

Conversations on the Early Reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus**

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The Early German Reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* A Conversation with Winfried Schröder

Thomas van Binsbergen: I would like to start our conversation on the early German reception of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter *TTP*) from a set of local differentiations.² Home to a major book market and a leading university, Leipzig is without doubt the epicenter of the earliest reception of the *TTP* in 17th century Germany. Here, the professors Jakob Thomasius (1670) and Friedrich Rappolt (1670) attacked the dangerous naturalism of the anonymous author in the name of Lutheran orthodoxy.³ Soon after, a refutation of the *TTP* was also considered in partly Calvinist Heidelberg,⁴ but finally only carried out in the context of Lutheran orthodoxy by Johann Konrad Dürr (1672) and Christian Friedrich Knorr (1674) in Jena. In a similar Lutheran orthodox context in southern Germany (Augsburg and Altdorf) we later find further criticism by Theophil Spitzel (1676) and Johann Christoph Sturm (1677). In general, German Lutheran orthodoxy held firm to its dogmatic theology and Aristotelian scholastics in dealing with the *TTP*'s philosophy of religion, natural law and politics of *libertas philosophandi*.⁵ As a result of the concern and fear regarding the fragmentation into factions and quarrels, very little room was left for internal strife when refuting the *TTP*. On the other hand, the early German reception had a relatively wide scope concerning the topics it addressed – or at least, it commented on more than only the biblical criticism and the hidden metaphysics of the *TTP* as during the early Dutch reception,⁶ namely, it commented also on the legal and political philosophy implied by the *TTP*'s main thesis of *libertas philosophandi*. Finally, the particular perseverance and content of the Lutheran orthodox attack on the *libertas philosophandi* and the *TTP* seems to have had two sources: a political concern of such “*licentia*” leading to religious violence and an academic concern of it leading to the destruction of Aristotelianism and the whole university system.⁷ How would you characterize the relationship between the context and content of the earliest German reception?

Winfried Schröder: Keeping in mind the dangers of anachronism in applying our terminology to those days, I would like to begin with a few words on the term reception. There was no such term. However, as regards positive reactions, there was a trend among 17th and 18th century academic philosophers to speak of the way in which one took notice and made use of theories, that is, as a *philosophus sectarius* or a *philosophus eclecticus*.⁸ If you read a Cartesian, you can either read him as a *philosophus eclecticus* combining Cartesian ideas with others or as a *philosophus sectarius* member of the Cartesian *secta* or school aiming at most faithfully reproducing the ideas of Descartes. This pair of terms, *philosophia sectaria* and *philosophia eclectica*, is very important in those days. We must remain mindful of this when we ask what the reception was of the *TTP* and Spinoza. Of course, as to the hostile responses, there's no such problem. Normally, in the strict sense, the reception of a philosophy would entail a *philosophia sectaria* in which for instance Spinoza would have had many disciples whose aim was nothing but reproducing their master's ideas. The interesting question we'll then have to address is the following: were there Spinozists not only in the sense of a *philosophia eclectica*, but also in the sense of a *philosophia sectaria*?

TVB: So the term of *philosophia eclectica* largely preexists Christian Thomasius' claim of eclecticism?⁹

WS: Yes, somewhat paradoxically the *secta* of Christian Thomasius was opposed to the opinion that one should subscribe to the ideas of only one philosopher. They stood in favor of a rational choice between diverse elements combined into one philosophy, without any negative meaning. Unlike nowadays, eclecticism was entirely positive. In principle you had two options if you wanted to start as a philosopher: the eclectic way or the sectarian way. In the Lutheran orthodox tradition – in which we find for example

Jakob Thomasius, the father of Christian – you obviously had to be a sectarian. Yet, in Jena, some kilometers south-west from Leipzig, we find the Lutheran Johann Franz Budde who was a fervent adherent of eclectic philosophy. For him as for many others, the basic motivation for being an eclectic philosopher was the conviction that only eclecticism could save a Christian philosopher from being enslaved by a non-Christian philosophical school. It is by theological criteria that he and others finally chose to be eclectic philosophers.

TVB: Could we speak here of a separation between theology and philosophy?

WS: Even more, a clear superiority of the religious and theological! At that time – and this is also true for many critics of Spinoza – eclectic philosophy was often regarded as the proper Christian way of doing philosophy. In the texts written against Spinoza by philosophers of the establishment we sometimes find a word that is important here: to be an eclectic reader of Spinoza was to “*spinozifizieren*”. *Spinozifizieren* means to have Spinozistic tendencies or to do philosophy with some elements of Spinoza. Take for instance Christian Thomasius in *Elender Zustand eines in die Atheisterei verfallenen Gelehrten* (1720) where he says that Theodor Ludwig Lau “*spinozifiziert*”.¹⁰ This means that Lau was not a sectarian Spinozist, but an eclectic trying to do philosophy in the right way. We often encounter this problem of reception in the polemical literature of that period. So far for the term reception.

TVB: I can understand the neutral or perhaps even positive semantic element in the idea of *philosophia eclectica*, but such neutrality seems more difficult to hold on to in the case of *philosophia sectaria*. Didn't these sectarians consider themselves in a continuous relation of power with other sects, a constant conflict? Jakob Thomasius was someone who was quite worried by the idea of sectarianism and faction fomenting. He took the other sects very seriously and was ready to combat them.¹¹

WS: Yes, and in particular the ones he called *novatores* (Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, etc.). For Jakob Thomasius the situation is fairly simple: there's only one philosophy, basically Aristotelian scholasticism. He consequently combatted the *novatores* as well as the *novantiquos* who combined modern and ancient elements. In opposition, the eclectic philosophers asserted that they were the true philosophers practicing the freedom to philosophize which consisted in a freedom to elect, to choose and to combine material from different origins. For them, sectarian philosophy was slavery, *in verba unius magistri jurare non usitatum est*.

TVB: Speaking of the freedom to philosophize, from the very beginning of the German reception of the *TTP*, the inherent plurality of opinions implied by Spinoza's *libertas philosophandi* is quite aggressively rejected as it was considered politically incompatible with public peace according to divine revelation and natural law theory which posits the superiority of reason in view of morality.¹² Would you agree that the Lutheran orthodox reception by readers like Thomasius, Rappolt and Dürr was particularly violent as it sought to control this plurality, that is, the minds of a larger reading public of the *TTP*? Does their sectarian philosophy imply a certain violence and a certain need to control others?

WS: Yes, but that's actually normal. Were things so different in the Dutch universities when Descartes encountered Gisbertus Voetius? Descartes was also an innovator who was heavily combatted as he gave rise to a new sect. Nevertheless, it's true that the Lutheran philosophers at Lutheran universities had an intellectual monopoly which they used to push through their relatively new Aristotelian scholastics. They obviously defended this privileged position.

TVB: I agree. Monopolies often hide or suffocate underlying complexities and conflicts by imposing their views and interests. Moreover, when something escapes them, they might react fiercely and without mercy. For instance, while the *TTP* also sought to reassure and to defend the author's moral integrity and intellectual activities,¹³ the Lutheran orthodoxy clearly had no patience whatsoever and over and over again viciously attacked Spinoza.

WS: Well, there are two aspects here: on the one hand Spinoza's moral integrity and his attempt to defend it and on the other hand the aim of the polemicists to denigrate Spinoza. I think one must admit that although the Lutheran adversaries of Spinoza were very polemical, they didn't primarily attack his personal integrity. In this respect the refutation of Jakob Thomasius is important. Thomasius didn't know who the author was, he didn't know that the author was a Jew expelled from the synagogue. For Thomasius the author was anonymous, so he concentrated on the theoretical stances expressed in the *TTP* and attacked those stances without denigrating the person. A similar approach can be found in many other university dissertations in Lutheran Germany, certainly compared to Catholic cultures where there was no discussion whatsoever. The Catholic apologists would sometimes mention Spinoza or Hobbes, though they never reproduced the theories, they attacked the names. They burned the books, at times the authors, and they would not enter into a discussion of the theories they opposed. That's an enormous difference between the Lutheran universities and intellectual culture and the Catholics. Take for example Johannes Musaeus, who also presided the refutation of the *TTP* by Knorr at the university of Jena.¹⁴ Musaeus did something which is actually quite remarkable. He not only refuted three short treatises by Matthias Knutzen – the first atheist known by name –, but he even published them in the appendix of his refutation. Without Musaeus we would have no knowledge of these three treatises.¹⁵ Such an approach stands a huge contrast with the Catholic way.¹⁶

TVB: That's interesting, but why was this difference between these cultures of refutation so great? Can the idea of control – a way of keeping things in place by acting on them from a distance, combining certain regimes of communication and representation – add to a political and strategic understanding of the Lutheran orthodox reception of the *TTP*?

WS: Perhaps. So, how can we explain the enormous difference in the ways Lutherans and Catholics dealt with their adversaries? Is it a strategy or what is it? A first thing – which might sound rather obvious – is that it's simply an identity-defining element of Protestantism not to be Catholic, not to have a pope, not to have an institution imposing the right faith. Of course the Protestants think that they have the right faith, but they reject the oppressive measures which are typical of Catholicism. This goes back to Luther himself who declared that Protestants must fight infidelity and heresy, but only in words. Finally, this involves the roots of Protestantism which bring back every religious argument to the biblical text, avoiding physical violence. In Protestant texts on *libertas philosophandi* one can find calls to allow and respect plurality, although not in the academic institutions of course...

TVB: I suppose that autonomous readers of the Bible and Protestant sects define themselves partly negatively, in contrast to others. Hence, some kind of plurality is automatically taken into account.

WS: Well, Jakob Thomasius, like other Lutherans, obviously didn't appreciate plurality, he opposed it. The difference with the Catholics consisted mostly in the methods of combatting plurality. Those were restricted to argument and refutation, not the fire stake. As a result, there sure was a tension between the methods and the exclusivist Lutheran claim to the right religion and philosophy. In the end, the Lutherans too were frightened by an extended pluralism such as that of the Dutch Republic and consequently combatted it. However, the way they did so was specifically non-Catholic.

TVB: Would you say that the Lutheran orthodox approach was more successful?

WS: I think that in the long run the Catholic way proved to be unsuccessful. If we look at 18th century radical anticlericalism, we find it primarily in Catholic countries – see for instance the French Revolution. The suppression was very tough, but the eruption was equally violent. In England we have no anticlericalism and after the Glorious Revolution there was toleration to a considerable extent, right? And what about anticlericalism in the Netherlands? No, I don't think this was a theme there. But in France? Definitely.

TVB: Do you see these differences also inside Germany?

WS: Some regions chose to remain and still are Catholic, but I would be careful here to draw parallels. As to the early reception of the *TTP*, the Catholic regions of Germany and the Catholic apologetic literature are really uninteresting. They were late too, because there was strong censorship. Many Catholics became aware of freethought and the Spinozistic threat only in the mid-18th century – it's quite deplorable.

TVB: Did the early Lutheran orthodox reception bring some philosophical or political openings in relation to the *TTP*?

WS: I would say yes and no. There's some openness in the fact that Spinoza is openly discussed, but it's not an opening that started something at that time, it's an openness constitutive of Protestant identity.

TVB: Nevertheless, many Lutheran responses were rather rough, for instance if we think of Christian Kortholt (1680) who stressed the idea of Spinoza being an impostor. The rejection of Spinoza's work was somewhat indirect, but still quite resolute. The later Lutheran line of reception – with among others Kortholt (1680), Budde (1701), Jenichen (1707), Staalkopf (1707; 1708; 1710) and Löscher (1708) – seems to have been less interested in a direct attack on the *TTP*, but rather sought to historicize and systematize Spinozism as an extreme form of atheism in order to deal with it in a more efficient and definitive way.¹⁷ This is also the moment when the concept of Spinozism appeared for the first time.¹⁸ Perhaps we can speak here of another attitude corresponding to a new concern with the relation between this philosophical theory (Spinozism) and its cultural-historical conditions? Perhaps we can even read this attitude as symptomatic of a new self-awareness of Lutheran orthodoxy? What I'm trying to get at is the question whether the disintegration of Lutheran orthodoxy in the 18th century – the century of the Enlightenment – was in some way connected to this more rationalizing attitude towards Spinozism?

WS: I would like to begin with a direct answer concerning one aspect of the process you're talking about, namely whether the discussion about Spinoza may have played a role in the disintegration of Lutheran authority. From a philosophical as well as theological perspective it is important to remember that Lutheran orthodoxy developed its philosophical theories on the basis of Luther's writings. Take for example practical philosophy and action theory in which any Lutheran philosopher was bound by Luther's statements on the question of the will. Luther was a hard-boiled determinist as we can read in his *De Servo Arbitrio* (1525) written against Erasmus of Rotterdam. On these issues concerning the freedom of the will any Lutheran philosopher was well aware of the theological determinism and *servum arbitrium* being essential to Lutheran anthropology. Lutherans were all determinists and they combatted libertarian views in action theory. Now, these philosophers saw that an equally tough determinism was expressed in the works of the heretic and atheist Spinoza. This was a real problem for them since they also understood very well the consequences of Spinoza's determinism, namely so-called atheism. This problem and the subsequent disintegration of Lutheran orthodoxy began in the late 17th century and came to a crisis in the 18th century, it was a process which took place in many fields at the same time, among them anthropology, practical philosophy and action theory. Indeed, Spinoza precipitated this crisis through which Lutheran theologians and philosophers – whose teachers had been tough determinists – became libertarians and defended the freedom of the will. That's strange, isn't it? In the course of the 18th century practically all Protestant university theologians and philosophers were libertarians or even became Pelagians. The conviction was that the free will is not able to make a righteous life possible for each individual, but that each individual can by a life according to the free will ultimately be judged in a righteous way by a righteous God. Luther would have been enraged if he had known this. In short, the conjuncture in which the Lutherans opposed Spinoza consisted as it were of a conflict between Lutherans and a core element of their own identity, namely determinism. This is maybe already a part of an answer to your questions.

TVB: Do you think that the development of new theories of natural law contributed to this evolution of Lutheranism? For instance, if we take someone like Samuel von Pufendorf.

WS: I think Pufendorf is very illuminating in regard to the reception of Spinoza. He was a Lutheran, but as Lutheranism counted many factions and was not homogenous, he was targeted by the hardline Lutherans and was involved in many conflicts. I think Pufendorf is very interesting first of all in his reception of another *bête noire*, Thomas Hobbes. It's remarkable to see that a Lutheran university professor was able and allowed to engage productively with the *Leviathan* (1651). Of course he got some problems, but what he did, was in principle possible. This was exactly not the case with Spinoza. Nobody at a university level could engage productively with Spinoza, contrary to Hobbes who was nevertheless attacked by many as an atheist. That's an interesting contrast, right? Pufendorf, however, obviously didn't think of Hobbes as immoral and atheist, because otherwise a positive engagement with Hobbes wouldn't have been possible. In contrast, it was precisely the idea that atheists can't possibly be moral that defined Pufendorf's stance towards Spinoza. Regarding natural law theory, I think Pufendorf is most important in his voluntaristic understanding of natural law as only existent and obligatory because of its creation and ordainment by God the legislator. For many German legal philosophers dealing with Spinoza the question whether Hugo Grotius was right or not in positing his *etiamsi daremus* was very important, but for Pufendorf there wouldn't be any law whatsoever without a divine legislator. In the very beginning of *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625) where Grotius announces his theory of natural law, he states that the norms of natural law are valid and binding even if there would be no God, *etiamsi daremus non esse Deum*. However, Grotius adds that even if there was no God, it would be a crime and unlawful to think this. In the end, for Grotius, the norms – the natural laws – do not depend in any way on God, neither in their existence or in their obligatory character. This was the naturalization and secularization of the idea of morality. On the other hand, you have a voluntaristic faction to which Pufendorf belonged and also John Locke, for example. Locke argued that the elimination of God, even in thought, dissolves everything since there's only one possible motive to act morally and according to the law, namely the sanctions composed by God in the afterlife. One finds the same thought expressed in the words of Pufendorf and other members of this faction. The Grotian faction, however, asserted that there's a natural law independent of God's will – which evidently gave rise to much discussion in Protestant circles. This may have played a role in the reception of the *TTP*.

TVB: It sure would be interesting to examine how the refuters of the *TTP* stood in relation to Pufendorf and the natural law tradition...

WS: In any case, many readers and opponents of the *TTP* addressed Spinoza's redefinition of natural law. Both camps which I just sketched, were of course opposed to Spinoza's version. According to these readers, Spinoza's natural law showed the pernicious moral and practical consequences of his philosophy.

TVB: I would like to move on to another locality in the social geography of German reception, namely Halle, home to Christian Thomasius and the German early Enlightenment. Christian Thomasius was a leading defender of toleration and the freedom of conscience as well as an ardent theorist of *libertas philosophandi* as a complex human right building on reason and consisting of the rights to think, to write, to teach, etc. Yet, he also – similarly to the generation of his father – rejected all atheistic irrationality, that is, all disturbance of public peace.¹⁹ As has often been remarked, Thomasius' calls for intellectual emancipation resemble somewhat a Spinozist program of liberation, although Thomasius' understanding of freedom remains somewhat abstract contrary to Spinoza's concrete politics in terms of power and affect. Moreover, on several occasions Thomasius forcefully distanced himself from Spinozism while at the same time remaining curious towards Spinoza and at some point even admitting that there's "manches Gute" in the *TTP* – as you have noted before.²⁰ Between rivalry, rejection and curiosity, how do you see the encounter of Christian Thomasius with the *TTP* and with Spinozism?

