack of education but a lack of certainty. The work of Spinoza opens up a different approach, and if our aim is like that of the TTP, to defend political life against the threat of civil war, such a different approach is in order.

Keywords: conspiracy theory; political affect; superstition; Spinoza; tractatus theologico-politicus

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> *For I have shown that Scripture does not teach things through their proximate causes, but only relates them in that order and with those phrases with which it can most effectively move people (especially, ordinary people) to devotion. For this reason it speaks quite improperly concerning God and things, because its concern is not to convince people's reason, but to affect and fill their fantasy and imagination.* (Benedictus de Spinoza, TTP, ch.6, G iii, p. 91)

1. Introduction

The year 2020 was the anniversary of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (TTP), a major work by Benedictus de Spinoza. However, for most of the last 350 years, it faded from memory [1]. Due to the efforts of scholars, such as Jonathan Israel, Etienne Balibar, Antonio Negri, and others, this neglect is now changing [2–4]. Yet, it remains a strange book, or an "anomaly", to borrow Negri's term. The peculiar title of the treatise gives us the first hint of its two-fold structure, which would strike a modern reader of our secular age. The first part deals with religion and superstition, which are, unlike in the main currents of the Enlightenment, not differentiated in terms of prejudice or blinded intellect. Both religion and superstition, as Spinoza points out throughout the TTP, stem from the imagination; there is no distinction there. In the second part, Spinoza translates this insight into the political domain. He considers here not just what we might call a classical liberal version of this conclusion, that reasoning be free from political consequences (his much-debated notion of the "freedom to philosophize"), but he also paradoxically propones what many consider a harsh insight: in matters of religion, the state is the supreme power, which will and should limit the social freedom of the individual.

My contention is that the theological-political disputes that Spinoza was concerned with in his time are similar to the conspiratorial disputes we experience today. There is a "mirror image", that is to say, they are dealing with the same problem in a different

mode [5]. Here, I take a cue from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. When he spent some time in Bamberg as a newspaper editor, he noted that, in modernity, the reading of a newspaper replaced the ritualistic prayer of reading the Bible in the morning[1] [6]. Hegel observed a shift in how humans oriented themselves in the world. Although the world in the Bible and the world in the newspaper are very different—the Bible displays a stable one and the newspaper shows a constantly changing one—they are equivalent in the citizen's life, to orient one's attitude toward the world, in the words of Hegel. They structure the imagination beyond intellectual control, priming our affective responses to ourselves, each other, and our surroundings.

We can extrapolate this idea beyond Hegel's time. It is no novelty to consider the newspapers, which once thrust the Bible off of this pedestal, to be themselves now succeeded by yet another more rapidly changing and interactive source of news: social media. Especially new social media outlets, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, and so on. A decidedly different type of medium has thereby emerged as the centerpiece of social orientation. One's place in the world is no longer determined by a single or a handful of outlets, such as in the times of hegemonic newspapers, but by a disorganized plenitude of often contradicting sources. More importantly, we now actively contribute to this place in the world by liking, reacting, upvoting, and so on. Unmistakably, for many people in the world, social media is the primary fashion to understand the world and their place in it, rather than Scripture. With the emergence of these platforms came the popularization of a new type of conspiracy theories, what political scientists Rosenblum and Muirhead call, in the American context: "the new conspiracism" [7]. Particularly in the year 2020, these theories broke out from the American context and are now widespread and firmly established in Western Europe and the rest of the world. The emblematic conspiracy theory of this new conspiracism is Qanon. The popularization of these kinds of theories—which are marked by contradiction and incoherence [8], and we will come back to their status as theory as well—prompted responses aiming to counter them, not just in the United States but in the European Union as well. Two important means in this battle are fact-checking and gatekeeping. While such means are supported by certain existing scholarly work on conspiracy theories, I argue that from a Spinozist perspective, by understanding conspiracy theories as superstition, these suggestions appear to be problematic. Both fact-checking and gatekeeping are ultimately aimed at solving a knowledge deficiency, to let the right kind of knowledge reach as many people as possible. Yet, they fail to connect to the affectual operations of these conspiracy theories, nor do they address the grounds from which they spring: uncertainty.

In this article commemorating Spinoza's TTP, I aim to show its relevance today in helping us understand the appeal of these conspiracy theories and to approach conspiracy theories philosophically, and more specifically within the framework of Spinozist anthropology. First, through an exposition of Spinoza's TTP, as an intervention primarily concerned with the relation between politics and theology. Second, by examining the emergence of a specific kind of conspiracy theory, which a significant portion of the contemporary population of the (Western) world is inclined to obey, even if many others consider them outlandish superstitions. Finally, to understand and assess the current difficulty in combatting them while at the same time opening up a different approach not directly concerned with epistemologically policing conspiracy claims. If our aim is like that of the TTP, to defend political life against the threat of civil war, such a different approach is in order.