WS: Thomasius surely remained curious to the end of his life – his library was also full of dangerous books –,²¹ but my answer would be very short and simple: I think it's impossible to produce a coherent picture of Thomasius. First of all, in his main text on the topic, *Problema juridicum an haeresis sit crimen* (1697), he's very clear with regard to the liberties which should be given or respected in a state. In this text he also says that errors cannot and must not be punished, since error is never voluntary. So he's distinctively a liberal, but at the same time he attacked Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus because he considered Tschirnhaus a Spinozist. Precisely in his *Monatsgespräche* (1688-1690), which was a flagship of the Enlightenment, Thomasius attacked Tschirnhaus by calling him a hidden Spinozist and stinging him to admit it. This created a dangerous situation for Tschirnhaus. It really was an aggressive attack, and on top of that it was launched by a philosopher who defended liberty! I think – like probably most scholars – that there's no clear picture of Thomasius.²² If we want to assess Thomasius' stance towards the liberty of philosophizing, we have on the one hand *An haeresis sit crimen* and this famous passage where he says in a private conversation that there's "manches Gute" in the *TTP*, and on the other hand the evil attack on Tschirnhaus, who knew Spinoza personally and visited him in Rijnsburg but certainly was no Spinozist. Tschirnhaus took some ideas of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, but not from Spinoza's metaphysics, he was not a Spinozist in the sense of the *Ethica*. This contrast, this contradiction in Thomasius, can perhaps be explained by a rather trivial factor, namely the fact that Tschirnhaus had attacked Pierre Poiret. Poiret had published a text, *Cogitationum Rationalium de Deo, Anima, et Malo* (1685), in which he had written a militant attack against Spinoza. A bit later, Tschirnhaus wrote *Medicina Mentis* (1687), which consequently was the occasion for Thomasius to launch his attack on Tschirnhaus. After all, Tschirnhaus attacked in *Medicina Mentis* Poiret for being an enthusiast, a religious fanatic – which he actually was. Poiret had originally been a Cartesian, but later converted to some crazy mysticism and that is exactly what Tschirnhaus pointed out. This outraged Thomasius, because – and this is a really important point – Thomasius was not just the Enlightenment philosopher he's mostly regarded for. Thomasius had a mystical side in his personality, he even had an experience of grace and inner light like a mystic, and Poiret played a role in all of this, they exchanged letters. Indeed, Thomasius was an Enlightenment philosopher and jurist as well as a mystic and very pious man – usually this is not recognized. As a result, Thomasius could by no means have tolerated that his friend Poiret was attacked by Tschirnhaus and so he took his revenge. It's a bit of a gossip, but it's important to somewhat grasp Christian Thomasius.

TVB: That is definitely remarkable. However, I was thinking in another direction, though I agree that there's something of a contradiction that animates the whole person of Thomasius. According to Thomasius, this "manches Gute" is to be found in the last chapter of the *TTP*. Regarding this chapter Pierre-François Moreau writes that "on bascule (...) de la question des rapports État/Église à la question des rapports État/individu, ou plus exactement, puisqu'ils ne sont nullement posés dans la forme du droit subjectif, à la question des rapports de l'État avec lui-même – de l'État comme appareil à l'État comme force de production intellectuelle et sociale."²³ Thus, it seems like there we have the liberal Thomasius stressing individualism, but at the same time he was perhaps also looking to advance a certain social identity that could bring out national interests and strengthen the state?

WS: Well, I stressed the tensions in Thomasius's ideas, but one thing remains clear: there's no way for him to accept or to tolerate atheism, for Pufendorffian reasons. What I actually want to remark is that there's no positive trace of Pierre Bayle in Thomasius. Of course he knew the *Pensées diverses sur la comète* (1682), the thesis of the *athée vertueux*, but he didn't support that idea and his silence on Bayle is revealing. In any case, one must take into account Bayle's ideas when reading opponents of Spinoza. From very early on everyone knew the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697), everyone knew the article on Spinoza, the idea of the *athée vertueux* and the idea of a freedom that those atheists should enjoy following the *Pensées diverses*.

TVB: You have mentioned the *Monatsgespräche*, an important work of the early Enlightenment. How would you compare the readership of the *TTP* with that of the *Monatsgespräche*? Do both works try to illuminate or enlighten the same publics through a similar project of freedom?

WS: Yes, I believe so. The idea was to address a readership which is not academic in the strict sense. It's not Thomasius' university colleagues which were targeted but the broader public, the literate learned public outside the universities. Actually, it was the *Christiane lector* that the *TTP* addresses as well.

TVB: Isn't it rather the "*Philosophe lector*" that Spinoza addresses?

WS: Yes, but all their readers were Christian. Another thing is that the *Monatsgespräche* were written in a vernacular. However, the *TTP* was very soon also published in a vernacular, so that's no real difference. I think it's safe to say that Spinoza didn't address the common reader. Thomasius' *Monatsgespräche* would fit even better to the idea of Enlightenment, of enlightening the broader public.

TVB: The *Monatsgespräche* were also written in the form of dialogues. We can find in these dialogues a great deal of irony or even sarcasm, which doesn't happen in the *TTP*...

WS: Yes, the form of the dialogue corresponds well with the non-sectarian approach to philosophy. Thomasius is not an author who declares the 'right' philosophy, but he's open to a variety of new tendencies which are discussed. Some of the dialogues are as it were reviews of newly published books. A dialogue is an open discussion, it's not the declaration of a dogmatic philosophy.

TVB: Although there are no dialogues in the *TTP*, it's not a text that proposes a unified and right philosophy, or at least not explicitly...

WS: There is indeed the '*Éthique souterraine*'. But is there in Thomasius' *Monatsgespräche* such a *philosophie souterraine*? In any case, it's not a treatise, it's a collection of dialogues which reflect an open discussion and not the treatment of a specific problem.

TVB: I would like to turn now to the "only true early German Spinozism", which in the past you have called the clandestine Spinozism,²⁴ that is, a Spinozism anonymously hidden from the university institutions of the Lutheran orthodoxy or of the early Enlightenment. However – as you have also remarked –, to speak of a full-blown reception of the *TTP* in clandestine literature would be an overstatement. After all, these clandestine Spinozists – Friedrich Wilhelm Stosch (1692), Theodor Ludwig Lau (1717), Johann Georg Wachter (1699) and the author of the radical *Symbolum sapientiae* (end of 17th century) – rarely if ever mention Spinoza's name and although they have followed him to some extent in the individual pursuit of a philosophical life, they often had important reservations about Spinoza's practical philosophy or even held contrary views on other aspects of his philosophy.²⁵ In the end, should we consider these clandestine authors as Spinozists or should we call them materialists or atheists or something else?

WS: This is indeed a matter of permanent discussion with Jonathan Israel who has a rather liberal comprehension of Spinozism and is ready to brew some thinkers as Spinozists with rather soft criteria. I normally apply rigid criteria and I should say a few words about these criteria. In my view and according to the terminology of that era – which we discussed a bit by the terms of *philosophia sectaria* and *philosophia eclectica* – I think we should reserve the term Spinozism for sectarian Spinozists who really had the aim of reproducing Spinoza's ideas. To give a Dutch example, I would say Abraham Cuffeler was a sectarian Spinozist, he was very faithful to Spinoza's philosophy. So what are the criteria to speak of sectarian Spinozism? In metaphysics it's quite simple as there must be a monistic theory which we could call – following Bertrand Russell – neutral monism, neither physical nor mental. Can materialists be Spinozists? I would say no, because it's precisely one of Spinoza's major achievements to have overcome Cartesian

dualism by proposing a theory according to which there's only one kind of substance which is different from matter or form. I would hesitate to include materialist philosophers into the school or sect of Spinozism, but I know that's a matter of discussion.

TVB: What about determinism as a criterion?

WS: Definitely! Determinism would be my second point, but that means also the question whether a soft version of determinism may be included or not. As to practical philosophy, I would propose an ethical antirealism, which denies moral or natural law as an entity and good and evil as real properties. Thus, we have three criteria. Consequently I have some doubts whether the philosophers which are normally labeled Spinozists should be categorized as such. Take for instance Stosch who is clearly a materialist, but also clearly an eclectic as he shows elements of Spinoza – whom he quotes by name – as well as Hobbes and Jean Le Clerc, the empiricist and friend of Locke. Stosch is typically an eclectic, but the basis of his metaphysics is unequivocally materialist.

TVB: In sum, to speak of Spinozism with regard to these clandestine authors is an overstatement?

WS: Yes, if you set those criteria. If we take Wachter, we find the opposite position, namely the contention that material metaphysical entities do not exist, there's only spirit. He reinterpreted Spinoza as a kind of heir to Neoplatonism asserting the emanation of the spiritual – there would be only spiritual entities. Wachter's claim was that Spinoza got his basic idea from the Kabbalists and it is true that many Renaissance Kabbalists – for example, Leone Ebreo, whose *Dialoghi d'amore* (1535) were in Spinoza's library – and 17th century Kabbalists like Abraham Cohen de Herrera were inspired by Neoplatonism. In *Spinozismus im Judenthum* (1699) and *Elucidarius cabbalisticus* (1706) Wachter considered Herrera's *Puerta del cielo* (written in the early 17th century) as a major source for Spinoza's metaphysics,²⁶ which he saw as idealistic monism, contrary to Stosch. By the way, Wachter was a semi-clandestine, he published some books with his initial name, like *Origines juris naturalis* (1704), a Spinozistic text on natural law. Wachter was under the illusion of being accepted by the authorities and learned his lesson afterwards. Ultimately, the question what kind of theories qualify as Spinozist is a matter of agreement in a discussion on criteria. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: in Germany we have no sectarian Spinozists.

TVB: Well, the criterion in which I'm particularly interested is that of Spinoza's *libertas philosophandi* and more generally the *TTP*'s political philosophy. After having a glance at the clandestine Spinozists, it seems to me there was no serious engagement with Spinoza's *libertas philosophandi*. Is this correct? Why would this be?

WS: Half a century ago I was incautious to say that it was difficult or even impossible to speak of a reception of the *TTP* in the early Spinozists, but on closer inspection I would say that there are nevertheless traces of an engagement with the *TTP* in Stosch and in the *Symbolum sapientiae*. The *Symbolum* – which is a text with three versions (at least one version by Wachter) – is actually full of echoes of the *TTP* which are discussed. When I was writing my 1987 dissertation I concentrated on metaphysics, moral philosophy and natural law philosophy and I decided not to address the reception of the *TTP*.²⁷ Now I think there are in fact some traces, but my principle point is that there are also difficulties. To begin with, the plea for *libertas philosophandi* developed in the *TTP* is in my view not totally Spinozist. You don't need to be a Spinozist in order to agree with the chapters 19 and 20, many arguments can be approved of without being a Spinozist.

TVB: Yes, if you stick to those chapters, but if you don't agree with this approach concerning the concept of *libertas philosophandi* you might come to other conclusions...

WS: OK, but wouldn't you agree that readers of the chapters 19 and 20 could grasp some of the arguments – the pragmatic and political arguments – while on the other hand rejecting Spinoza's foundations in the chapters 1 to 18? I think some ideas of chapter 20 are simply common ideas in the general discourse on

liberty. These ideas are also to be found with other protagonists of liberty such as Anthony Collins – the receptions of Spinoza and Collins are even often mixed up from 1716 onwards.

TVB: These readers must have been then quite short-sighted, because chapter 20 starts by stating the freedom to philosophize as a natural right and the whole concept of natural right in Spinoza is highly original. Of course you can accept the very basic and common claims of this chapter, but by this you are not necessarily understanding and accepting *Spinoza's* freedom to philosophize.

WS: I totally agree, but we have again a sectarian approach and an eclectic approach. In this particular case the eclectic approach refers to the rather trivial or superficial elements of the freedom to philosophize. Now, imagine an open-minded reader of the *TTP*. What happened when such a reader approved its main thesis? To agree with the need for philosophy to be free would normally entail to just act accordingly, to just philosophize, but not to reproduce Spinoza's arguments. The normal reaction to reading the *TTP* is doing philosophy in a free way, whereas the normal reaction to the *Ethics* would be to reproduce, to further develop or to modify its ideas. I think that's why there must have been many readers which were convinced by the *TTP's* arguments and committed themselves to free philosophizing, though there's no documentation of their indebtedness to Spinoza. Don't you think that many readings of the *TTP* remain without echo or trace? What kind of book is the *TTP* actually? I would say that it's not a book which wants to persuade its readers of a particular philosophy or philosophical theory, like the *Ethics*. By contrast, the *TTP* addresses the *Christiane lector*, the educated Latin-reading public whom Spinoza wants to persuade of one point – namely what the book expresses in the title page –²⁸ without expecting the readers to embrace its underlying metaphysics and practical philosophy. Spinoza wanted the *TTP* to have a broad reception. This reception had to be broad because the aim was to influence public debate in public reality.

TVB: That's interesting and I would like to add that there's also a formative element in the *TTP*. Spinoza wants to put out a message, but at the same he also wants to in a way transform the reader, or at least it is an invitation to understand religion and faith differently. For this reason, the other chapters are very important.

WS: Yes, and this creates a tension between his latitudinarian approach to reach as many readers as possible and a more specific approach which seeks to revise concepts such as religion, etc., which are based on his very peculiar philosophical positions.

TVB: Indeed, the encounter between the horizontally given and a philosophical impulse provides perhaps a guiding tension in the reception of the *TTP*. So how can clandestine 'Spinozists' be relevant here? Why did clandestine literature interest you in your research on Spinoza and his contribution to the history of philosophy and modern society?

WS: Well, the basic question I was interested in concerned the origins of modernity: Which were the philosophers that inspired the protagonists of the Enlightenment? Which were the thinkers that – to put it pathetically – destroyed the past? Of course Spinoza is here one of the main candidates. I tried to understand which ideas of Spinoza were really massive breaks with the tradition as there are many marks of modernity in his philosophy. The next observation that I made was that in spite of all this, he attracted very few disciples, faithful disciples. I decided then to have a look again at the early reception of Spinoza to see whether studying these works of reception could reveal something as to the impact that Spinoza had on the early protagonists of the Enlightenment and modernity. Thus, as simple was my motivation, but there's one more point: among the early so-called Spinozists, some of them published their work – like Wachter, Cuffeler, Leenhof, etc. – and others were clandestine. My idea was that those latter formed a perfect standard and deserved particular interest for a simple reason regarding the problem put forward by Leo Strauss:²⁹ How sincere is an author who publishes with his own name? Are there hidden messages between the lines? All those questions that we have concerning any published text are by contrast absolutely absent in

clandestine authors whose identity remains in the dark and who had no fear for sanctions. Consequently, these clandestine authors have delivered ways to circumvent hermeneutical problems, because what they wrote is what they thought. Hence, we can examine how radical a radical thinker could be when there was no fear of persecution and sanctions. In the reception of Spinoza the *Symbolum sapientiae* goes for instance very far indeed, even further than Spinoza, namely all the way to atheism. Clandestine literature is really a treasure to study the history of philosophers who were eager to go as far as they could in their radicalism, when there are no outward limits anymore to thought. Clandestine literature guarantees something of a laboratory of unlimited free philosophizing. After all, even in Spinoza – as we all know – there is uncertainty and doubt.

² This conversation was part of a workshop on March 2nd 2022 organized by Sonja Lavaert and myself at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. I would like to thank Winfried Schröder, Sonja Lavaert and the participants for their contributions.

³ Walther, Manfred, 'Machina civilis oder Von deutscher Freiheit', in P. Cristofolini (ed.), *L'Hérésie spinoziste*, Amsterdam, APA-Holland University Press, 1995, 184-221; Israel, Jonathan, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 628-36; Lavaert, Sonja, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid, veelheid. Het moderne democratie-denken van Machiavelli tot Spinoza en zijn kring*, Brussel, VUBPress, 2020, 185-200.

⁴ Walther, Manfred, 'Spinoza in Heidelberg', in *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, Berlin/Heidelberg, Springer, 1998, 209-32.

⁵ Zenker, Kay, *Denkfreiheit. Libertas philosophandi in der deutschen Aufklärung*, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 2013.

⁶ Bunge, Wiep van, *From Stevin to Spinoza. An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, 108-22.

⁷ Zenker, *Denkfreiheit*, 495; Garber, Daniel, 'Libertas Philosophandi in the 17th Century. Some preliminary remarks', *Dianoia*, 31/2, 2020, 103-11.

⁸ Albrecht, Michael, *Eklektik. Eine Begriffsgeschichte mit Hinweisen auf die Philosophie- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1994.

⁹ Pelletier, Arnaud, 'Philosophie pour le monde et sagesse hors du monde: les limites de la revendication éclectique chez Christian Thomasius', *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review/Revue canadienne de philosophie*, 57, 2018, 695-717.

¹⁰ Thomasius, Christian, 'Elender Zustand eines in die Atheisterei verfallenen Gelehrten', in *Ernsthafte, aber doch muntere und vernünftige Thomasische Gedancken*, Halle, Rengerische Buchhandlung, 1720, 282.

¹¹ As can be read in Jakob Thomasius's refutation of the *TTP*, namely Thomasius, Jakob, 'Programma adversus anonymum, de libertate philosophandi' [May 1670], in C. Thomasius (ed.), *Dissertationes LXIII*, Halle, Johann Friedrich Zeitler, 1693, 571-81. See also Begley, Bartholomew, 'Naturalism and its political dangers: Jakob Thomasius against Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise. A study and the translation of Thomasius' text', *The Seventeenth Century*, 34/5, 2018, 649-70.

¹² Zenker, *Denkfreiheit*; Lavaert, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid, veelheid*; Benigni, Fiormichele, 'How to prevent repression: Equality and Natural Right in Hobbes, Spinoza, and some critics', *Dianoia*, 31/2, 2020, 149-59.