2. Theology and Politics in the TTP

It is useful to establish the TTP's backdrop, before I treat Spinoza's understanding of superstition. Political and religious life in the United Provinces was intermingled from its

[1] The full quote, translated in English, is as follows: "Reading the morning newspaper is the realist's morning prayer. One orients one's attitude toward the world either by God or by what the world is. The former gives as much security as the latter, in that one knows how one stands

inception, and social conflict was endemic [9,10]. In the General Union of 1576, all Dutch provinces became united in their resistance against their legitimate Lord, the Roman-Catholic Spanish king, Philip II. In 1581, in the famous *Plakkaat van Verlatinghe* (Act of Abjuration), they formally renounced Philip II as their sovereign. Yet, with the establishment of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, the religiously fueled political disputes were far from over. The war for independence against the Spanish Empire went on well into Spinoza's life. It was only with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that the Republic was definitively recognized, and the Dutch revolt finally came to an end. This "external war" was part of the wider European struggle between Roman-Catholicism and Protestantism in its different forms. Additionally, while it was internalized in the United Provinces, there were struggles even within the Reformed denomination.

The most noteworthy was between the theologians Arminius, who came to be supported by the leaders of the province of Holland, and Gomarus, who was supported by the other provinces. Spinoza briefly mentions this at the end of the TTP as "the religious controversy between the Remonstrants and the Counter-Remonstrants (. . .) stirred up by the Politicians and the Estates of the provinces" [11] (ch.20, G iii, p. 246; p. 352). The conflict was settled through the Synod of Dort, which took place from 1618 to 1619, convened by the Estates general. It established the official doctrine of the Public Church. Dissenters were arrested and either locked up, such as Hugo Grotius, or sentenced to death, such as politician Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Land's Advocate of Holland, by far the most powerful province of the Union. For Spinoza, this controversy serves as a warning, noting that:

> *In the end, it degenerated into a schism, and many examples made it manifest that laws passed to settle Religious controversies aggravate people more than they correct them, some people take unlimited license from them, and moreover, schisms don't come from a great zeal for truth (a source of gentleness and consideration for others) but an overwhelming desire for control* [11] (Ch.20 G iii, p. 246; p. 352)

As an intervention in the political and religious life in the United Provinces, Spinoza tried to formulate a response to such disputes through the TTP. The point of his exercise is not to do away with religious life tout court but to interpret its role in teaching social morality, which consists of "obedience and charity" and to give all citizens a "freedom to philosophize"—that is freedom of (religious) imagination—which is essential to social stability. Spinoza notes that this freedom "cannot be taken away without great danger to the peace and great harm to the whole Republic" [11] (Preface G iii, p. 10; p. 74).

Within that process, there is a complex role for imagination. Spinoza argues that no prophet "has received God's revelations without the aid of the imagination, i.e., without the aid of words or images"—only Jesus Christ could directly access God's revelations [11] (ch.1 G iii, p. 21; p. 85). He does not offer a full-fledged theory of imagination in the TTP, but in the Ethics, Spinoza teaches [12] (II, p17s) the pervasiveness of imagination in human life. In the words of Spinoza scholar Eugene Garver, according to Spinoza: "Imagination is our original endowment" [13]. All knowledge of the outside world is ultimately based upon our body creating "images" of the outside world [12] (IV, p1s), [14]. Sometimes we are able to transform these images into rational "philosophical knowledge", but prophecies, as found in Scripture, are not aimed at nor can they be transformed into that kind of knowledge. Images cause an emotional response, and the entirety of our affective life operates through the imagination [12] (II, p40s2)], [4] (p. 231), In the Ethics, Spinoza explains that, by affect, he means a force or influence, and the idea thereof, which either increases or diminishes our power of acting. He makes a basic distinction between positive affects and negative affects. Positive affects (such as joy) are the affects through which our power of acting is increased, which he later restates as moving our minds to greater perfection, i.e., closer to God, that which acts most powerfully. Negative affects (such as sadness) are those that diminish our power of acting, by which we are moved to a lesser perfection [12] (II, p11), [15]. This does not just hold for the individual's power and being but holds for the social and political spheres the individual is a part of.