¹³ Letter 30 to Henry Oldenburg. See also Bunge, Wiep van, 'Becoming Spinoza: On the Failure of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*', in J. Oddens, M. Rutjes & A. Weststeijn (eds.), *Discourses of Decline*, Leiden, Brill, 2022, 37-52.

¹⁴ Zenker, *Denkfreiheit*, 112-3; Lavaert, *Vrijheid, gelijkheid, veelheid*, 198-9.

¹⁵ Schröder, Winfried (ed.), *Philosophischen Clandestine von der deutschen Aufklärung. Abteilung I: Texte und Dokumente. Band 5: Mathias Knutzen: Schriften-Dokumente*, Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 2010.

¹⁶ Johann Lorenz Schmidt, the first German translator of Spinoza's *Ethics*, considered the freedom of forming one's judgment an essential element of protestant identity as opposed to Catholicism. This constituted his plea for free philosophizing in the *Vorbericht* to Matthew Tindal's translated work *Beweis daß das Christenthum so alt als die Welt sey* (1741). Schröder, Winfried, 'Aporien des theologischen Liberalismus. Johann Lorenz Schmidts Plädoyer für eine "allgemeine Religions- und Gewissensfreyheit"', in L. Kreimendahl (ed.), *Aufklärung und Skepsis*, Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1995, 215-31.

¹⁷ Sparr, Walter, 'Formalis Atheus? Die Krise der protestantischen Orthodoxie, gespiegelt in ihre Auseinandersetzung mit Spinoza', in K. Gründer & W. Schmidt-Biggeman (eds.), *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner Religiösen Wirkung*, Heidelberg, Lambert Schneider, 1984, 27-64.

¹⁸ Otto, Rüdiger, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1994, 61.

¹⁹ Zenker, *Denkfreiheit*, 509-10.

²⁰ Schröder, Winfried, 'Spinozas Einfluss auf die Praktische Philosophie der Französischen und Deutschen Aufklärung', *Studia Spinozana*, 9, 1993, 150.

²¹ Schröder, Winfried, 'Quo ruitis? oder: Christian Thomasius und die Risiken der Aufklärung', in M. Beetz & H. Jaumann (eds.), *Thomasius im literarischen Feld*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2003, 203-219. In Thomasius's library catalogue,

Bibliotheca Thomasiana continens libros theologico-polemos (1739), we find among others the *TTP* and several of its refutations, Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*, Pieter Balling's *Het licht op den Kandelaar* (1662) and Lucius Antistius Constans' *De jure ecclesiasticorum* (1665).

²² Schneiders, Werner (ed.), *Christian Thomasius (1655-1728). Interpretationen zu Werk und Wirkung*, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 1989; Tomasoni, Francesco, *Christian Thomasius. Geist und kulturelle Identität an der Schwelle zur europäischen Aufklärung*, Münster, Waxmann Verlag, 2009.

²³ Moreau, Pierre-François, *Spinoza. État et religion*, Lyon, ENS Éditions, 2005, 68.

²⁴ For instance in Schröder, Winfried, 'Spinoza im Untergrund. Zur Rezeption seines Werks in der littérature clandestine', in H. Delf & al. (eds.), *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistgeschichte*, Berlin, Edition Hentrich, 1994, 142-61.

²⁵ Schröder, Winfried, "Die ungereimteste Meynung, die jemals von Menschen ersonnen worden" – Spinozismus in der deutschen Frühaufklärung', in E. Schürmann, N. Waszek & F. Weinreich (eds.), *Spinoza im Deutschland des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 2002, 121-38.

²⁶ Beltrán, Miquel, *The Influence of Abraham Cohen de Herrera's Kabbalah on Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Leiden, Brill, 2016.

²⁷ Schröder, Winfried, *Spinoza in der deutschen Frühaufklärung*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1987.

²⁸ "TRACTATUS THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS / *Continens Dissertationes aliquot / Quibus ostenditur Libertatem Philosophandi non tantum salva Pietate, & Reipublicae Pace posse concedi: sed eandem nisi cum Pace Reipublicae, ipsaque Pietate tolli non posse.*"

²⁹ Strauss, Leo, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, New York, Free Press, 1952.

The Early Dutch Reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

A Conversation with Wiep van Bunge

Thomas van Binsbergen: The early Dutch reception of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter *TTP*) is without doubt best known by the refutations of six critics: Johannes Melchior (1671), Jacobus Batelier (1673), Regnerus van Mansvelt (1674), Willem van Blyenbergh (1674), Johannes Bredenburg (1675) and Frans Kuyper (1676).^{1, 2} These critics read and refuted the *TTP* while being themselves part of particular networks and communities, sharing particular social and intellectual contexts. When tracing these broader relations, local reactions and topics come into relief constituting a geography of reception in which three localities stand out on the map of the Dutch Republic. First comes Amsterdam, the city where the *TTP* was printed, though none of the first refutations originated here, putting aside the posthumous publications of Batelier and Mansvelt. Amsterdam is where the *TTP* was first read by 'the Spinozist circle' of friends and thinkers with whom Spinoza explored in all confidence radical ideas in biblical criticism, metaphysics and political philosophy in the 1650s and 1660s.³ A second locality of early Dutch reception is Rotterdam and the wider South Holland region, home to Bredenburg and Blyenbergh, but also to immigrants such as Batelier and Kuyper. Here, the engagement with the *TTP* was varied and lively, as for instance 'the Bredenburg disputes' testify.⁴ Finally, there's Utrecht, which quickly became a center for liberal thought when Lambert van Velthuisen and Johannes De Bruyn developed a Cartesian network joined by Johann Georg Graevius, Mansvelt, Melchior (indirectly) and others. They formed a private scholarly society known as the *Collegie der Scavanten* and nurtured among others an interest in Spinoza's work leading up to a meeting with Spinoza himself in Utrecht in 1673.⁵ Would you agree to this division and description of three local communities reflecting as it were different early Dutch reading publics of the *TTP*?

Wiep van Bunge: Yes, that makes a lot of sense. I would be careful though not to neglect the northern provinces. It is a general complaint that the intellectual historiography of the Dutch Golden Age is 'Hollandocentric'. Many people take Amsterdam to be a *pars pro toto*, but Amsterdam was in many ways not representative of the Dutch Republic, it was an exception, an extremely powerful one. Demographically it was unique and much bigger than for instance Rotterdam – whereas today the difference is much smaller. The main academies and centers of learning were indeed in the West: Leiden and Utrecht, but also the Athenaeum of Amsterdam as well as the Illustrious School of Rotterdam. Yet, the universities of Franeker and Groningen are two of the oldest universities in the Netherlands, they too played a part. As far as we know there were no refutations of Spinoza produced at Franeker or Groningen, but Jacobus Alting and Samuel Maresius from Groningen were well aware of Spinoza. In *Vindiciae dissertationis suae nuperae de abusu philosophiae Cartesianae* (1670) the latter even challenged the Dutch Cartesians to distance themselves from Spinoza and refute him. So the North is also part of the story, but in a much less obvious way than the three other localities of reception. Between them, Utrecht was of course the city with a major university where Cartesianism was introduced in the Dutch Republic and also attacked by Gisbertus Voetius and Martinus Schoock during '*La Querelle d'Utrecht*'. Amsterdam and Rotterdam, on the other hand, hosted important Collegiant and Mennonite traditions and were characterized by the presence of a large well-educated liberal middle class. The point I want to make is that these three centers were well-connected. The Flemish Mennonites in Amsterdam knew their Rotterdam friends very well, as became obvious when Pieter Balling defended the Rotterdam Collegiant Jacob Ostens, who on his turn defended his Utrecht friends. Ostens wrote two major pamphlets (1662; 1665) against the accusation that he and his friends had become attuned to Socinianism and he also corresponded with Velthuisen in Utrecht. When speaking of networks in the

early reception of Spinoza and the early radical Enlightenment, a very important theme is friendship (*vrriendschap*), it's what cemented these intellectual factions.⁶ Spinoza writes a lot about friendship as well, as we can read in his letters. There's something about *vrriendschap* that is constantly reiterated and that goes way beyond what we call friendship today. It was a particular way of connecting to someone, often by family ties, as in the case of the Amsterdam community around Spinoza.⁷

TVB: In short, the key elements for defining the three communities of reception and the relations between them are demographics, academia, the general socio-economic and intellectual culture of a locality and *vrriendschap*. Could you discuss these elements in the case of Franeker and Groningen?

WVB: Well, all I want to point out here with someone like Maresius, is that the battles concerning the new philosophy were also fought at Franeker and Groningen. Actually, these refutations of Descartes or Spinoza were very much the product of factions: Batelier represented the Remonstrants, Mansvelt spoke on behalf of the Cartesians and the different factions were well in accordance with their respective representatives. Bredenburg, however, was an individual caught up in a personal crisis. If we take Batelier, we can see that he was in close contact with Philipp van Limborch who advised him. Batelier was already an old warhorse when he wrote his refutation of the *TTP*, he had battled Abraham Heidanus in the 1640s and was a veteran of the polemics between the Calvinists and the Remonstrants. In his correspondence with Limborch we can read how Limborch was actually helping to steer Batelier's attack on Spinoza. It was a concerted effort.

TVB: It seems as if these different networks of communication and intellectual factions were very self-aware of their interests and position in the debate – perhaps we could speak here of a collective or even political awareness. How did these factions situate themselves in relation to the *TTP*'s main thesis of *libertas philosophandi*?

WVB: The paradoxical fact is that this must have been a major disappointment for Spinoza as it were precisely the Remonstrants and Cartesians that refused to go along with him. They were obviously very much in favor of this *libertas* for which they had argued themselves since they existed as a group. In the 1640s you had for example Adriaan Heereboord, an eclectic philosopher defending the cause of Cartesianism, and by the 1650s and 1660s the leading philosophers in Leiden and Utrecht were indeed Cartesians. To a certain extent they had won the battle, but then this radical suddenly popped up, secretly arguing in favor of atheism. They figured they had come so far, while at the same time making true the warnings of Schoock in *Admiranda Methodus Novae Philosophiae Renati Des Cartes* (1643), the first major attack on Cartesian philosophy in the Dutch Republic. In this work Schoock stated that by allowing Cartesian philosophy to become normal in Dutch academia the inevitable result would be the spreading of skepticism and atheism. Thirty years later then, a philosopher connected to the Cartesian cause, the author of perhaps the most learned introduction to the philosophy of Descartes written in the Dutch Republic, actually did advance atheism! The Cartesians were not amused as they felt embarrassed or even afraid. They not only couldn't afford this, they were also genuinely shocked by the atheism of Spinoza – and they had every reason to be so. Something similar can be noted for the Remonstrants, who were a minority though not persecuted. But, if you wanted to be a professor in a Dutch university, you had to be a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, you couldn't be a Remonstrant, nor a Mennonite, nor a Catholic or a Jew.⁸ There was no state church, but there sure was a publicly privileged church, so the same rules were applied everywhere: at the university, in government, in public administration, etc. I think this is why the city of Rotterdam is so interesting, namely because the elites in Rotterdam were in large part nonetheless Remonstrant and liberal, like the regent Adriaan Paets who somehow got away with it. Thus, the Remonstrants were also afraid of being associated with Spinozism and of losing the privileges of the general toleration in the Dutch Republic at that time. In a way, the orthodox Calvinists could relax and just point out that they had warned for this to happen, they didn't think it was up to them to do the work of refuting Spinoza.

TVB: Yet, according to Richard Popkin, it would be the general “public silence” in the early Dutch reception of the *TTP* that brought the Huguenot former minister Jean-Baptiste Stoupe in his *La Religion des Hollandois* (1673) to a “loud outcry”.⁹ Do you agree with this thesis?

WVB: No. To begin with, Stoupe was a freethinker himself, he was a *libertin*. It’s far from obvious what he intended to do here, he was a very illusive character, one has to be careful with Stoupe. The way Stoupe tells his readers about the dangers of freethought is rather ridiculous since he himself was a freethinker, right?

TVB: Yes, but what do you understand by a freethinker? Should we place him in the line of Giordano Bruno, Lucilio Vanini or even Spinoza himself?

WVB: What is certain is that he was a bit of a *libertin* and a shady character. Besides, Stoupe was actually much more concerned with Socinianism. In the 1660s and 1670s the average Calvinist minister would indeed have been much more nervous about Socinianism than Spinozism. Spinozism was for a handful of philosophical madmen, but Socinianism was a huge theological school of thought that was trying to infiltrate the Dutch Reformed Church – that’s at least how they felt. My next point on Popkin is that I don’t think there was a public silence at all, he forgets basically three things: First, during the vast crisis of 1672 public life came for at least two years effectively to a standstill. The French were in Utrecht and the state was in ruins, so other things had priority. Second, in 1674 the *TTP* was officially prohibited. This in itself was revolutionary as it was the first prohibition of a philosophical title in the history of the Dutch Republic.¹⁰ We know that in the early 1670s the *TTP* was very difficult to purchase in Leiden and Utrecht, the book virtually disappeared from the bookshops. Third, writing a serious refutation of a twenty-chapter book like the *TTP* costs of course time. Hence, to speak of “public silence” is quite inaccurate.

TVB: I agree, but maybe we could understand something else in Popkin’s premise of a public silence. Today the six early Dutch refutations of the *TTP* are relatively well-known, they made their way in spite of the crisis of 1672, the censorship and the slow work of writing a serious refutation. However – and here we could reconnect to the idea of the three or more communities of reception –, a public is more than just a refutation, it’s a group of people reading, thinking and discussing together. It is probably more difficult to document and discuss such collective practices and movements, but it might be interesting to step away for a moment from the well-known critics and to delve into the ‘public silence’. Do you see my point?

WVB: Yes, but all I can say here as a historian of philosophy is based on the sources at our disposal. One of the problems with a group as that of the Collegiants is that they haven’t left us anything. When you study the Dutch Reformed Church of Amsterdam, there is material on the proceedings of church meetings, on what they were talking about, but the Collegiants left nothing. It was their idea to just speak and see what happens. I think it’s reasonable to assume that there were people who were deeply fascinated and that there was already an audience very appreciative of the *TTP* in 1670, otherwise the entire subsequent phenomenon of a radical Enlightenment makes no sense. Actually, nearly all the critics state that Spinoza was clever, learned and not to be underestimated, regardless of all the rest. This is not something Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants said about each other, they hated each other’s guts. This is also not something you can see in the polemics between Calvinists and Cartesians, they were trying to destroy each other. Now, in the case of Spinoza, there were often obvious signs of respect in spite of the harsh refutations and this continued for the *Ethics* as we can read in the analyses of Christoph Wittichius or Bayle. Indeed, I think that we have to seriously assume that the *TTP* also had a positive audience. Moreover, there are pamphlets, *schuitpraatjes*, which give an idea of what people were talking about in the *trekschuit* (a tow barge) from The Hague to Leiden, for example. It’s an entire genre in the pamphlet literature which relates the conversations between a miller, a maidservant or other people who met on a boat and discussed the newly installed minister or mayor, news from the war with England, the food prices, etc. I’m also thinking of a little notebook on Hadriaan Beverland and Spinoza by a libertine student in Utrecht who was very interested in these new

ideas and evidently hated the Calvinist ministers.¹¹ There must have been a lot of unspokenness and we know that a considerable percentage of the Dutch population in the 17th century still wasn't associated with any church, they were *indifferent*. In much of the Dutch Republic people were not forced to become a member of a church, it's only by the second half of the 18th century that the near complete confessionalization of the Dutch population was finally achieved. This is one of the paradoxes of the Dutch Enlightenment.

TVB: Was this slow evolution perhaps partly due to the great importance of Cartesianism in the Dutch Republic? After all, this new philosophy was deeply concerned with the separation of philosophy and theology and by this also advanced the necessity of faith in relation to reason.

WVB: Absolutely, and it's exactly that balanced situation which was terribly threatened by Spinoza as he basically destroyed its foundations, even if the *TTP* maintains in a clever way the separation between philosophy and theology. This is what got the more liberal readers really mad, like Blyenbergh who felt Spinoza was not taking the theologians serious and was only interested in religion as "*een doeckje voor 't bloeden*".¹² Let's be honest, in a 17th century context it's very curious to posit that the truth is none of the theologian's business, as did Spinoza in the *TTP*.

TVB: I think the examination of the Dutch pamphlet literature can be particularly interesting if we're looking for more than a history of philosophers. Perhaps the Huguenot community of the Dutch Republic offers a fertile ground to study such a political communicative approach to the reception history of new philosophies, I'm thinking here of their learned journals and academic discussion culture. Would you agree to this?

WVB: Yes, but do not underestimate the centrality of the universities in the Dutch Republic. It's not as if these debates at Dutch universities were completely separated from the rest of society. If you look at the figures, the number of people with an academic background in the Dutch Republic was much higher than in the 19th century Kingdom of Holland.¹³ In a sense, the 17th century university was less exclusive and academic than later. It was much more part of society despite the mountain of learning Latin, for which all cities actually had Latin schools.¹⁴ Another important aspect of the Dutch situation is that the universities were not under the control of the state but of the city. Being under the control and responsibility of a local authority also created a very close link between students, academics and citizens – they formed local communities. Concerning the Huguenot community one should not forget that the majority of Huguenot refugees were starving, they were having a tough time surviving and many of them returned later to France.¹⁵ It seems that for many Huguenots religion wasn't necessarily the first priority since they saw moving to the Dutch Republic also as an economic opportunity. All in all, I'm very much in favor of integrating the Refuge in Dutch intellectual history. We could consider the work of someone like Bayle as part of the intellectual infrastructure of the Dutch republic.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the Huguenots had of course a specific intellectual background linked to the tragedy of being expelled from their country, which made them quite different.