This is why prophets rely on imagination; they use it to connect to an audience, strike a chord with them, regardless of the intellectual capacities they might have. Spinoza often emphasizes that this is the point of Scripture itself, to speak to common people's imagination. However, at the same time, imagination is "inadequate", meaning that we can be mistaken about what it is that prompts our imagination, while, at the same time, knowledge of such a mistake does not annul the effectual "impression" [12] (II, p40s2). Therefore, the imagination is open to disputes, and it cannot properly determine by itself to what end it is affected, whether the result is an increase or decline in the power of acting. And, unlike reason, it can give rise to social conflict, with which Spinoza was confronted in the European and national theological disputes. In the next sections, I will examine how Spinoza's notion of imagination and his distinction between positive and negative affects translate to his distinction between religion and superstition, which arise from the imagination, and their political role vis-à-vis the sovereign.

3. Between Religion and Superstition

In the TTP, religion acquires a specifically practical meaning. Spinoza distinguishes true religion from superstition [4] (p. 302). Unlike his contemporaries argued, such as Thomas Hobbes and Adriaen Koerbagh, religion should not simply be debunked as just another kind of superstition only with an institutional force and critical mass by which it seeks to differentiate itself from those other superstitions. Instead, through his observation of the inexpungable role of imagination in human life, he notes religion's social function and immanently critiques its role in 17th-century Dutch society. In a play on the famous Lucretian line that religion could persuade men to do great evils, Spinoza substitutes fear for religion [11] (Preface, G iii, p. 6; p. 67). Yet, even though Spinoza considers fear the source of superstition, he more often emphasizes the vacillation between hope and fear as the affective driving force. It is impossible to become completely impervious to these affects, but the notion of vacillation points to an unbearable kind of uncertainty, which specifically serves as the breeding ground of superstition. Unlike religion, superstition is "necessarily very fluctuating and inconstant" [11] (Preface G iii, p. 6; p. 68).

For Spinoza, superstition is a stranger to no one, and he opens the TTP, akin to the famous first sentence of Rousseau's Social Contract, with an observation on the pervasiveness of superstition:

> *If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, no one would be in the grip of superstition. But often they are in such a tight spot that they cannot decide on any plan. Then they usually vacillate wretchedly between hope and fear, desiring immoderately the uncertain goods of fortune, and ready to believe anything whatever* [11] (Preface G iii, p. 5; pp. 65–66).

What is immediately striking about this passage is that superstition is understood here as a way out of uncertainty. However, superstition offers the "easy" way out. It prompts belief in something without sufficient causes for such a belief. Despite the believer's best hopes, superstition ultimately leaves those who seek refuge through it right back at the starting point. Again, if not more, in fear and uncertainty looking for new superstitions, trapped in a vicious cycle. Uncertainty has a "natural" component, pertaining to those factors that are outside of our powers to manipulate. He makes this especially clear when he states that even powerful statesmen, such as Alexander the Great, are not exempted from superstition's hold [11] (Preface G iii, p. 6; p. 67). Additionally, since superstition arises from the imagination, or rather "because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most powerful affects", this hold is not countered by education [11] (Preface G iii, p. 6; p. 68).

Spinoza understands superstition as a kind of pathology, as a deformation of religion [16]. He emphasizes that such a deformation might result from reading Scripture too literally. Superstitious readers confuse what are ultimately moral messages aimed at the imagination, told through wonders or acts of God, to be instead rational explanations for events that occurred. For Spinoza, the problem consists of an inadmissible intermingling of reason and faith. An intermingling that fails to understand the role of the imagination and

accommodate the moral messages of Scripture to how people are constituted, i.e., their affective composition. Reading Scripture from a Spinozist perspective, through his idea of accommodation, we can distill what he calls (true) religion. True religion aims only at social behavior, as "it requires nothing from men but obedience", and its core message is that "obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor" [11] (ch.13, G iii, p. 168; p. 258). For the application of this simple message, a free imagination is required. Spinoza walks a fine line between the freedom one has to interpret Scripture according to one's own insights and setting very specific limits on this freedom through the core message: careful that religion does not degenerate into superstition again. Not the inevitable differences in interpretation are problematic, but the aim with which the interpreting is done. He notes that true religion "condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach opinions which encourage obstinacy, hatred, quarrels and anger" and promotes "those who encourage Justice and Loving-kindness" [11] (ch.14 G iii, p. 180; p. 271). This is captured not in words or thoughts, but in actions, for "the person who displays the best arguments is not necessarily the one who displays the best faith; instead it's the one who displays the best works of Justice and Loving-kindness" [11] (ch.14 G iii, p. 179; p. 270).