TVB: We have discussed a few of the communities in which the *TTP* was received, but I would like to turn now to an individual critic, Regnerus van Mansvelt. Interestingly, the lengthy refutation of Mansvelt, the only professional philosopher among the first refuters of the *TTP*, was immediately dismissed by Spinoza in a very short and fierce way (letter 50), but nevertheless later found in his library. When Mansvelt and his Cartesian colleagues dissociated themselves from Spinoza by refuting the *TTP* out of fear of being considered too closely related to it, Spinoza, from his side, promptly repulsed these "stupid Cartesians" (letter 68).¹⁷ In general, Spinoza reproached these troubled readers their ignorant Christianity and their dismissive interpretation of the *TTP*'s philosophy, that is in the first place the simplification of its metaphysics (letter 73). However, the political philosophy of the *TTP* was almost entirely neglected by the

first refuters except Mansvelt who also dealt with the topic of *libertas philosophandi*.¹⁸ Although Mansvelt presented Spinoza as an impostor promoting dark forces, he nevertheless recognized the exceptional quality of Spinoza's philosophy and studied willingly all chapters of the *TTP*. How would you further characterize the push-pull dynamic between Mansvelt and Spinoza?

WVB: It's obvious that from a strictly philosophical point of view Mansvelt is the most interesting critic, though Bredenburg is interesting too being a singular individual who ended up a Spinozist. Mansvelt corroborates what I have said so far, as a Cartesian philosopher he felt challenged. He had to demonstrate that it was perfectly possible and even necessary to be a Cartesian in philosophy while not endangering loyalty to the Dutch Reformed heritage. The reached compromise between Cartesian philosophers and Calvinist theologians worked as long as the philosophers didn't cross the boundaries. Moreover, the fact that Mansvelt is the only one who addresses the politics of the *TTP* is remarkable, but it has to be noted that though political philosophy is considered today more interesting than those endless theological debates, in the 17th century context it was probably the other way around. It's hard to overestimate how important and essential these highly abstruse theological disputes were to people in the Dutch Republic. I think religion and theology mattered to these people in a way that for us became very difficult to imagine. By contrast, political philosophy in the Dutch republic arrived late. There was actually very little significant political philosophy during the entire Dutch Revolt.

TVB: Well, maybe it also depends on how you understand politics. Could we say that if these discussions on religion and metaphysics affected people so much, it was because they were politically motivated as well?

WVB: I would have to be convinced of that... For these people nothing mattered more than the fate of their souls.

TVB: Undoubtedly, but can't the word "challenge" that you used in the case of Mansvelt also be understood politically and depending of the particular public he was part of?

WVB: I don't think so. The Cartesians felt challenged academically and Mansvelt had a job to defend. Spinoza was challenging his professional competence.

TVB: Sure, though Mansvelt was involved in more than just a job, for instance when he met with his friends and colleagues of the *Collegie der Sçavanten*. I would say there was a whole social field – which we have explored and speculated on a bit – that was challenged, though probably more so in Rotterdam than in Utrecht and in a less direct way than in the personal case of Mansvelt.

WVB: Yes, less directly. Mansvelt remains a question mark, we know very little about the man and he has hardly any list of publications, he died very early.

TVB: Mansvelt also formed a sort of an exception to the striking lack of interest in the *TTP*'s political philosophy during the early Dutch reception – which we have already mentioned. How should we understand this, given that the Dutch republic hosted in that same period the advent of a vibrant regime of political communication, a dynamic proliferation of pamphlets, petitions, newspapers, etc.?¹⁹

WVB: Call it the birth of the public sphere! There was indeed a lively public opinion and the literacy figures in the Dutch republic were astounding, many people could read and write, especially in comparison to the Holy Roman Empire or France. I would say this public sphere existed, because the Dutch were politically essentially pragmatic. They loved to debate the weirdest details in theology and to some extent in philosophy, but I don't see such intellectual energy invested in political philosophy. There are the brothers De la Court and the Grotian tradition in political philosophy, but that doesn't compare to the massive body of work in other fields. Take the case of Balthasar Bekker who came up with the book *De Betoverde Weereld* (1691) in which he argues against the active involvement of Satan with mankind. It provoked 300 pamphlets within

two or three years. This shows that there was certainly something like a public sphere, but that it was mostly engaged in considerations on religion and Bible interpretation and sometimes Cartesian metaphysics. I don't know any important intellectual or public debate on politics in the Dutch Republic, for example on the concept of sovereignty. However, this changes in the course of the 18th century when the major theological disputes – between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants, Cocceians and Voetians, etc. – more or less evaporated and were replaced by huge political polemics that started to erupt in the 1740s on the nature of the Stadtholderate or of the Republic. Once the Dutch republic started to crumble – already quite early in the 18th century – the volume of political thinking grew quickly.²⁰ My feeling is that in the 17th century there was simply no need for political theory since the Dutch Republic was a splendid success, many people were happy, rich and successful.

TVB: Though in the same period there were also important economic and strategic debates on the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*), right?

WVB: Certainly, but always in a very pragmatic way. As long as there were no problems, there were no attempts to fix anything in the Dutch Republic. We also can observe this during the Second Stadtholderless Period which lasted the entire first half of the 18th century and which delayed radical political debates to the 1740s.

TVB: Another early critic of the *TTP* that I would like to discuss with you is Johannes Bredenburg. I believe that his case points to some interesting historical-philosophical issues concerning the early reception of the *TTP* and Spinoza's philosophy more generally. Originally driven by practical and philosophical considerations on toleration, Bredenburg sought to trace the hidden foundation of the *TTP* in order to destroy it, joining in the same effort of the other early Dutch critics. However, passionate about the quest, Bredenburg became somewhat desperately entangled in a kind of Spinozism. Correspondingly, he completed as it were a personal crisis which had started with his critical attempt to tone down the philosophical nerves of Spinoza's philosophy, as the title of his refutation of the *TTP* signals.²¹ Considering the effects that the *TTP* had on Bredenburg, he can be seen as an original reader of the *TTP*, in a way translating Spinoza's philosophy in his own words and thoughts. Moreover, in the wake of Spinozism Bredenburg also tested the boundaries of toleration in real life by giving rise to a series of disputes in the Rotterdam Collegiant community known as the *Bredenburgse twisten*. To what extent is Bredenburg a Spinozist according to you?

WVB: In the *Wiskundige Demonstratie* (1676), published by his enemies Frans Kuyper and Abraham Lemmerman, Bredenburg undertook a sort of thought experiment on the truth of universal determinism, which boiled down to a variety of straight Spinozism. Bredenburg was a kind of a sectarian Spinozist, but he didn't want to be one, he arrived at his conclusions from a strictly philosophical perspective. By rational argument he established his Spinozism in the negation of the freedom of the will, which was especially upsetting for a Collegiant, who like the Mennonites and Remonstrants and differently from the Calvinists upheld the freedom of the will, claiming the legacy of Erasmus. Bredenburg became schizophrenic as his heart told him to remain a Christian, while his head urged him to abandon Christianity since that is what becoming a Spinozist meant according to Bredenburg. After the huge debates in which Bredenburg was involved together with the Rotterdam Collegiant community, he became at the end of his life something of a fideist as we can read in his poetry where he recounts his earlier rationalist arrogance and finally figures that fate should have the last say. This is also what made the case of Bredenburg so interesting to Bayle who probably partly recognized himself in all this.²² In sum, we can agree that Bredenburg ended up as a fideist, which is philosophically deeply problematic.²³

TVB: I would like to focus now on the issue of the rise of Spinozism in the early Dutch reception of the *TTP*. Martial Gueroult, when discussing the necessarily transcendental establishment of philosophy and its history, stated that “to search for the conditions which make the indestructibility of philosophies in history possible is to search for ways in which, in each philosophy, the scientific establishment of a truth of judgment makes possible the foundation of an intrinsic truth, independent of any truth of judgment”.²⁴ If we take for example Bredenburg, it seems almost as if he was indeed captured by such a transcendental event, encountering in what he sought those conditions by which Spinozism became indestructible and unavoidable in his personal history as a thinker and perhaps even in philosophy in general.

WVB: I'm quite skeptical, I think Gueroult was a genius, but with a weird methodology. As Gueroult 'becomes' Spinoza, he actually becomes another Spinoza, he tries to improve on Spinoza. Besides, I don't think there's such a Platonic realm of eternal truths in philosophy, I think philosophical debates are always specific although they obviously often return to the same subtexts. I remain to be convinced of philosophical problems that matter beyond any specific context. As to Bredenburg, following his Erasmian belief in the freedom of the will, his entire concept of the dignity of the human being was challenged by an extremely powerful determinist philosophy. Just like Luther and Erasmus clashed during the early Reformation, Bredenburg was caught in a crisis that however took place inside of him. After all, he hardly had any formal education in philosophy, he was essentially concerned with questions on theological action and on the relationship with the Creator. These early so-called Spinozists were Collegiants, not philosophers.

TVB: Could we nevertheless consider a sort of becoming of Spinozism which tended to escape the narrow context of the early Dutch reception? Perhaps the becoming of Spinozism was a larger movement by which some individuals like Bredenburg were swept away as their philosophical desire was transformed. In other words, perhaps Spinozism entailed the exploration of a slowly but steadily systematizing original thought which manifested itself on occasion as for instance with the Leenhofians or the Hattemists.

WVB: My view is that in Spinoza's philosophy there are all sorts of crucial issues which were equally crucial to Christian theology and more specifically to the liberal individualist tradition.²⁵ Many of these liberal and explorative Christians without church had a highly individualistic conception of religion,²⁶ this was the ultimate consequence of the Reformation and this new notion of religion is what Spinoza tapped into. However, this is also why to many readers of the 18th century – during which religion was increasingly conceived as a societal phenomenon – his writing must have looked a bit old fashioned. In the 18th century, religion actually became a societal fact and Protestantism and nationhood became completely interchangeable, that is the confessionalization of the state. This is when to be a Dutchman, you had to be a Protestant. It's a highly paradoxical consequence of the Dutch Enlightenment which in a sense became increasingly exclusive.²⁷ Collegiants like Bredenburg, however, still lived by this highly individualistic conception of a believing soul having to come to terms with its creator. This is very much what Spinoza was writing about and finally resulted in crises among his readership. Already in the first half of the 18th century the notion of religion and everything it entailed, started to change so that to be a proper Protestant became synonym with to be a proper citizen. There's no Platonic essence of what it means to be religious, it's a notion that is constantly changing and Spinoza was precisely writing at the moment when this ultra-Reformed conception of Protestantism started to dissolve.

TVB: If I understand you correctly, the idea of a Spinozism on societal level could only have played a role after the 18th century Dutch evolution of the general understanding of religion. Consequently, does this mean Spinozism cannot be considered as a factor in debates on religion and politics in the 17th century?

WVB: Well, of course there was something of an early radical Enlightenment. For Bredenburg, Spinoza was a problem, but for Koerbagh, Meyer, the Leenhofians, etc., Spinoza offered a solution. They believed Spinoza supplied a philosophical, moral and political vocabulary escaping the divisiveness which all these theological and political disputes had caused. In the late 17th century the Dutch Republic was a spectacular

economic success, but originally the Dutch Revolt started as a desperate attempt. The success of the Dutch Republic always remained extremely fragile as we can observe in the rhythm of crises. In 1618-1619, in the middle of the Twelve Years' Truce during the Eighty Years' War, the synod of Dordrecht almost caused a civil war, it was a traumatic event.²⁸ In 1650 the stadtholder William II ordered the army of the States General to attack Amsterdam. In 1672 the French invaded the Republic... It was one crisis after another! Despite the wealth, literature and universities, the defining line between success and disaster remained very thin.

TVB: That's interesting, but can we consider Dutch Spinozism – more so than the story of Spinoza himself – as part of these dynamics of crisis?

WVB: No, I don't think so. Its critics saw it of course as a contributing factor, that is, as the result of allowing the freedom that the *TTP* tried to reinforce, while its supporters thought Spinoza's philosophy would offer solutions. They recognized that plurality can be a success, but that it also can cause hurt and that some *concordia* on a number of fundamental truths is needed. Perhaps Spinoza's philosophy, because of its highly abstract nature, could allow the nation to somehow unite.

TVB: Besides, as we noted earlier, these supporters were mostly from Amsterdam, so probably not representative of other places in the Dutch Republic...

WVB: That's indeed true, but we should ask ourselves why there was any support for Spinoza at all? What had Spinoza to offer besides his amazing philosophy?

TVB: I suppose these supporters were mostly people personally tied to Spinoza through some form of *vriendschap*, so perhaps there's something to be found in the character itself of these relations. In any case, I would like to come back once more to the *TTP*'s political philosophy and in particular its thesis of *libertas philosophandi*. On this topic Henri Krop has remarked that the early Dutch critics remained usually silent, apparently because they took this issue for granted or maybe because they considered it simply as too peculiar.²⁹ More recently, Krop has stressed the first explanation: the *TTP* would have been a normal intervention in the political-theological debates at the time, contrary to the *Ethics*.³⁰ Nevertheless, from the author's point of view, Spinoza actually did interrupt the work on his philosophy to write the *TTP* and step out of the study room – all in all a most remarkable act.³¹ In your latest publication you argue that the *TTP* was a failure because it didn't live up to the original intentions of Spinoza which were partly religious and private, concerning the accusations of atheism he had to endure, and partly philosophical and public, concerning the communication of the universal ethics which he defended.³² Later however, when writing the preface to the *TTP*, Spinoza pointed more combatively than ever to the theological-political phenomenon of superstition as the most problematic point for a peaceful society which necessitates a critical examination of the conditions of a democratic debate and its democratic freedom of philosophizing – hence, the *Tractatus Politicus* (hereafter *TP*), one could argue. Isn't this call for a critical and democratic attitude a success in itself or do you maintain that the publication of the *TTP* was a “disaster”? Can't we see the “failure” here also as a success?

WVB: That's a not uninteresting suggestion, but I would be careful. I'm always extremely hesitant concerning the question of the content and meaning of the *TP*. We have no idea what else Spinoza wanted the *TP* to contain, we just don't know. Nevertheless, the *TP* is an interesting book because it takes the events of 1672 into account, while the *TTP* was written in order to in a way prevent 1672, namely the collapse of the De Witt regime. Finally this defense of the De Witt regime was a failure and so we see Spinoza trying to make sense of it. In the end, political philosophy for Spinoza is about balancing out power as you want citizens to enjoy liberty as much as possible, but within definite limits. In this sense the *TP* is obviously more realistic, after having witnessed how people could become dangerous when left wildly free. Another reason

why we can consider the *TTP* a failure is that it made it impossible for Spinoza to publish the *Ethics*, it destroyed his reputation.

TVB: Yes, but the interest and urgency of publication was very different. The *TTP* and the *Ethics* are two works of a very different temperament. Moreover, don't you think the *TTP* added to the *Ethics* in important ways?

WVB: That's indeed very likely. The last parts of the *Ethics* do contain all sorts of moral and political consequences about which he had been thinking thanks to the *TTP*. I think Alexandre Matheron has very convincingly established the deeply political nature of the *Ethics*.³³ I agree that the *Ethics* would have looked fundamentally different if he hadn't done his work on the *TTP* in between. Still, Spinoza's main book remains the *Ethics*, even if we consider the *TTP* his second masterpiece.

TVB: In comparison to Spinoza's general philosophical outline in the *Ethics*, to what extent did the early Dutch readers consider the *TTP* an abnormal or paradoxical work?

WVB: In general, Dutch polemics in the 17th century were quite feisty, people called it *de jeukerige eeuw* (the itchy century).³⁴ It didn't take a lot to create a huge brawl and provoke the publication of dozens of pamphlets. However, Spinoza was suspected to be a serious well-articulated philosophical atheist and there was no precedence to that, it was new and deeply shocking as Dutch *libertinage* remained on the whole rather tame. Later, someone like Bayle posited equally serious atheistic ideas such as that of the *athée vertueux*, but his sources were different and he stood far from all debates dividing the Dutch Republic at that time. These debates centered mostly on the extension of the theological debates between Voetians and Cocceians and on the case of Balthasar Bekker. In all of this the *TTP* played at most a marginal role, already refuted and prohibited.

¹ This conversation was part of a workshop on March 10th 2022 organized by Sonja Lavaert and myself at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. I would like to thank Wiep van Bunge, Sonja Lavaert and the participants for their contributions.

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- ²⁶ Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans Eglise*.
- ²⁷ Jews for instance only received equal citizen rights in 1796 owing to the French.
- ²⁸ In chapter 20 of the *TTP* Spinoza alludes to the role of the synod of Dordrecht in the painful schism between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants.
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La première réception française du *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Une conversation avec Pierre-François Moreau

Thomas van Binsbergen : À propos de la première réception française du *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP par la suite), je voudrais proposer une première distinction entre les lecteurs localisés en France et ceux dans la périphérie ou hors de la France.¹ Parmi les derniers, nous repérons deux groupes : les huguenots, positivement caractérisés par leur religion protestante, et les libertins, plutôt dans un rapport négatif avec la religion.