4. Religion, Superstition and Politics

Were superstition only a personal matter of coping with the natural causes of uncertainty and fear, perhaps Spinoza would be less worried by it. However, not only does superstition have a social dimension in the sense that we are affected by other people, the role of imitation in social life [10] (p. 30), but more importantly, it has a political-institutional dimension. Spinoza understands the state in a Hobbesian sense, arguing that: "each person transfers all the power he has to the social order", which implies that this "social order alone will have sovereignty" and that "each person will be bound to obey it" [11] (ch.16, G iii, p. 193; p. 258). What Spinoza understands in Hobbes, who is considered the first theorist of representative government, is that only on the sovereign level can some form of political unity be constructed. This unity entails combining powers, opens the possibility to live in greater freedom [11] (ch.16 G iii, p. 195; p. 289), and increases the ability to cope with or face uncertainty. Therefore, the sovereign plays a role in the constitution of its subjects. Certainty is, at least partly, mediated through the social and political practices of "customs, laws, and institutions", giving each nation its particular constitution, as well as reflecting that back onto its subjects [10] (p. 35). For Spinoza, the object of the state is the structuring of the "social environment in ways that promote virtue and harmony" [10] (p. 36). These powers of the sovereign are threatened by social discord, and the greatest threat to any such construction is civil war. In a state of civil war, some subjects attempt to retain some of their rights and thereby divide and destroy the sovereignty [11] (ch.16 G iii, p. 195; p. 289). Here, the political problem of superstition comes to light since to achieve unity, the state deals in affects. Spinoza argues that what binds subjects to the state, to make the contract by which the transfer of rights to the sovereign takes place valid and lasting, is the hope for a greater good or fear of otherwise greater harm [11] (ch.16 G iii, pp. 191–192; p. 285). This means that superstition, with its own dealings of hope and fear, is a competitor in binding the people to political aims. Superstition is inherently a governing logic. However, whereas the logic of the sovereign is intimately tied up with a calculation of public utility [17], or with the public good (the positive affects which would increase the power of acting of the community), superstition is only concerned with private aims (negative affects leading to a decrease in the power of acting). The problem Spinoza faces is that, on the one hand, "a contract can have no force except by reason of its utility" [11] (ch.16, G iii, p. 192; p. 286), while superstition operates through the personal authority another actor uses "only to compel others to think as he does, under the pretext of religion", to further personal aims [11] (ch.7 G iii, p. 97; p. 170). In a way, this obscures the calculation of utility and binds people to a "false" religion instead. Yet, unlike binding to the state, this is a problem because "an action done on a command—obedience—does, in some measure, take away freedom, (. . .) that isn't what makes the slave. It's the reason

for the action" [11] (ch.16 G iii, p. 194; p. 288). The ultimate aim of superstition, according to Spinoza, is to "turn the heart of the multitude (. . .) away from the supreme powers, so that everything may collapse again into slavery" [11] (Preface G iii, p. 7; p. 70).

Spinoza proceeds to try and understand in what way the state can best defend itself against superstition. He argues that the power of the sovereign is tied to the space left for criticism of the governing function with an appeal to the mutual calculus of utility. Spinoza understands democratic government to be more or less fully realized to the extent it can hold open the space for criticism, and subsequently if from that space subjects can still recognize these "supreme powers" as sovereign:

> *So if good faith, not flattering lip service, is to be valued, if the supreme powers are to retain their sovereignty as fully as possible, and not be compelled to yield to the rebellious, freedom of judgment must be granted. Men must be so governed that they can openly hold different and contrary opinions, and still live in harmony* [11] (ch.20 G iii, p. 245; p. 351).

Hence, Spinoza argues for a "freedom of philosophizing", which is simultaneously an irreducible freedom and a political one [11] (ch.20 G iii, p. 239; p. 344). From the fact of imaginative plurality, Spinoza tries to conceive the political situation best suited to it, which both gives space to this plurality and aims to overcome it in the political sense of unity, of uniting forces. This, finally, leads Spinoza to come to the insight that (even) in matters of religion, the state is the supreme power to provide and limit social freedom.

Now that I have treated Spinoza's understanding of superstition, I want to turn to his relevance for our contemporary political condition of conspiracy theories. Before I can do so, however, it is important to examine this condition, and I will do so through one of the more promising attempts to understand it: Nancy Rosenblum and Russel Muirhead's *A lot of people are saying*.

5. The New 'Conspiracism'

In the age of social media, public and scholarly interventions tackling conspiracy theory are usually centered around two specific things: first, the (im)possibility of making a distinction between malign and benign forms and second, finding the right means to combat the malign ones in the name of the public good. Many scholars attempt to do so by reference to an epistemological dimension or some criterion of truth. They either state that conspiracy theories are by definition untrue and therefore problematic tout court, what has come to be known as the generalist position [18,19]. Or that conspiracy theories are problematic to the extent that they are untrue, arguing for a case by case or evidence-based approach, what has come to be known as the particularist position [20,21]. Combatting conspiracy theories then either entails bolstering or targeting the epistemological apparatus of those who adhere to the conspiracies, to wise them up, so to speak [19,22]. Otherwise, suspending judgement on such theories until they are properly investigated, looking at the "evidence" [23]). Such a truth-criterion, however, proves difficult to establish. It is not easily ascertainable what is true or what is evidence, even when dealing with non-conspiratorial sources (a quick glance at theory on propaganda is enough to understand that). More importantly, however, the supposed truth of such theories does very little to remediate their problematic aspects. Differently put, even truth can be weaponized against society. Take, for example, the overrepresentation of minorities in poverty and crime (which holds for most Western countries). This fact is often ideologically weaponized against these minorities, its 'truth' is no counterforce [24]. The same holds for the charge of "conspiracy theorist" itself, which can be levelled against people to discredit them [25] but, at the same time, is not immune to such weaponization if proven true or untrue. A focus on the epistemological dimension entrenches the discussions on conspiracy theory in a back-and-forth on the possibility of dismissing such theories out of hand or on a case-by-case basis through evidence. Such a focus can either fall into the trap that a reference to a criterion of truth is insufficient to distinguish between problematic and unproblematic theories or runs the risk of becoming an ahistorical framework from which these theories

are understood. More importantly, they take us away from questions concerning the (inner) workings, its appeal, and the (social-political) aims of the theories.

A more promising attempt to understand and distinguish between mere theories of conspiracies, as benign forms, and "conspiracy theory", as malign forms, is put forward by Rosenblum and Muirhead in their work *A Lot of People are saying*. Rosenblum and Muirhead, political scientists by trade, approach the matter mostly in relation to the political aims of conspiracy theories, more specifically oriented towards, or rather against, democracy. They understand there to be a new form of conspiracy thinking; they term "conspiracism" and define it shortly as conspiracy without the theory [7] (p. 2). Rosenblum and Muirhead argue that we cannot dismiss conspiracy theories out of hand, that "classical" theorists, meaning most conspiracy theorists before our current social media age, were engaged in "detective work" and aimed for a comprehensible narrative to understand collected evidence. However, the new "conspiracism" of the social media age is not aimed at evidence nor investigation but mostly has (destructive) political aims and a different mode of legitimation: repetition. This mode is specifically coupled with the emergence of social media in the political realm, in which the amplification of baseless claims is pervasive through likes, reposts, retweets, upvotes, etc. Hence the title of their work, a reference to the oft-used phrase by the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump, the most prominent politician connected to conspiracy theories and responsible for bringing them to the forefront of American politics. The new conspiracism aims at delegitimization. The intended targets are not to be corrected but denied "their standing in the political world to argue, explain, persuade, and decide" [7] (p. 2). Hence, Rosenblum and Muirhead identify two specific targets of this "conspiracism": first, political parties, partisans, and the norm of legitimate opposition, and, second, institutions such as the free press, the university, and expert communities within the government.

6. Combatting Conspiracism

Emblematic for this new kind of conspiracy theory, or conspiracism, is "Qanon". A conspiracy theory that started on the online message board 4 Chan in 2017. An anonymous writer(s), under the name "Q", regularly posted cryptic messages called "Q drops", which hint at various conspiracies connected to the virus, the 5G network, a so-called deep state, and Bill Gates. While the theory may have originated in the United States, this specific conspiracy theory has surprisingly become a global phenomenon. Moreover, whereas 4 Chan was still considered a fringe platform, where many of these theories flourish, Qanon has now spread throughout the internet, reaching millions of people through the more popular platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. What sets this "conspiracism" apart is its purely negative project of rejecting the "meaning, value, and authority of democratic practices, institutions, and officials" without any affirmation of another order or replacements [7] (p. 7). It thereby aims at a second, subsequent, goal: disorientation. Rather, more precisely, it attacks any and every possibility of a shared understanding or the possibility of a political community. This has become specifically clear in the "stop the steal" campaign loosely connected to Qanon. This campaign took grievance with the US presidential elections of November 2020, arguing that massive voter fraud was employed to cover up the "landslide" victory of their preferred candidate Donald Trump [26]. It was one of the fastest-growing groups in the final months of 2020, present on several social media platforms, including Facebook, which then quickly tried to shut it down. Elections are a telltale target, for, in their capacity of institutionalizing democracy, they are supposed to act as an orientation point beyond partisan perspectives.