Pierre-François Moreau : Il faudrait remarquer que le problème est que les catégories ne sont pas fixes et qu'on peut se déplacer entre elles. Aux yeux des catholiques cela va de soi : quand on n'a plus l'Autorité et la Tradition comme garde-fous, on dérive facilement. Un protestant est alors (selon eux) toujours susceptible de devenir un libertin, un athée. Mais dans la réalité, le libertin d'origine protestante ou l'hétérodoxe, hors de la France et arrivé dans les Provinces-Unies, doit bien s'appuyer sur la communauté du Refuge pour vivre, même s'il ne pense pas exactement comme les pasteurs huguenots. Tous les exilés vivent ce problème de trouver une solidarité sociale. Par ailleurs, je pense que la communauté du Refuge était beaucoup moins intolérante que le protestantisme du XVI^e siècle. On se représente, par exemple, la polémique entre Bayle et Jurieu comme la persécution de Bayle par les autorités huguenotes, mais Elisabeth Labrousse a bien montré que Jurieu était tout aussi marginal que Bayle et que lui aussi représente pour les autorités plutôt un problème qu'une référence.² Élie Saurin, pasteur de l'église Wallonne d'Utrecht, a écrit – comme vous savez – que « ceux que l'on connaît sous le nom de *Tolerans mitigez*, & que l'on pourrait appeler aussi les *Zéleux charitables*, sont ceux qui forment le parti Protestant. »³ Bayle est à l'écart de ce parti, et Jurieu aussi. En réalité, la majorité des protestants et les synodes qui les représentent ne sont pas aussi hétérodoxes que Bayle et ne sont pas aussi intolérants que Jurieu. Nous pouvons distinguer entre libertins et huguenots, mais je pense que les marges sont également importantes. Nous l'observons chez les libertins d'origine huguenote qui ont intérêt à garder des liens avec la communauté protestante pour se protéger contre les autorités néerlandaises ou contre les espions de Louis XIV, tout simplement pour continuer à vivre.

TvB : C'est sans doute l'histoire du libertin Jean-Baptiste Stoupe et d'autres. Par contre, Stoupe est clairement en mission politique – pour Louis XIV ! – au moment qu'il écrit un pamphlet en dénonçant la religion des Hollandais.⁴ D'un autre côté, il y a par exemple le huguenot exilé Pierre Yvon dont les convictions religieuses sont entièrement positives. J'aimerais donc soulever de manière plus élémentaire la distinction entre politique et religion et questionner les priorités.

PFM : Je crois qu'il s'agit ici d'un problème anthropologique. Les individus, surtout quand ils passent d'un pays à un autre, ne sont pas seulement des gens préoccupés par des théories philosophiques, politiques, ou religieuses. Ce sont aussi des gens qui doivent vivre et pour cela, s'ils ne veulent pas mourir de faim ou de solitude, ils font partie d'une communauté. Par ailleurs, à l'intérieur d'une communauté il peut y avoir des individus qui pensent de façon très orthodoxe et d'autres qui pensent de façon plus hétérodoxe, mais qui en même temps sont tenus par cette communauté d'une façon ou d'une autre. L'individu est donc contraint de s'y rattacher malgré tout, même s'il ne croit plus aux valeurs de la communauté. De plus, même dans les Provinces-Unies et même pour ceux qui ont une pensée très libre, les attaches communautaires sont lourdes, ce qui est aussi positif, car c'est ce qui protège les individus. D'autre part, un écrivain huguenot condamné par le synode ou attaqué par Jurieu et d'autres huguenots restera pour les autorités hollandaises un huguenot néanmoins, par ce que l'on pourrait appeler un effet de rémanence. Quand on regarde les problèmes

théoriques, il faut donc aussi voir cet aspect de l'ancrage sociologique et anthropologique des individus. De la même façon, en France, quand un écrivain est membre d'un ordre religieux, cet ordre le protège, même quand il s'éloigne des principes de l'ordre. Tant qu'il n'est pas exclu de l'ordre, il ne sera pas poursuivi par une instance civile. Ces ordres ou sociétés religieuses donnent également à manger aux individus qui réfléchissent. Au XVII^e siècle, les ordres nourrissent et protègent leurs membres contre la justice civile. Par contre, une fois exclu, on devient une cible facile.

TvB : Je pense que ces aspects de communautés et de solidarité sont en effet importants, surtout quand on essaie de penser politiquement une réception philosophique, c'est-à-dire à base d'une critique historique en termes de collectivités et de groupes sociologiques de lecteurs au lieu de s'intéresser uniquement aux écrivains individuels. En tout cas, les lecteurs libertins du *TTP* en dehors de la France séjournent le plus souvent dans les Provinces-Unies, la république où règne du temps de Spinoza le régime de la 'Vraie Liberté' (*Ware Vrijheid*).⁵ Nous y trouvons avant la publication du *TTP* (1670) Jean Hénault et Charles de Saint-Évremond, et peu après, le prince de Condé qui pendant l'occupation de Utrecht aurait invité Spinoza en 1673 pour s'entretenir avec lui sur des questions politiques.⁶ En fait, ce sont plutôt des cartésiens néerlandais et le colonel Jean-Baptiste Stoupe qui ont organisé le voyage de Spinoza et qui l'ont finalement rencontré à Utrecht.⁷

PFM : Oui, bien que Spinoza ait vraiment été invité par l'état-major de Condé. Je pense que l'état-major n'aurait pas pris cette décision contre l'avis du prince – de fait absent au moment de la visite de Spinoza. Si Condé a fini ultrareligieux dans ses dernières années, à cette époque-là il était lui-même encore libertin et entouré de libertins. Gustave Cohen avait retrouvé les traces de cette visite de Spinoza dans le journal de l'état-major de Condé, conservé à Chantilly,⁸ et je suis allé le relire il y a quelques années avec Jacqueline Lagrée. Ce qui est sûr, c'est que tout cela relève pour eux de l'anecdote – les notations qui concernent Spinoza ne semblent pas avoir plus d'importance que les salutations à transmettre à telle actrice du théâtre d'Amsterdam. C'était du tourisme militaire, bien qu'ils aient été en guerre ! Il s'agit d'une conception de la guerre qui n'est pas du tout celle que nous avons aujourd'hui. En tout cas, Spinoza a été reçu à Utrecht par des libertins du milieu de Condé, des gens qui n'auraient jamais dit publiquement qu'ils étaient libertins.

TvB : Mais à quoi ressemblait ce cercle de libertins autour de Condé plus précisément ? Est-ce que nous pouvons y compter quelqu'un comme Lambertus van Velthuisen, un cartésien (et hobbesien) néerlandais et politicien d'Utrecht ?

PFM : Comptons au moins les gens qui se trouvaient à l'état-major de Condé. Dans un livre comme celui de François-Tommy Perrens, qui s'intéresse plus aux racontars et anecdotes qu'aux écrits théoriques, il semble que même dans la cour autour de Louis XIV il y avait des nobles qui s'amusaient à brûler des crucifix et qui avaient des pratiques libertines très avancées.⁹ Visiblement les cercles libertins étaient à cette époque encore très fermés, ou éventuellement semi-fermés.

TvB : Pour la France cela peut bien être le cas, mais des histoires pareilles m'ont l'air moins probables dans les Provinces-Unies. Si nous comptons dans le cercle de Condé aussi Velthuisen, alors nous nous trouvons déjà presque dans l'académie d'Utrecht avec Johann Georg Graevius, Johannes De Bruyn, Regnerus van Mansvelt...

PFM : Oui, mais eux s'intéressent plus à des questions théoriques tandis que les libertins dont Perrens parle n'ont pas de théorie. C'est de l'ordre de la raillerie anti-chrétienne, qui relève plus de la plaisanterie et du libertinage que du libertinisme.

TvB : Concernant Stoupe, qui attaque les Provinces-Unies et le *TTP* dans *La religion des Hollandois* (1673), il me semble clair qu'il est en fait bien intéressé par la pensée subversive du *TTP* sur la tolérance.¹⁰ Malgré une certaine distance politique au projet républicain, nous pouvons voir chez Stoupe tout comme chez le traducteur Gabriel de Saint-Glain et le biographe Jean-Maximilien Lucas – tous les trois des libertins

d'origine protestante –, un intérêt, une curiosité ou même un désir pour la puissance de la philosophie spinoziste, le texte du *TTP* et la figure de son auteur.¹¹

PFM : Je suis entièrement d'accord. Je crois même que curiosité est un terme faible parce que traduire le texte et écrire une biographie enthousiaste sont des actes forts. Quand on lit les deux premières biographies on remarque que le pasteur Johannes Colerus admire les mœurs de Spinoza, mais qu'il s'indigne en permanence contre ses doctrines. En revanche, Lucas – si c'est bien lui l'auteur de l'autre biographie –¹² est d'un enthousiasme communicatif général. Il s'adresse directement à ses interlocuteurs et il parle de « notre ami Spinoza dont nous nous souvenons tous ». Il semble donc en appeler à un cercle spinoziste.

TvB : Oui, mais est-ce que la curiosité n'implique pas une certaine réserve ou prudence après tout ?

PFM : Alors, disons une curiosité chez Stoupe, un intérêt chez Saint-Glain et un enthousiasme chez Lucas.

TvB : Ces libertins – comme vous l'avez récemment suggéré à propos de Saint-Glain –¹³ semblent se retrouver avec Spinoza et le *TTP* dans un processus de transformation. Comment transforment-ils Spinoza et sont-ils transformés par Spinoza ?

PFM : Cela m'a en effet frappé en lisant *La Clef du sanctuaire* (1678). D'habitude on dit que c'est une mauvaise traduction. Quand nous avons traduit le *TTP*,¹⁴ je trouvais que la traduction de Saint-Glain était assez typique du XVII^e siècle – pas toujours très exacte, mais sans vraiment trahir le texte. Mon hypothèse est qu'Emile Saisset, le premier traducteur français de l'œuvre intégrale de Spinoza, a en fait fabriqué cette accusation de mauvaise traduction pour légitimer sa propre traduction.¹⁵ Saisset était un spiritualiste de l'école de Victor Cousin et il a traduit Spinoza pour montrer que les spiritualistes ne sont justement pas des panthéistes. Il a combattu sur deux fronts : contre l'Église et contre le panthéisme dont l'Église les accusait. Au XIX^e siècle nous trouvons encore une deuxième traduction française de Spinoza par le républicain Jules-Gustave Prat qui a vécu la Commune et qui se réclamait de Diderot et du matérialisme. Prat n'était pas un universitaire, c'était un enthousiaste, un militant, qui a été éliminé de l'histoire. C'est dommage que Prat n'ait pas vu la traduction de Saint-Glain, car il dit qu'il ne la connaît pas, mais qu'il sait par Saisset qu'elle serait très mauvaise. Bien qu'il critique Saisset tout le temps, là-dessus il lui a fait confiance et il a eu tort. En fait, quand on peut avoir l'impression que Saint-Glain trahit le texte de Spinoza, il ne le trahit pas, il l'avance un peu, il donne en avance des explications que Spinoza donne quelques pages plus loin, ce qui rend le texte moins prudent et plus militant.

TvB : De quelles façons les rôles du traducteur (Saint-Glain), du biographe (Lucas) et du militaire – Stoupe, mais éventuellement aussi Henry de Boulainvillier ou même le marquis de Vauvenargues – ont été significatifs pour la réception française du *TTP* ?

PFM : La suggestion du rôle du militaire est intéressante, mais que voulez-vous en faire ?

TvB : Si le traducteur et le biographe travaillent l'œuvre et la vie et les rassemblent sur un même plan qui nous permettrait un exercice historique et critique, le militaire pourrait soulever plus explicitement dans la réception française une dimension stratégique et politique en termes de guerre. Nous pourrions rechercher une généalogie française de politisation du spinozisme à travers sa réception, un 'contre-savoir'.¹⁶

PFM : Notre vision de ce qui est militaire est spontanément brouillée par ce qu'est devenue l'armée en France au XIX^e siècle, au moment de l'affaire Dreyfus entre autres. Dans les deux derniers siècles l'armée en France est un corps réactionnaire, très catholique, antisémite, obscurantiste, et tout cela perdure. Peut-être que l'armée au XVII^e siècle est bien différente, ce qui justifierait ton hypothèse que précisément les militaires ne forment pas l'alliance entre l'armée et le clergé (« le sabre et le goupillon »). Peut-être qu'il y a chez les militaires une plus grande ouverture d'esprit à l'égard du libertinisme, ça ne me paraît pas impossible... En vous écoutant je pense à Bussy-Rabutin, un cousin de Madame de Sévigné et célèbre

libertin au sens de conquêtes galantes. Des gens comme Bussy-Rabutin – nous sommes vers 1640-1660 – passent la moitié de leur temps à la Cour ou à Paris avec des femmes, des jeux de cartes, des visites au théâtre. Cette vie libertine est alors probablement associée à des plaisanteries sur la religion, non pas une critique théorique, mais plutôt une pratique anti- ou non-religieuse, plutôt du libertinage que du libertinisme. Ces gens sont tolérés par le roi et l'Église, car l'autre moitié de leur temps est consacré à défendre le front, à se battre contre des armées espagnoles, allemandes, ou autres. Je pense que Condé aussi doit faire partie de ces gens-là qui ne prennent pas la religion au sérieux, mais qui ne prennent pas non plus la peine d'écrire un traité anti-religieux, ce ne sont pas des libertins théoriques. Par contre, ils forment une espèce de terrain dans lequel le libertinisme théorique trouvera des lecteurs ou des protecteurs.

TvB : Hors de la France et en particulier dans les Provinces-Unies, les libertins français profitent de plus de tolérance et se retrouvent à l'abri de la censure absolutiste, mais ont-ils aussi philosophé plus librement ? Est-ce que le voyage et le libertinage se prêtent à la *libertas philosophandi* ? Charles Wolfe a voulu penser le voyage comme un fondement possible de l'athéisme et du libertinisme, comme une pratique de 'déterritorialisation'.¹⁷ Le terrain de la transformation implique un changement de territoire qui peut se faire même sur place, localement.

PFM : Premièrement, à côté des gens qui se moquent de l'Église sans faire de la théorie, il y a en France aussi des libertins qui écrivent des manuscrits clandestins, mais qui ont seulement une théorie faible de l'imposture, une théorie faite par collage et non-systématique. Le rôle que le spinozisme a pu jouer dans l'histoire du libertinisme, c'est de faire passer les libertins d'une théorie faible de l'imposture à une théorie forte de l'imagination. Il s'agit de voir que tous les hommes ont une imagination qui fabrique en dehors de leurs volontés des fantasmes, et que les princes et prêtres partagent ces fantasmes et ne se contentent pas de les diffuser aux autres en s'appuyant sur la religion. Quand on lit un texte libertin comme *L'Esprit de Spinoza/Le Traité des Trois Imposteurs*, on observe bien le mot « imposteur » dans le titre, mais ce mot est ici conceptuellement bâti sur la théorie spinoziste de l'imagination, une théorie anthropologique beaucoup plus forte que le reproche d'imbécile ou de fripon. Jusque-là, les écrits clandestins mêlaient des éléments de critique religieuse et parfois politique avec des importations philosophiques dispersées – Hobbes, Gassendi, les aristotéliens italiens. Le spinozisme va alors fournir une anthropologie appuyée sur une métaphysique, une ontologie de la puissance. Cette philosophie ne sera pas toujours comprise dans sa cohérence et son extension, mais le système est assez puissant pour être efficace même sous cette forme. Au final, je crois que c'est ça qui va faire basculer du libertinage ou libertinisme à la philosophie des Lumières.

TvB : N'y a-t-il pas au même temps aussi une évolution conceptuelle de l'imposture comme fraude ou mensonge à l'imposture comme violation de la raison ? Et est-ce que ces deux évolutions sont connectés ?

PFM : Le spinozisme ajoute qu'il ne suffit pas de dire qu'une imposture est une violation de la raison pour convaincre, car les forces de l'imaginaire sont tellement puissantes que la raison ne suffit pas à les dissoudre. Le spinozisme n'est pas une philosophie de la libération par la raison, c'est une philosophie de la libération par la *force* de la raison.

TvB : Ce serait alors comme si plus les libertins sont devenus politiques, plus la répression est devenue moralisatrice, se réclamant de la Raison mais en fait continuant ses propres impostures ?

PFM : Oui, je pense qu'il y a eu également une autre évolution qui n'est peut-être pas due à Spinoza, mais à d'autres conditions. Cela s'observe dans les études de Françoise Charles-Daubert qui montre que lorsque la critique de la religion est forte, la critique du pouvoir est ambiguë parce qu'on sait que le pouvoir est une illusion, sans fondement et règles, mais on sait aussi que le pouvoir protège contre la foule.¹⁸ Ce type de libertin sait que le pouvoir est une imposture, mais qu'il ne faut pas la dénoncer, ou qu'il faut seulement la dénoncer entre proches, dans un cercle fermé. Par exemple, Fontenelle, homme des Lumières, aurait dit :

« Si j'avais la main pleine de vérités, je me garderais bien de l'ouvrir. » Ainsi, un petit groupe d'esprits éclairés se dit que le pouvoir politique est bien une imposture, mais une imposture utile pour dominer la foule. Par contre, dans *Le Traité des Trois Imposteurs* et puis au XVIII^e siècle on cherchera de plus en plus à finalement éclairer le peuple. Il y a là un basculement politique complet, même si les philosophes du XVIII^e siècle auront dans les faits parfois encore besoin de certains aspects du pouvoir pour se protéger, mais ils n'auront plus l'idée que tout pouvoir est positif. L'appel au peuple, à partir de 1750, est une idée complètement inverse à l'idée du cercle fermé dans le siècle précédent.

TvB : La relation entre les libertins et la foule ou la multitude m'a l'air en effet un point très important...