In defense of the intended target of conspiracism, Rosenblum and Muirhead mostly aim to bolster democracy itself through what they call "speaking truth to power" and "enacting democracy", which to varying degrees are already put into practice. Concerning "speaking truth to power", two means are specifically prevalent in contemporary attempts to combat conspiracism. First, the role of fact-checking, the practice by which false claims are debunked through an appeal to the rational abilities of people. A response that is

highly informed by the focus on the epistemological dimension of conspiracy theories. Second, and closely connected to it, gatekeeping, a strategy focused on the amplification or restriction of speech, or in the age of social media known as "deplatforming" [27]. The emergence of social media proves to be a particular challenge for the practice of gatekeeping. Whereas traditional media still had control and responsibility over what they published, new social media circumvent this control (they are only platforms!). Rosenblum and Muirhead signal a second element that makes gatekeeping more difficult: an asymmetry of claims. Simple false messages are amplified more easily, and the fact that there are so many online platforms means that actual gatekeeping is virtually impossible. Nevertheless, calls for gatekeeping are being heard, and large platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, now actively fact-check and deplatform suspicious claims. Even if these platforms are themselves private entities with private aims [28], and, in response, alternative platforms emerge, sometimes even set up with the express aim of promoting such conspiracy theories [29].

However, it is not just put into practice by private companies, such as Facebook and Twitter, but became a focal point for the European Union. Accelerated by the Corona-virus pandemic, the aforementioned Qanon theory was, for much of 2020, the most followed conspiracy theory in Germany and the Netherlands [30]. A development that worried the European Commission to such an extent that it prompted them to devote time and energy to addressing these theories, especially concerning the Coronavirus itself [31]. Together with the United Nations, the Commission attempts to counter the trend by, essentially, fact-checking. Through an official website, they attempt to debunk the claims of conspiracy theories with a slew of reliable and verified information as well as guides on how to distinguish between facts and falsehoods, understanding your own possible biases, and even how to approach others who support the problematic theories.

Rosenblum and Muirhead note that "to diagnose the threat that conspiracism poses, to unravel its logic, to falsify its specific claims, to call out the conspiracists, and to point to its destructive consequences are all necessary, though they are not guaranteed to disarm it" [7] (p. 158). They understand that gatekeeping and fact-checking alone will not be enough. Hence, they add a third element: "enacting democracy" as a call to action. Action that confirms democratic norms by realizing them. Political leaders, officials, and democratic institutions must hold their ground and directly confront conspiratorial claims with defiance, thereby actualizing democratic norms [7] (p. 161).

7. Conspiracism as Superstition; A Spinozist Critique

Understanding the emergence of contemporary conspiracy theories on social media as conspiracism is a valuable approach. It highlights the political character of such theories and directs our attention to the supposed enemies and subsequent aims of these theories. Yet when considered from a Spinozist approach, crucial elements seem to be lacking that problematize the means of combatting such malign conspiracy theories. So what can be gained by taking up such an approach and taking conspiracism for what is considered a term of old religious moralizing, namely: superstition?

First, while contemporary analyses and subsequent means of combatting conspiracy theories prima facie appear as logical, their lack of understanding the appeal of such theories warrants skepticism. Instead of remediating the situation, trying to close the rift between adherents of the conspiracism and others, they may very well be exacerbating it. They omit the affective dimension, which is central to Spinoza's approach to superstition. Bringing in this affective dimension brings up different and important aspects of conspiracism. It redirects our attention from possible epistemological disadvantages on the part of the conspiracy theorist to the production of negative affects as a consequence of societal constellations. Moreover, it opens up a different response to the question: what do people try to get from these theories? The answer to which is not the truth but rather a sense of certainty and orientation in society.

A second and connected point here is the understanding that the uncertainty that is the breeding ground for conspiracy theories is not caused by conspiracism itself but rather homed in on, exacerbated, and exploited. Disorientation is not merely caused by conspiracism; it harnesses the uncertainty and disorientation present in society already. Subsequently, it presents itself as a way out, as a means to (re)capture some political, social, and economic standing in the world. It brings to light those structural causes, those political and societal uncertainties, which serve as a pre-condition for the new conspiracism. Uncertainties that do not merely pertain to the economic situation, as the global economy increasingly involves high levels of precariousness, but also to the cultural dimension [32–34]. Additionally, what is now abundantly clear with the coronavirus pandemic and an increasingly changing climate: a biological/environmental one.