PFM : Deuxièmement par rapport à la liberté de philosopher, la tolérance dans les Provinces-Unies est quand même relative. Elle est beaucoup plus forte qu'en France, mais elle varie néanmoins selon les époques et les milieux. Après tout, il y a des gens inspirés par Spinoza qui ont fini en prison comme Adriaan Koerbagh et Aart Wolsgryn, éditeur du roman spinoziste *Philopater* (1691 ; 1697). Ce n'est bien-sûr pas la France de Louis XIV, mais la liberté des Provinces-Unies est donc toujours une liberté qui peut être limitée. En outre, je pense que séjourner à l'étranger peut en effet favoriser une liberté de philosopher. Dans le pays d'accueil, et surtout si on écrit dans la langue du pays d'origine, les autochtones ne lisent souvent pas ce qu'un étranger écrit et les autorités autochtones ne considèrent donc pas toujours ces écrits comme dangereux. C'est par exemple l'histoire de Descartes dans les Provinces-Unies qui continue néanmoins à publier en France, mais aussi de Marx et Engels en France et Angleterre, ou de Plekhanov et Lénine en Suisse ou à Paris. Il y a bien une certaine liberté de l'exil qui permet de s'échapper à la censure ou la police du pays d'origine, mais il y a toujours aussi des espions qui sont envoyés à l'étranger et qui peuvent intervenir contre des individus. L'étranger protège donc seulement relativement contre le pays d'origine, et des écrits peuvent d'ailleurs toujours être arrêtés à la frontière. C'est pourquoi les libertins doivent s'organiser avec des libraires, des imprimeurs, des contrebandiers, etc., qui s'occupent aussi bien d'ouvrages philosophiques que de pornographie tant que ça leur apporte de l'argent.

TvB : Dans ce sens, rester en France n'est pas nécessairement moins intéressant pour les libertins qui disposent d'un cercle bien fermé ?

PFM : Oui, rester en France peut être bien, si on est protégé par un grand seigneur. Un libertin érudit qui habite chez un prince sera à l'abri de la police qui n'interviendra pas aussi vite. C'est donc plus compliqué que simplement la rencontre entre un état oppressif et un individu qui veut penser librement. On trouve en France des structures sociales qui peuvent protéger presque autant que l'exil, mais pas tout le temps, pas indéfiniment, et il se peut que le prince se convertisse à une religion plus stricte ou soit pris dans une conjuration et condamné à mort...

TvB : À quoi tient cette relation entre un libertin et son seigneur ? Quel est le rapport entre leurs (différentes) opinions ?

PFM : Souvent un intellectuel pouvait avoir chez un noble la fonction de précepteur des enfants. C'est le cas de La Mothe Le Vayer qui a éduqué le jeune Louis XIV. Le précepteur est évidemment nourri et proche d'une personne bien placée, ce qui le protège. Mais pour conclure cette problématique du libertin ou huguenot en exil, il faudrait encore remarquer qu'un pays étranger peut avoir intérêt à recevoir des exilés pour justement entretenir l'opposition au pays des exilés ou même pour préparer un coup d'État dans ce pays. Si, par exemple, les Hollandais soutiennent les protestants c'est peut-être en anticipant une révolte protestante en France. On pourrait se demander en quelle mesure la conjuration de Rohan et Latréaumont – à laquelle Franciscus van den Enden, l'ancien professeur de Spinoza, avait participé – a été manipulée par le gouvernement hollandais. Nous pouvons observer les mêmes dynamiques dans beaucoup de coups d'État du siècle dernier en Afrique, en Amérique Latine ou en Europe de l'Est. Dans les Provinces-Unies, les libertins français et huguenots se voient offrir un refuge, mais peut-être avec l'idée de les manipuler. La

manipulation consisterait alors à les appuyer contre leur propre gouvernement, quitte à les laisser tomber quand c'est nécessaire. Bref, ce cynisme du pouvoir gouvernant est bien connu.

TvB : Du côté des huguenots en particulier, les principaux lecteurs et commentateurs du *TTP* se trouvent bien dans les Provinces-Unies : Yvon (1681), Aubert de Versé (1687) et – pour compléter la liste – Pierre Bayle.¹⁹ La pensée huguenote est conflictuelle et « sans qu'aucun adversaire ne l'avoue, ne fait que refléter l'importance prise dans le monde protestant par la pensée de Spinoza : tolérance, droits imprescriptibles de la conscience, suprématie des pouvoirs politiques sur les pouvoirs religieux, séparation de la foi et de la raison, autant de thèmes rajeunis par le *Tractatus* et qui assument dans le Refuge une actualité souvent pénible. »²⁰ On pourrait dire que le *TTP* est comme un miroir, un spectre ou une crise concernant les préoccupations huguenotes autour de premièrement la tolérance, c'est-à-dire autour de la liberté de conscience. Êtes-vous d'accord avec ces métaphores, et pourrions-nous dire que la conscience (*conscientia*) constitue le champ de l'expérience huguenote ?

PFM : Il faut considérer l'histoire interne du calvinisme depuis Calvin. Au début, cette religion est intolérante et quand elle commence à parler des droits de la conscience, il faut bien voir qu'il s'agit de *devoirs* de la conscience. Les droits de la conscience dans le premier calvinisme n'ont rien avoir avec la tolérance, car les droits de la conscience pour Calvin sont des devoirs que la conscience impose à l'individu. En fait, il s'agit des devoirs de proclamer la vérité, de convertir les autres et de punir les hétérodoxes. Il me semble qu'au cours du XVII^e siècle on voit une espèce de retournement à l'intérieur de la conscience calviniste et peu à peu la doctrine originelle des droits de la conscience se transforme dans une doctrine des droits de l'individu, c'est-à-dire dans une vraie doctrine de tolérance. C'est bien-sûr une évolution qui s'est produite lentement, d'abord sans doute de façon pratique et théorisée seulement autour de 1700. Il suffit à nouveau de lire Élie Saurin contre qui Calvin se serait probablement indigné.

TvB : C'est certainement une évolution frappante. Quelles sources ont marqué cette évolution – des sources spinozistes peut-être ?

PFM : En tout cas dans les Provinces-Unies, on s'est retrouvé en face d'une multiplication de sectes – les anabaptistes, les sociniens, mais aussi les spinozistes, parmi d'autres – et donc en face du problème pratique du vivre-ensemble. Nous pouvons ensuite observer une espèce d'évolution dans les familles de pasteurs où les fils sont plus tolérants que les pères, ce qui correspond à l'esprit de l'époque. En plus, il y a aussi à l'intérieur des deux protestantismes, le luthéranisme et le calvinisme, l'irruption du piétisme. Le piétisme éloigne les questions du rapport entre Église et État au profit du rapport entre la grande Église et l'ecclesiola, la petite communauté, et donc le rapport en quelque sorte entre dogme et sensibilité. Les polémiques entre les luthériens ou calvinistes dogmatiques et les piétistes ne se porteront pas sur la question politique, mais plutôt sur l'autorité de l'Ecclesia et sa méfiance à l'égard de pratiques internes. Le piétisme pourra parfois aussi être intolérant – comme à l'égard de Wolff –, mais par la suite le piétisme deviendra tolérant dans la mesure où il s'intéresse plus à la croyance interne. Donc, je crois qu'il s'agit d'une conjonction de plusieurs facteurs qui ont transformé le protestantisme. Peut-être qu'il y a eu la pénétration d'une certaine adaptation de spinozisme, mais ce qui est sûr c'est que le piétisme se répand également en milieu huguenot. Par ailleurs, il faut également noter l'histoire, interne au protestantisme, du rapport à la Bible.²¹ Dans le XVI^e et une partie du XVII^e siècle les calvinistes sont ceux qui tiennent le plus au texte biblique dans sa littéralité, mais peu à peu,²² notamment du côté de l'école de Saumur en France, il y a une évolution interne du rapport à l'Écriture Sainte qui rend la critique biblique de Spinoza plus compréhensible et moins scandaleuse. Plus tard, Hegel suggérera même une continuité entre la science biblique des pasteurs de son temps et celle du *TTP* qui pour le reste ne l'intéresse pas, contrairement à l'*Éthique*. Bref, les catholiques ont eu beaucoup de retard par rapport à tout cela.

TvB : Du côté de la 'France toute catholique', le *TTP* circule déjà peu après sa publication discrètement à Paris au milieu de Huygens, Leibniz et Tschirnhaus, mais ce seront les religieux Richard Simon (1678), Pierre Daniel Huet (1679) et Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1681) (et même Antoine Arnauld) qui affronteront réellement Spinoza.²³ Leurs réfutations critiquent le *TTP* par différentes tactiques, mais toutes se concentrent sur la critique biblique et toutes revendiquent la vérité catholique.²⁴ Contrairement à cette revendication d'une valeur universelle, Paul Vernière note bien que la critique biblique du *TTP* se porte sur la signification du texte – un contenu qui implique un contexte – et cela à travers des études sur le langage, la sémantique et l'histoire.²⁵ Comment voyez-vous la confrontation entre le *TTP* et les catholiques à propos de ces trois sujets : le langage, la sémantique et l'histoire ?

PFM : Pour commencer, à cette époque les lecteurs bibliques spinozistes et catholiques sont officiellement irréconciliables et le mot « spinozisme » devient surtout une insulte qu'on peut jeter à ses adversaires dans une pratique – courante dans l'histoire des idées – de l'amalgame. Le texte de l'Écriture est pour les catholiques moins l'objet d'une défense jalouse et quasi-obsessionnelle que pour les calvinistes à la Johann Buxtorf, car les catholiques ont la Tradition comme source. Bossuet, par exemple,²⁶ accepte bien que la fin du Deutéronome ne soit pas de Moïse tandis qu'un calviniste ne pourrait pas faire cela. Les catholiques – sauf Richard Simon – ne chercheront pas à expliquer cette fin comme prophétie de Moïse. Au contraire, ce qui fragilise apparemment le texte prouve d'autant plus la nécessité du recours à la Tradition pour l'interpréter, éventuellement même contre sa vérité littérale, si nécessaire. Il suffit de voir comment le jésuite Francisco Suárez – presque comme un philosophe antichrétien du XVIII^e siècle – a montré que le texte biblique est souvent obscur et plein d'ambiguïtés qu'on ne peut pas comprendre sans les langues originales du texte et les apports philologiques.²⁷ Suárez critique la lecture de la Bible pour montrer que le texte à lui tout seul ne peut pas servir à témoigner la religion chrétienne et qu'il faut la Tradition. En fait, pour le dire de façon provocante, jusqu'à une date récente, un catholique est quelqu'un qui ne lit pas la Bible.

TvB : La sémantique dont Vernière parle reviendrait alors à la théologie – non pas la philologie – qui pour les catholiques donne sens au texte biblique ?

PFM : Oui, et dire que Moïse n'a pas du tout écrit le Pentateuque est bien une question théologique, car l'autorité biblique de Moïse est essentielle. Par contre, les dernières lignes du Deutéronome concernent une question textuelle particulière qui n'est pas importante pour les catholiques.

TvB : Et quel est le rapport entre le *TTP* et le catholicisme concernant l'histoire ?

PFM : Dans le *TTP* il n'y a pas de téléologie historique, contrairement à ce que l'on trouve chez Bossuet qui écrit bien une histoire universelle de six époques dans un ordre téléologique. Quand Bossuet, par exemple, parle des miracles il ne nie évidemment pas les miracles du Christ, mais pour lui les vrais miracles sont l'existence-même du Christ, le salut et la conversion. Il ne s'attarde pas sur le miracle individuel. Il ne cherche pas à prouver la religion par les miracles. Il ne les nie pas, mais il les tient un peu à distance. Des gens comme Bossuet sont très méfiants à l'égard du miraculisme janséniste qu'on retrouve chez Pascal et les écrivains de Port-Royal.

TvB : C'est une chose remarquable, car le miracle me semble l'institution théologique par excellence qui fonde l'entreprise catholique, ou c'est en tout cas un point très sensible.

PFM : Je dirais sans doute plus dans une branche du catholicisme que dans une autre.

TvB : Est-ce que cela tient aussi à sa relation problématique avec le pouvoir du pape ?

PFM : Peut-être, mais nous pouvons aussi observer la pénétration d'un certain rationalisme dans l'Église catholique, d'où le fait que l'Église officielle en France deviendra très prudente face à toutes les révélations privées – disons à l'exception de Lourdes. Plus l'Église devient autoritaire et centraliste, c'est-à-dire plus le

pape l'emporte, plus on se méfie des miracles et des révélations privées, des apparitions, parce que tout cela semble faire surgir des sources de légitimité religieuse populaire qui risquent de déborder les autorités ecclésiastiques. L'Église catholique se méfie énormément de tous ces groupes – notamment des jansénistes – qui parlent de révélations privées et qui ont tendance de mettre en cause la légitimité du pape et la Tradition.

TvB : Cependant, est-ce que cette évolution ne serait pas également en lien avec des préoccupations à propos de l'origine et l'authenticité (le fondement) de la Bible et la religion – comme chez Huet, Bossuet ou encore d'autres ?

PFM : Je pense que toute Église a la tendance, premièrement, de se fonder sur un miracle originel qui est la révélation et, deuxièmement, de se méfier des miracles ultérieurs, et la même chose pour la prophétie. Elle voit dans ces manifestations religieuses qui viennent après sa propre fondation des menaces potentielles. Si l'Église peut arriver à mettre la main dessus, elle en fera des confirmations, mais si elle craint de ne pas y arriver, elle y trouvera plutôt des foyers de troubles. Tous les ennuis que les mystiques ont eus avec l'Église sont liés à cela.

TvB : Dans ce sens, il y aurait bien à cette époque-là un intérêt catholique pour l'historiographie. D'un autre côté, la prochaine génération de catholiques français qui réfutent le *TTP* – Michel Le Vassor (1688), Pierre-Valentin Faydit (1705 ; 1710) et Ignace de Laubruessel (1710) parmi d'autres – semblent s'intéresser moins à des questions scripturaires et historiques, mais plutôt à des questions métaphysiques sans doute en lien avec l'*Éthique*. Puis, nous pouvons aussi distinguer en France – comme dans les Provinces-Unies – un autre groupe qui lit et discute le *TTP* : les libertins. Cependant, due à la censure absolutiste ceux-ci restent largement dans l'ombre et se réfugient dans la littérature clandestine. Bien que les libertins soient les premiers à entretenir une relation positive avec le spinozisme, ils ne sont pas nécessairement spinozistes. Dans un premier temps, Yves de Vallone, Henry de Boulainvillier et l'auteur de *l'Esprit de Spinoza* sont assurément parmi les lecteurs libertins du *TTP* les plus importants.²⁸ En général, le lien entre théologie et politique est essentiel pour la critique libertine antireligieuse (et antimonarchiste) et c'est ainsi que le *TTP* se révèle une arme politique.²⁹ Néanmoins, selon Françoise Charles-Daubert et plus tard Jacqueline Lagrée, « Spinoza a été enrôlé dans une perspective qui lui est étrangère. »³⁰ Quelles sont pour vous les principales différences philosophiques et politiques entre Spinoza et les libertins en France ?

PFM : La philosophie de Spinoza ne peut pas avoir semblé tellement étrangère aux libertins, sinon ils n'auraient pas pu en faire quelque chose, ils n'auraient pas pu la transformer. Il y a dans le *TTP* un certain nombre de thèmes qui se prêtaient à l'usage qu'en ont fait les libertins. 'Usage', c'est-à-dire 'choix', 'simplification', et aussi 'orientation'. Après tout, la caractéristique de tout instrument puissant – y compris les outils intellectuels – c'est qu'on peut l'utiliser à d'autres fins que celles pour lesquelles il a été initialement conçu. En ce qui concerne la politique et en particulier la multitude, je dirais que les libertins évoluent. Il faut sans doute distinguer d'un côté les italiens du XVI^e siècle et les français du début du XVII^e siècle qui pensent la politique selon le concept de « *intus et foris* », l'intériorité de l'homme et de son petit cercle opposée à l'extériorité des coutumes et pratiques. D'un autre côté nous trouvons au XVIII^e siècle une volonté très nette d'éduquer le peuple, donc de libérer la multitude et de faire sauter le cadenas.

TvB : C'est sans doute une éducation d'ambition laïque, mais qui comporte néanmoins des éléments religieux appelant à la 'justice et charité'.

PFM : Oui, mais dans la coterie de d'Holbach il s'agit carrément d'une éducation par l'athéisme. En ce qui concerne la foule, il y a évidemment toute une série de dégradés : de ceux qui disent qu'il faut quand-même se méfier (Voltaire) à ceux qui se méfient seulement un peu (Diderot) ou encore moins (d'Holbach). De la même façon, il y aura pendant la Révolution ceux qui défendent l'Être suprême, ceux qui préfèrent défendre un culte de la raison et ceux qui tiennent à l'athéisme.

TvB : Dans le cas du libertin Boulainvilliers – ou donc Henry de Boulainviller –,³¹ nous pouvons observer un aristocrate qui se méfie de la foule et un chrétien qui manifeste contre « l'impiété de Spinoza ». Il s'agit donc d'une perspective politique et théologique bien différente du républicain Spinoza. Néanmoins, Boulainviller occupe une place unique dans l'histoire de la réception française du spinozisme. Pour Voltaire c'est le « Spinoza français »,³² le premier promoteur d'un « spinozisme intégral ». ³³ D'autres signalent un « spinozisme suspect »³⁴ et nuancent beaucoup,³⁵ voire même l'étiquette libertine,³⁶ ou font le silence complet.³⁷ Boulainviller même s'exprime dans l'*Essai de métaphysique*, une œuvre tardive et la couronne de son *corpus Spinozanum*, de la manière suivante : « Je ne suis pas moins prévenu que tout autre contre la doctrine de Spinoza ; & rempli de cette ardeur, qui doit animer tout homme capable de connaître & de défendre la vérité, j'avais entrepris, il y a longtemps, la réfutation du Traité Theologo-Politique [sic] de cet auteur. »³⁸ Il semble que le *TTP* a pu quand-même jouer un rôle dans la trajectoire spinoziste de Boulainviller, non pas dans sa dimension politique et théologique, mais plutôt dans sa dimension historique et critique. Plus précisément, si Laurent Bove fait l'hypothèse que ça serait plutôt la lecture du *Tractatus Politicus* qui nous informe sur l'historiographie de Boulainviller,³⁹ je me demande si Boulainviller n'a pas développé sa sensibilité pour l'historiographie et l'histoire comme idéologie à partir du *TTP* ? Ne serait-il pas proche de la problématique du théologique-politique ?

PFM : Peut-être, mais je dirais que dans le *Traité politique* (*TP* par la suite) il y a certainement un chapitre dont il est proche : celui sur l'aristocratie. Ce que Boulainviller retient du *TP* c'est la critique de l'absolutisme au sens français du terme. Pour Spinoza il faut bien quelque chose d'absolu, c'est la démocratie, mais Boulainviller ne le suivra évidemment pas sur cela. Ce qui peut intéresser Boulainviller dans le *TP* et qui n'est pas contradictoire avec le *TTP*, c'est le souci de mettre en place une série d'équilibres, de ressorts, d'institutions qui se trouvent en balance. Il faut s'arranger pour qu'aucun individu n'aie jamais tout le pouvoir. Ce qui semble haïssable à Boulainviller, c'est une monarchie où le roi a tout le pouvoir.

TvB : Mais est-ce que cette critique de la monarchie – et le *vulgus* comme figure correspondante – n'est pas plus inquiète et saisissante dans le *TTP* ?

PFM : Le mot monarchie a deux sens chez Spinoza. La monarchie dont il dit du mal dans le *TTP* est la monarchie autoritaire et le fait absolu – le roi comme auteur du pouvoir total et soutenu par l'Église qui au même temps aussi menace son pouvoir. Ce qu'il montre dans le chapitre sur la république des Hébreux, c'est comment le système mosaïque – s'il avait été bien mis en place – faisait un équilibre entre les princes et les prêtres. Bon, ce système – comme on sait – est vite tombé en désuétude, presque dès le début. Le deuxième sens du mot monarchie chez Spinoza se rapporte à la monarchie du *TP*. C'est une monarchie très institutionnelle où le roi se contente d'ajouter sa signature à ce qu'on a décidé dans les conseils de représentants des familles, des syndics, etc. Il s'agit donc d'une monarchie extrêmement bien équilibrée qui pourrait intéresser quelqu'un qui serait soucieux de défendre les intérêts de la noblesse contre le pouvoir autoritaire du roi.

TvB : C'est dans ce sens que les libertins en France ne sont pas – et certainement pas ouvertement – antimonarchistes ?

PFM : En effet, ils ont besoin du roi pour les protéger.

TvB : Est-ce que cela expliquerait pourquoi les libertins ont pu s'intéresser à la vision ou proposition politique de Spinoza ?

PFM : Peut-être, mais est-ce qu'ils l'ont dit ?

TvB : Peut-être entre eux, clandestinement. Justement, j'aimerais aborder la littérature clandestine et notamment la façon dont cette littérature pourrait nous aider à penser la relation entre critique et *praxis*. Comment fonctionnait le réseau clandestin, la communication clandestine ? Comment décrire la dimension sociale des activités intellectuelles des libertins ?

PFM : Je dirais qu'il s'agit d'une institution flottante. Les plus sérieux dans cette institution ne sont pas les théoriciens, mais plutôt ceux qui sont motivés par l'argent et bien organisés : les libraires, imprimeurs, contrebandiers, etc. Il s'agit là d'un réseau efficace qui fait circuler des livres de théorie aussi bien que des livres pornographiques ou des marchandises convoitées, malgré les interdits royaux. En plus, la police fait souvent partie de ce réseau.

TvB : Mais donc une relation productive entre critique et *praxis* chez ces libertins français est plutôt faible ?

PFM : Je pense que ce sont certains libraires ou imprimeurs, connaissant des libertins et leurs manuscrits et intérêts, qui ont contribué à des échanges, souvent par du bouche-à-oreille et des voies informelles. En lien avec tout cela il y a bien-sûr aussi le réseau des intellectuels entre eux, mais celui-là passe sans doute autant par les lettres que par les manuscrits. Parfois on peut ajouter un manuscrit à une lettre, en étant toujours prudent du fait que la lettre pouvait être saisie par des autorités, tout comme le manuscrit. Au final, je pense que les lettres vraiment dangereuses étaient détruites par le destinataire.

TvB : Par ailleurs d'être libertin, Boulainviller est aussi un historien et penseur de l'histoire. À partir des textes historiques de Boulainviller, Foucault a fait sa célèbre théorie sur la nation comme nouveau sujet de l'histoire, sur les « races » (non-normalisantes) ou les classes comme les forces de la guerre généralisée qui (re)produit la société, et sur l'historiographie moderne comme un contre-savoir, une question de généalogie de luttes et donc un champs historico-politique.⁴⁰ Nous pouvons lire dans les premières pages de l'étude de Boulainviller du *TTP* une contestation de l'analyse politique de l'élection du peuple hébreu en faveur d'une interprétation encore bien catholique, mais aussi une conceptualisation historique de ce peuple comme une « nation » portée par la « race » dominante de David.⁴¹ Est-ce que ceci ne suggère pas que les racines du spinozisme de l'historien Boulainvillier se trouvent dans le *TTP* ? Est-ce qu'une pensée historique en termes de forces et de relations de (re)production – un matérialisme historique – est possible à partir du *TTP* ?

PFM : En tout cas, les racines de l'historien Boulainviller se trouvent également dans l'*Éthique*. Cela dit, l'insistance forte de Boulainvilliers sur la mémoire à tous les niveaux de l'expérience humaine – y compris son « cogito » empiriste –⁴² donne une tonalité particulière à son « spinozisme alternatif ». Ce qu'il dit sur la mémoire au niveau anthropologique prépare et légitime ce qu'il dit sur la tradition dans ses travaux historiques.⁴³ En outre, je pense qu'il est en effet possible de penser un matérialisme historique à partir des textes de Spinoza, mais à condition de relier le *TTP* et l'*Éthique*. La théorie de l'expérience a besoin des deux, et le matérialisme historique a besoin de cette théorie. Il faut se souvenir de ce que disait Marx sur la lutte de classes et la dictature du prolétariat : l'une sans l'autre n'est plus du matérialisme historique : or, le concept de dictature du prolétariat est vide au moment où Marx et Engels en parlent dans *Le Manifeste du parti communiste*. C'est l'expérience qui vient le remplir de sens au moment de la Commune de Paris. Une théorie de l'histoire sans l'expérience, c'est une simple classification spéculative.

TvB : D'un point de vue spinoziste, vous avez récemment souligné un sens à l'histoire non pas comme téléologie, mais comme « des conditions objectives qui produisent de plus en plus de cas où une « multitude libre » est guidée par l'espérance plus que par la crainte. Une espérance qui n'est pas le simple espoir envers et symétrique de la crainte, mais comme un accompagnement et une anticipation de la Raison. »⁴⁴ Autre part, vous avez suggéré l'espérance comme « structure fondamentale du désir » en échange avec Antonio Negri, qui lui affirme : « L'espérance est un des éléments de la perspective temporelle chez Spinoza, autant

que l'imagination. L'espérance signifie qu'il y a un projet, un pas en avant vers le futur... »⁴⁵ Est-ce que vous rejoignez Negri dans une « renaissance de l'espérance » ?

PFM : Alors, le sens que je peux donner à cette expression de « structure fondamentale du désir » – qui a un côté lacanien surprenant, j'avoue – est qu'elle renvoie à la question : comment traduire le conatus ? Il y a beaucoup de gens qui pensent que Spinoza est conservateur parce qu'il dit qu'il faut conserver son être en conservant son état – ce qui n'est pas faux pour Hobbes. Spinoza, en revanche, appuie beaucoup sur la différence entre conserver son état et conserver son être. On pourrait dire que pour Spinoza conserver son état, c'est la modalité la plus basse de conserver son être. À la limite, pour un morceau de pierre, par exemple, conserver son être c'est conserver son état, bien que ce ne soit même pas sûr car à l'intérieur d'une pierre nous trouvons des processus chimiques. Plus on se trouve dans un être complexe, plus conserver l'être veut dire changer d'état. Pour un être dont la complexité aboutit à un désir, l'espérance est le désir de changer d'état, d'aller vers le mieux, et est donc une structure fondamentale de tout désir, sur le plan anthropologique aussi bien que sur le plan politique. Quand, par exemple, Spinoza dit que la multitude est prêt à tout pour changer – en bien ou en mal, bien entendu –, il renvoie à une composante fondamentale du désir.

TvB : Comment pouvons-nous savoir que conserver son être n'est pas conserver son état ?

PFM : Par deux voies : l'expérience et la Raison. L'expérience, c'est celle de l'histoire ; la Raison, c'est la réflexion sur ce qu'est la condition humaine, son ustensilité. Avec un outil on peut faire mieux que ce que l'on a, on peut même faire mieux que ce que prévoyait le fabricant de l'outil. Donc l'activité proprement humaine – la fabrication d'outils, et plus largement, la production de moyens de production – engendre nécessairement des affects d'espérance. Ceux-ci peuvent être trompeurs ou non, c'est une autre question. En tout cas cela veut dire qu'à l'espoir, qui est comme la crainte une donnée corollaire de la condition animale de l'homme, vient s'ajouter – se greffer sur, s'ancrer sur – l'espérance qui est typique des désirs humains. Bref, la conservation de l'état initial et la crainte mènent toutes seules à la destruction – ou bien, qui n'avance pas recule, car l'histoire avance toujours.

TvB : On pourrait lier ceci à l'utopie, le lieu qui n'existe pas, mais vers lequel on souhaite avancer.

PFM : En effet, le lieu qui n'existe pas encore.

TvB : Est-ce que le concept de l'utopie est important pour une philosophie politique spinoziste, tout comme Ernst Bloch l'a trouvé pour le marxisme ? De plus, comment la dimension spatiale ou topique de l'espérance spinoziste en tant qu'utopie se relationne-t-elle à la théologie et la politique ? Après tout, Bloch a choisi un théologien, Thomas Münzer, pour esquisser « la production de l'espérance ».⁴⁶

PFM : Concernant la première question je dirais qu'il y a trois discours chez Spinoza auxquels on pourrait donner le nom d'utopie. Bien entendu, il n'utilise le mot qu'une seule fois.⁴⁷ Premièrement, l'illusion qui consiste à rêver d'âge d'or ou à fabriquer imaginativement des lois qui ne tiennent pas compte de la nature humaine réelle. C'est ce qu'on trouve dans le premier chapitre du *TP* et ce que Spinoza critique. Deuxièmement, l'effort qui consiste à décrire les structures d'États meilleurs, différents des États existants mais fondés sur les lois connaissables de la nature humaine. C'est ce qu'il fait dans le *TP* et auquel il ne donne pas le nom d'utopie, mais qu'on peut l'appeler ainsi. Troisièmement, le repérage du mouvement réel qui pousse une multitude libre à créer des institutions conformes à son espérance. Au final, je pense qu'il s'agit d'une convergence entre les deux derniers sens de l'utopie chez Spinoza, c'est-à-dire la connaissance rationnelle de ce que pourraient être des États meilleurs et l'espérance (le désir) d'une multitude libre de se créer un état meilleur. À ce moment-là, on tombe sur la figure d'un Spinoza révolutionnaire, d'un Spinoza qui peut dire à la multitude : « Voilà des institutions pour vous [nous] ! » S'il n'y avait que la théorie du meilleur régime, on risquerait une dérive de l'espérance vers des procédures de classification conservatrices.

TvB : Donc ce moment-là, c'est le temps de l'utopie comme espace politique.

PFM : Oui, qui n'est pas un « nulle part » en tant que tel.

TvB : Non, au contraire.

PFM : Je pense qu'il faut dire que le spinozisme est un instrument de pensée. On doit donc pouvoir l'utiliser même dans des choses où Spinoza ne l'a pas utilisé, sinon ce n'est pas un instrument. Alors maintenant, qu'est-ce qu'est ce lieu (*topos*) dans l'utopie ? On peut trouver la réponse dans le *TTP* : « Pour vivre en sécurité, et pour se préserver des attaques des autres hommes et aussi de celles des animaux, la vigilance et le gouvernement des hommes peuvent être fort utiles. A cet égard, la Raison et l'expérience n'ont pas enseigné de moyen plus sûr que de former une société par des lois déterminées, d'occuper une certaine région[!] du monde et de concentrer les forces de tous comme en un corps unique – celui de la société. »⁴⁸ Pour construire des institutions, la première chose nécessaire est un lieu, tout simplement.

TvB : En conclusion, que peut dire cette « renaissance de l'espérance » pour la recherche spinoziste à l'université et pour la vie et la politique en dehors ?

PFM : Elle joue un rôle-clef dans le passage d'une (nécessaire) lecture architectonique à une (non moins nécessaire) lecture instrumentale. La seconde ne peut venir qu'après la première, de même qu'il faut apprendre à manier un outil pour savoir s'en servir. Sinon, on est dans l'essayistique.

¹ Cette conversation a eu lieu lors de l'atelier organisé par Sonja Lavaert et moi-même le 27 octobre 2022 à la Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Je tiens à remercier Pierre-François Moreau, Sonja Lavaert et les participants pour leurs contributions.

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⁸ Cohen, Gustave, *Le Séjour de Saint-Évremond en Hollande et l'entrée de Spinoza dans le champ de la pensée française*, Paris, Champion, 1926.

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¹⁰ Binsbergen, 'The Huguenot experience'.

¹¹ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 27 ; Moreau, Pierre-François, 'La Clef du sanctuaire. Note sur une traduction libertine de Spinoza au XVII^e siècle', à paraître ; Binsbergen, 'The Huguenot experience'.

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- ²³ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 108-17.
- ²⁴ Auvray, Paul, 'Richard Simon et Spinoza', dans *Religion, érudition et critique à la fin du XVII^e siècle et au début du XVIII^e*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1968, 201-14 ; Tosel, André, 'Le Discours sur l'histoire universelle de Bossuet : une stratégie de dénégation du *Traité theologico-politique*', dans P. Cristofolini (ed.), *L'Hérésie spinoziste*, Amsterdam, APA-Holland University Press, 1995, 97-105 ; Laerke, Mogens, 'À la recherche d'un homme égal à Spinoza. G. W. Leibniz et la *Demonstratio evangelica* de Pierre-Daniel Huet', *Dix-septième siècle*, 232/3, 2006, 387-410.
- ²⁵ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 124.
- ²⁶ « N'y-a-t-il pas des choses ajoutées dans le Texte de Moïse, & d'où vient qu'on trouve sa mort à la fin du Livre qu'on lui attribue ? Quelle merveille que ceux qui ont continué son Histoire aient ajouté sa fin bienheureuse au reste de ses actions, afin de faire du tout un même corps ? » Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne, *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle*, Paris, Sébastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1681, 413.
- ²⁷ Moreau, Pierre-François, 'Écriture Sainte et Contre-Réforme : la position suarézienne', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, 64/3, 1980, 349-354.
- ²⁸ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française* ; Simon, Renée, *Henry de Boulainviller. Œuvres philosophiques*, La Haye, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973 ; O'Higgins, James, *Yves de Vallone: The Making of an Esprit-Fort*, The Hague/Boston/London, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982 ; Benitez, Miguel, 'Du bon usage du *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* : La religion du Chrétien', dans O. Bloch (dir.), *Spinoza au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1990, 75-83 ; Charles-Daubert, Françoise, 'L'image de Spinoza dans la littérature clandestine et l'*Esprit de Spinoza*', dans O. Bloch (dir.), *Spinoza au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Méridiens Klincksieck, 1990, 51-74.
- ²⁹ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française* ; Assoun, 'Spinoza, les libertins français et la politique' ; Charles-Daubert, 'L'image de Spinoza' ; Lagrée, Jacqueline, 'Spinoza l'imposteur libertin ?', dans T. Berns, A. Staquet & M. Weis (dir.), *Libertin !*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2013, 193-209.
- ³⁰ Lagrée, 'Spinoza l'imposteur libertin ?', 208.
- ³¹ Simon, *Henry de Boulainviller*, vi.
- ³² Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 322.
- ³³ Assoun, 'Spinoza, les libertins français et la politique', 196.
- ³⁴ Benitez, Miguel, 'Un spinozisme suspect : À propos du Dieu de Boulainvilliers', *Dix-huitième siècle*, 24/1, 1992, 17-28.
- ³⁵ Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française*, 306-22.
- ³⁶ Simon, *Henry de Boulainviller*, xv.
- ³⁷ Foucault, « *Il faut défendre la société* ».
- ³⁸ Boulainviller, Henry de, 'Preface' [à l'*Essai de métaphysique*], dans *Réfutation des erreurs de Benoît de Spinoza*, Bruxelles, François Foppens, 1731, 151-2. En marquant ses distances, Boulainviller semble néanmoins faire remarquer une certaine cohérence dans son approche à Spinoza et ceci depuis ses premières lectures, notamment le résumé et la réfutation de la préface et des six premiers chapitres du *TTP* en 1695.
- ³⁹ Bove, Laurent, 'Boulainvilliers lecteur de Spinoza : Analyse politique et forme paradoxale de la radicalité dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle', dans C. Secrétan, T. Dragon & L. Bove (dir.), *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières « Radicales » ?*, Paris, Éditions Amsterdam, 2007, 373-88.
- ⁴⁰ Foucault, « *Il faut défendre la société* », 101-67.
- ⁴¹ « L'examen des choses contenues dans l'Écriture Sainte est bon ou méchant selon le principe qui le conduit ; celui qui a poussé Spinoza dans cette recherche se rend suspect dès l'abord par la décision qu'il fait que l'élection du peuple juif n'avait d'objet d'un certain gouvernement et l'habitation d'un pays promis aux patriarches dont il est sorti. Notre sentiment sur l'élection de ce peuple est bien différent, et nous avons lieu de le croire mieux établi sur l'Écriture que le sien, car le plus digne objet de cette élection a sans doute été la naissance du Messie ; c'est par rapport à lui que la Providence a séparé cette nation de toutes celles de la terre, et, parmi cette nation, qu'elle a distingué les races et spécialement celle de David. » Simon, *Henry de Boulainviller*, 13.
- ⁴² Boulainviller, Henry de, 'Réfutation de Spinoza' [l'*Essai de métaphysique*], dans *Réfutation des erreurs de Benoît de Spinoza*, Bruxelles, François Foppens, 1731, 3-5 ; Simon, *Henry de Boulainviller*, 87.
- ⁴³ Un excellent ouvrage qui analyse la voie spinozienne dans la pensée historiographique et politique de Boulainvilliers est Donna, Diego, *Contre Spinoza. Critique, système et métamorphoses au siècle des Lumières*, Genève, Georg, 2021, 107-55.
- ⁴⁴ Moreau, Pierre-François, 'Spinoza et l'histoire', à paraître.