Third, in its capacity of exacerbating the disorientation and uncertainty in society and its mobilization of certain groups therein, conspiracism reveals itself to be a governing logic. This brings out the question: what specific aims are furthered here? For Spinoza, these aims were tied to the theological-political structure controlling society, whereas we must wonder now what the aims of the mobilizing, not mobilized, group are as the second element in the constellation of conspiracism. Here, politicians, political commentators, and media figures alike actively promote uncertainty through these conspiracies, only to then sell a false sense of certainty to those who are receptive to it. Trump has tried to keep himself afloat through it [35]. However, he is far from the only one nor even the worst. Especially jarring is the case of political commentator Alex Jones, who in a ruthlessly opportunistic manner sold even a false cure for a disease which he has claimed did not exist [36].

Therefore, given the points just mentioned, what does this mean for the attempts to counter conspiracism through a cognitive/epistemological dimension, namely by doubling down on facts or even enacting and bolstering democracy? To further understand how these measures do not break the constellation of conspiracism, I take a cue from Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller. Pfaller reads Spinoza's distinction between true religion and superstition in a unique way, in part through French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni, which I use to help translate Spinoza's position to our contemporary situation. In the time of Spinoza, at least in The Netherlands, the Christian confessions notwithstanding their antagonism served as a common point of orientation with the Bible as their primary source. Therefore, to immanently criticize failings meant to construct through that common point of orientation "access points", hence, the equal yet distinct standing of religion and reason in moral social orientation. Yet, in our contemporary globalized society and with social media providing a myriad of points of orientation, such a universalization does not hold anymore. Mannoni, through a psychoanalytical appropriation of Spinoza, understands there to be three positions a subject can take up vis-a-vis religion. Not just those of true religion (faith/foi) and superstition, but a third "middle" term, namely belief (croyance). He thereby introduced a third term that entails a kind of "educated" position, meaning informed on the supposed truth or untruth of whatever belief is held that the subject disavows a superstition through but simultaneously upholds it. Both Pfaller and Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek has frequently explained this position through an anecdote about Niels Bohr. Bohr supposedly had a horseshoe above the door of his country house as prescribed by European superstition at the time. Yet, he did so, because while he himself did not believe in it, he was told that it would work despite the fact that he didn't believe in it [37]. Pfaller, in turn, deduces from the three positions of Mannoni that there are, therefore, two types of illusions, a term that incorporates yet extends beyond religion: those with owners (corresponding to true religion/faith/foi) and those without owners (belief/croyance or superstitions).

This appropriation of Spinoza makes for an interesting flip, which has two important consequences. First, as faith equals illusions with owners and superstition illusions without owners, the straightforward believers of superstitions for Spinoza are for Pfaller, in fact, adherents of faith. Second, those without faith are not without illusions but unaware of which illusions they disavow yet nonetheless uphold. Therefore, how does this conception

aid us in understanding the effects of the contemporary countermeasures for conspiracism from a Spinozist perspective?

It makes it possible for us to understand why, despite those attempts at solving knowledge deficiencies, people still believe in superstitions. For, the process of faith implies a double play of superstition or illusion. A problem Spinoza is also confronted with when he tries to understand how authoritarianism "keep(s) men deceived" by disguising superstition in "the specious name of Religion" in order for them to "fight for slavery as they would for their survival" [11] (Preface, G iii, p. 7; p. 69). Whereas the superstitious for Spinoza, or the faithful for Pfaller, import their belief from an external source, they take it up as if it is not. The reason that this "transformation" takes place, according to Pfaller, is because "faith", by imbuing its subjects with the imagination that they are the authors of their own actions, produces the affection of self-esteem (or for Spinoza: pride) [38] (p. 71). As such, it is a means to (re)gain some standing in the world. Furthermore, the more a subject acts according to these external sources, "the more bitterly he or she holds on to the illusion of self-determination and pursues his or her own heteronomy simply for the sake of 'proving' it to be autonomy" [38] (p. 215). The more these subjects are confronted with the better knowledge that they are not acting out of their own accord or that what they believe is not true, the more they are pushed for the sake of their self-esteem to own up to the illusion, thereby further undermining their own power to act. The difficulty in directly acting upon this mechanism is apparent in Spinoza's assessment of moralizing legislation, as:

> *The people who believe that the opinions the laws condemn are sound will not be able to obey them. But the people who think the condemned opinions false will accept the laws as privileges, and triumph in them so much that afterward the magistrate won't be able to repeal them even if he wants to* [11] (ch.20, G iii, p. 244; pp. 349–350).

There is a second important consequence. For, there are not only illusions with owners (Spinoza's superstitious) but also illusions without owners or disavowed illusions. For Pfaller, illusions without owners mostly concern "enlightened" disavowed beliefs; For instance, feeling intensely defeated when your favorite sports team lost even though you know very well it is merely a sports game. I argue we can apply them to a second position in the conspiracism constellation: political leaders, such as Trump. For, in a variation on the theme of Mannoni's, "je sais bien, mais quand même" ("I know very well, but nonetheless . . . ") [38] (p. 69), which is so aptly captured by the title of Rosenblum and Muirhead's work *a lot of people are saying*, these political leaders argue: it is not I who is saying this, I know better, but they (my faithful constituency) believe this, and thus, I must act according to it nonetheless! Here, better knowledge is even a requisite, and it allows such political leaders to play the game of politics, suspend their own disbelief, and run with whatever suits their political goals nevertheless. This means that an appeal to such leaders, either in terms of "speaking truth to power" or in terms of "enacting democracy", does, again, not break the hold of the conspiracist constellation. It rather enables them to play with those demands and strengthen the hold by covering up their private aims under the pretext of their supposedly democratic and representative function.

In sum, contemporary measures combatting conspiracism suffer from their omission of the affective dimension. It does not mean that they will not work since there is some evidence that they have limited effects on specific people, yet, at the same time, by not addressing the source of superstition, uncertainty, it runs the risk of leaving its impression on people intact, or worse, driving them further into the hands of the modern 'theologians' that deal in those superstitions. Even an appeal to political leaders does not work in that respect, for they are just as intimately tied up in the constellation of conspiracism, whereas the faithful adherents own up to their illusion, these leaders disavow it in order to play the game of politics.

8. Conclusions

I have tried to show how Spinoza's 350-year-old intervention in the political situation of his time still holds important insights for the political problems we face today. Overlaying his notion of superstition onto conspiracy theories has hopefully shed light on the one-sided and problematic approach of contemporary responses: attempts to influence the cognitive dimension, via an appeal to truth and information, mistake the affective causes, and subsequently its pervasiveness. Yet, we might wonder, what is there left to do then under the auspices of a Spinozist perspective?

Unfortunately, I can only hint at a possible direction and point towards the self-healing power of imagination in a variation on that saying at the core of Wagner's Parsifal, "die Wunde schließt der Speer nur der sie schlug" ("Only the spear that made the wound can close it"). However, how can that be? Pfaller, at the end of *On the pleasure principle*, takes up what he calls Pascal's advice. The only way to cure the ailment of taking too much pride in your own illusions is to disinvest yourself (specifically the psychoanalytic ego) and take up the illusions of others. This comes down to a ritualistic doing without believing. One must utilize the illusions of others to disavow one's illusions, as a means to cope with reality, "an exercise in superficiality" [38] (p. 225).

Yet, at the same time, I claim, this is exactly the kind of position used by political leaders who have exploited the 'faith' or superstition of others. It is a personal technique to not succumb to displeasure or unhappiness in the form of affects such a fear (or the other sad passions) without changing anything about the sources of fear. Here I wish to make one final return to Spinoza. I am not convinced by only "bringing back in", so to say, the faithful or the superstitious to society. No, the spear that makes the wound for Spinoza is intimately tied up to the uncertainty present in society. Uncertainty cannot be completely eradicated—there is space for Pfaller's advice—but at the same time, there are (self-caused) uncertainties that might possibly be overcome on a societal basis. In their displacement, such uncertainties come up as the objects of contemporary conspiracism: the global pandemic, the changing climate, social media, political elitism, and so on.

For Spinoza, engaging with these uncertainties means adhering to a form of neighborly love, the affect tied to his notion of true religion, which itself can only be ascertained from deeds or the good works. Politically, this amounts to an aim for a political construction through which all subjects can orient themselves. For our contemporary situation, it means that "speaking truth to power" or "enacting democracy" must be accompanied by an understanding of, attention for, and investigation into the breeding ground of conspiracism: political and societal uncertainty. Such uncertainties do not merely affect those who ultimately succumb to superstitious seductions, but all those who are required to enact democracy, political leader or not. Unfortunately, there are no quick solutions here.

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