⁴⁵ Lavaert, Sonja, & Moreau, Pierre-François, *Spinoza et la politique de la multitude*, Paris, Éditions Kimé, 2021, 259.

⁴⁶ Moreau, Pierre-François, '« Le nouvel infini de l'espérance humaine ». Ernst Bloch et Thomas Münzer', dans R. Carbone (dir.), *Modernità et critica, Vol. II*, Napoli/Potenza, La città del sole, 2022, 377.

⁴⁷ *TP* I.1

⁴⁸ « Attamen ad secure vivendum, & injurias aliorum hominum, & etiam brutorum, evitandum, humana directio, & vigilantia multum juvare potest. Ad quod nullum certius medium ratio, & experientia docuit, quam societatem certis legibus formare, certamque mundi plagam occupare, & omnium vires ad unum quasi corpus, nempe societatis, redigere. » *TTP* chap. III ; G III/47.

The Early English Reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

A Conversation with Luisa Simonutti

Thomas van Binsbergen: A first striking fact concerning the early English reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (hereafter *TTP*) is its geographical dimension which revolves almost entirely around London.¹ Cambridge is the important exception where a copy of the *TTP* first arrived in 1671 through the Dutch theologian Philipp van Limborch who was in correspondence with some of the so-called Cambridge Platonists.² In defense of revealed religion and natural theology the *TTP* was refuted by the leading members of this relatively diverse group: Henry More (1677) and Ralph Cudworth (1678). Both took issue with Spinoza's treatment of prophecy and especially miracles, which they saw as signs of divine authority necessary to draw the masses into the latitudinarian church. Theological philosophy and philosophical theology were complemented by insisting on religious commonsense as was done by the prominent Anglican Edward Stillingfleet who later (1709) also refuted the *TTP*.³ Although for instance English biblical criticism developed during the 1680s with the translation of Richard Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* and the erudite philology of Isaac Vossius,⁴ the numerous refutations of the *TTP* remained rather limited in scope in their concern with theology, leaving aside the deists.⁵ How open-minded or self-centred was the theological and more generally intellectual English context in which the *TTP* was received?

Luisa Simonutti: I think that we must start with the philological interest among the Latitudinarians. In the English context, there is an important history of philological studies which were sparked off by the works of the German Johann Buxtorf (father and son) and the French Louis Cappel. This interest of the Latitudinarians and the more orthodox Anglicans consisted in the problematic limits for assuring the holy inspiration and veracity of the biblical text. The polemics begin in this philological substrate between mostly France and England which is quite strong and has its roots in the debates around Buxtorf and Cappel on the historicity of the Holy Scriptures. The whole problem is of course very important in Protestantism where the text is of primordial importance: "sola scriptura". In Catholicism, this is less evident because you have the Church, namely the Church Fathers and the ecclesiastic apparatus and priests who have the function and duty to interpret and communicate the divine decrees. For the Protestants, to put the text in discussion is to open Pandora's box, and we will see that the question of miracles was key in unleashing these polemics. After all, it explains why there was a need in the English context to translate from the 1690s onward important works of biblical philology such as Jean Le Clerc's *Sentiments de quelques théologiens de Hollande* (1685) and *Défense des sentimens de quelques théologiens de Hollande sur l'Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1686). In fact, from these two volumes, five chapters were selected and translated into English with the title *Five Letters concerning the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures* (1690). A few years later, another text written by Le Clerc was translated, *A Treatise of The Causes of Incredulity* (1697). I think it was precisely to reinforce the debate on the idea of the holy inspiration of Scripture. These translations offer new arguments to the English radical protestants interested to affirm that the biblical text should be analysed with the new historical and philological instruments to show the text's veracity and even the force of its inspiration.

TvB: However, Le Clerc is probably less relevant to the context of the very first English reception of the *TTP* – for instance the Cambridge Platonists –, because he simply comes a few years later. On the other hand, how did the work of the Buxtorfs or Cappel exactly prepare this context?

LS: It is difficult to say to what extent these French or Continental texts were widespread and known in England, but it's always a good idea to start by verifying the personal libraries of certain people.⁶ In a 2008

book published in Italian, the historian Luciano Canfora suggests that reconstructing the most significant moments in the exercise of textual criticism – mainly but not exclusively of the *corpus* of the Old and New Testaments – signifies reducing the laborious, obstacle-ridden and at times implicit history of the freedom of thought.⁷ In reconstructing some of the salient moments in the history of the philological method, from Erasmus's work and the seventeenth-century philology of Spinoza, Richard Simon and Le Clerc to the condemnation of textual criticism by the Catholic Church at the turn of the nineteenth century, Canfora highlighted the innovative role of philologists, whom he labelled “the heretics of heretics”, namely, cultured men who were “the founders of philology and the initiators of our freedom: their ‘battlefield’ consisted of texts considered ‘sacred’ and the weapon they used in the combat was, then as always, philology”. The bibliography on the lengthy history of textual criticism is extensive and significant: I would especially like to refer to the interpretive approach mapped out in the 1980s by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein and, more recently, by Justin Champion.⁸ I can mention only a few examples related to the subject at issue – a long history where the critical quest for direct understanding of the biblical text proceeded hand-in-hand with attempts at ‘textual collecting’ designed to furnish an ‘encyclopedia’ for the learned Christian. Exemplary in this sense is the large volume *A Common-Place Book to the Holy Bible, or the Scriptures Sufficiency Practically Demonstrated*, which presented passages from the Old and New Testaments, catalogued according to the traditional approach of dogmatic theology. Published for the first time in London in 1676, this book went through numerous editions and reprints and, in the frontispiece to the edition of 1824, it was attributed to John Locke – an attribution that, despite being quite incorrect, survived up to its most recent edition, which appeared in 2009. Another book that exemplifies this concept of biblical philology by pondering, in a still pre-modern sense, the integrity and correctness of the text is the erudite work by the Jewish scholar Salomon Glass, *Philologia Sacra*, which appeared for the first time in 1623. In any case, following Luciano Canfora, I believe we can say that the biblical philologists of the 16th century – not the polemicists – are the real heretics and revolutionaries who are going to subvert criticism and pave the way for Spinoza, Richard Simon, Jean Le Clerc, etc. Moreover, in the 17th century, we also have the arrival in England of the Polyglot Bible that will contribute to advancing biblical philological analysis. Concerning the Latitudinarians as well as Gilbert Burnet and John Locke, however, we should always take into account that they all used the King James Bible, the official biblical text of the Church of England.

TvB: All in all, the English intellectual context was relatively open-minded and not so self-centred thanks to philology? What was the relation between biblical philology and theology?

LS: It is of course difficult to explain the English context in few words and in general terms, but I think that an important influence in this context from the middle of the 17th century onwards were the Unitarians. John Biddle, for example, was a central figure in Unitarianism who translated into English a biography of Faustus Socinus, founder of Socinianism, and he also collaborated on the translation of the Racovian Catechism and some other important Socinian books. Biddle himself lived a difficult life as he was several times imprisoned, and everyone – Catholics, Anglicans, Calvinists – was against him, that is, against the Unitarians. Yet, the Unitarians persevered, putting into question, not the miracles or the biblical text, but the central dogma of Christianity: the doctrine of the Trinity. In the end, the Unitarians certainly played a role in the English intellectual landscape. Locke, for instance, read and used several texts of Biddle, especially in his journals. Thanks to the translations of Biddle, Locke was aware of Socinianism long before going to Holland and he actually had several Unitarian friends in England. We can see that these ideas circulated quite broadly and caused polemics concerning religious rather than philological questions – the question of the miracles for the Latitudinarians, Trinity for Socinians, religious authority more generally for the Scottish Presbyterians.

TvB: What were the sources of someone like Biddle? Was he in contact with Socinian movements on the Continent and, more specifically, in the United Provinces? After all, he was a translator...

LS: The sources of Biddle consist mostly of certain Church Fathers.⁹ Through these texts, Biddle collected several text passages written by Church Fathers who doubted the Trinity. Using ancient and shared sources, he wanted to demonstrate the weakness of Trinitarian dogma. He certainly translated many Socinian texts, but I'm not sure that he was in contact with specific Socinians on the Continent. I mainly see Biddle himself as a source, namely for Englishmen like Locke, who later also discovered the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum quos Unitarios vocant* through the Remonstrant circles – during his stay in Holland – and with friends such as Philipp van Limborch. However, there were different versions and traditions of Socinianism: an English Unitarian version and another version that is rather Continental. The second one was probably more connected to political questions concerning tolerance, participation or rather refusal to participate in war, etc., that is, questions that were more relevant to the Dutch and Continental context. In England where Biddle lives, on the other side of the Channel, we find perhaps more explicitly theological debates and polemics on the question itself of the Trinity and other dogmatic points. We often only think of the Socinians in the United Provinces, but there were also things happening in England at the time.

TvB: It was without doubt the Socinians that animated the polemics of the day or even gave rise to more political debates – much more than for instance the Spinozists. They formed a threat, a danger.

LS: A danger, indeed. We can see already with Stillingfleet – and certainly after Stillingfleet in the 1680s – that all are put together: Hobbesians, Socinians, Spinozists, Mahometans. They are all enemies, they form a genealogy of enemies of religion. Often the word “Socinian” is recuperated as an insult for “atheist” or “heretic” or just someone against religion.

TvB: According to Étienne Balibar, “two central questions run right through the book [the *TTP*]: one concerns the nature of certainty (and thus relationship between “truth” and “authority”), the other the relationship between freedom and the right or “power” [*puissance*] of the individual.”¹⁰ As you already pointed out, it seems as if much of the earliest English efforts to refute the *TTP* concern the question of safeguarding religious and moral certainty. Do you agree to Balibar’s formulation and can it help us analyze the early English reception – for example, the reception by the Cambridge Platonists?

LS: Yes, and I would add that the relationship between truth and authority constitutes the first part of the *TTP* while the relationship between freedom and right/power concerns the second part. In the early English reception, there is mostly a discussion of the first part. It seems to me that the second part was only recuperated later with and after John Toland and the radical deists. In the period right after the publication of the *TTP* people didn’t really perceive yet the question of modern liberty and tolerance. There were some people who actually did discuss all parts of the *TTP* – like Regnerus van Mansvelt (1674) and Willem van Blyenbergh (1674) in the United Provinces –, but I think that their refutations were less representative for that period. In the *TTP* the word tolerance is still used in its traditional sense and never as it was used later. It is used in the sense of support and endurance, as during the Renaissance. Cesare Ripa, for example, illustrates in his *Iconologia* the virtue of tolerance by a woman that carries a weight. But the second part of the *TTP* invokes the modern context of the word tolerance. I think that the readers of the *TTP* in the 17th century don’t yet fully grasp the new meaning of tolerance. During the first two or three decades after the *TTP*’s publication, the polemics will concentrate on the first part. Later, during the eighteenth century, the second part becomes more interesting together with the spread of a whole new discourse on liberty and tolerance. In short, following Balibar, I would say there are two parts to the *TTP* which correspond roughly to different periods of reading.

TvB: I thought Spinoza knew the word tolerance also in its more liberal sense but that he didn’t use it like this on purpose, because he had other plans. Do you think this is correct?

LS: Yes, this seems very plausible. In any case, in England there was already a debate on these questions regarding liberty in the 1640s with John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644). I think that someone like the deist Charles Blount found inspiration in the Miltonian tradition, and he perhaps even used Milton's text in his writings in defense of the liberty of the press. We have to verify if among the early English Spinozists there are connections to Milton, who was really a point of reference on these questions. In the Dutch Republic, there's also a tradition of thought on tolerance, but it is probably more political-economically inspired. In 1578 a peace settlement was reached in the Low Countries, the *Religievrede*, that defined a way of coexistence between Catholics and Protestants in terms of toleration. In the wake of that settlement we find treatises on liberty which declare that it is necessary to tolerate differences in religion and society because toleration avoids sedition, wars and social unrest that damage trade and economic exchange. Moreover, there is the Erasmian tradition and Dirck Coornhert, and, later, in the 17th century, there are French pamphlets arriving in Holland which were written by Huguenots or sometimes by readers of the manuscript *Colloquium heptaplomeres de rerum sublimium arcanis abditis* of Jean Bodin. During the reign of Louis XIV the situation of the Huguenots got much worse, leading to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. This fueled the pamphlet literature on tolerance in the Dutch Republic even further. Thus, Spinoza and his readers lived in an environment in which questions of religious and political liberty were very present.

TvB: I can see how the first readers of the *TTP* – also in England – concentrated rather on the first part. Yet, I wonder if readers also understood the political-philosophical content and potential of the second part. Cudworth, for example, calls Spinoza “that late *Theological Politician*”,¹¹ stressing – perhaps unwillingly – the political character of Spinoza's intervention. To what extent are the early theological critics of the *TTP* aware of Spinoza's political philosophy?

LS: I don't know. I'm not even sure Cudworth had the *TTP* in his library which of course doesn't necessarily mean much. I think that the Cambridge Platonists certainly had enemies: Descartes, and also Hobbes who was considered the patron of all dark ideas concerning the state and humanity. When the *TTP* was published and reached England, and even more so when the *Ethics* started to circulate, Spinoza substituted Hobbes as the new principal enemy. Actually, there is a whole genealogy here: Machiavelli, Vanini, Hobbes, Spinoza. They are all dangerous thinkers, not only for religion but also for society and the state. They are the ones who destroy social connections and turn people to everything that is dark. I think that the Cambridge Platonists perceive well the political relevance of authors such as Hobbes or Spinoza, but I don't think – at least as far as I know – that they are really interested in an analysis of political questions.

TvB: When Cudworth uses the word “Politician”, is he referring to this affinity between Hobbes and Spinoza or is he referring to the *Politiques* that we find in French clandestine or political literature?

LS: I have never verified to what extent this clandestine literature was widespread in England. Surely there are several routes through which this literature and more generally Renaissance sources – Aconcio, Vanini, Machiavelli – arrived in England from Italy and perhaps through the French libertine circles.

TvB: One early reader who certainly must have been aware of the political potential of the *TTP* is Charles Blount. Blount was not only the first to render a chapter of the *TTP* in vernacular to the English public – namely the sixth chapter in *Miracles, No Violation of the Laws of Nature* (1683) –, he was probably also the translator of the whole book in English (1689).¹² While the debate on miracles was pursued with the critical (or perhaps not so critical after all) reply of Thomas Browne (1683), Blount was joined by Charles Gildon in a shared interest for Thomas Hobbes, as testified in their joint volume *The Oracles of Reason* (1693) and in Gildon's *Deist's Manual* (1705) which also treats of Spinoza. Inspired by Spinoza's as well as Edward Herbert's religious naturalism and rationalism, though not necessarily agreeing with Hobbes' politics,¹³ Blount made “the dissemination of deistical ideas of crucial political concern.”¹⁴ After all, the republican Blount felt strongly against religious tyranny (corrupted priestcraft) and political tyranny (monarchical absolutism), which Matthias Earbery (1697) would later defend against the theology and politics of the

TTP.¹⁵ How would you compare Blount's theology and politics with the position of the Cambridge Platonists and their Anglican or Latitudinarian allies?

LS: First, it has to be noted that it is thanks to Justin Champion, Dario Pfanter¹⁶ and perhaps a few other scholars that Charles Blount was somewhat rescued from the reproach of merely being a copycat and plagiarizer. In a sense, they recuperated the dignity of this author. Actually, Blount was the victim of a very broad judgement mixing all offenses together as Stillingfleet would do: deism, freethinking, heresy, etc. In any case, I don't think Blount and the Cambridge Platonists fit together at all.

TvB: Sure, I understand that their worlds differ radically, but since I'm trying to think the reception of the *TTP* also in terms of conflicting or converging reader's groups, communities or networks, I wonder of which kind of group Blount was a part? To what extent was Blount connected to a broader network, or was he isolated?

LS: No, I don't think he was isolated since he worked with Gildon, as you mentioned. But he had a fairly complicated life.¹⁷ He suffered from the death of his wife, then he fell in love with his sister-in-law, and later he even tried to commit suicide, by love. Blount had a turbulent life and at some point even decided to write to justify the marriage between a brother and sister. His friendships and professional relationships are less clear to me. For instance, I haven't come across him when studying the Socinians or even some philanthropes that tried to support the population in London with communitarian ideas. He remains a relatively little-known figure.

TvB: Next to his translation of the sixth chapter of the *TTP*, Blount also translated in *Miracles, No Violation of the Laws of Nature* a small part from Hobbes' *Leviathan*. This brings to mind the "leftist Hobbesians" in the United Provinces and the circle of Spinoza.¹⁸ On the other hand, his strategy of composing an anonymous text with different heterodox sources could make us think of clandestine texts such as the *Esprit de Spinoza/Traité des Trois Imposteurs*.

LS: Yes, I believe the question of the mortality or immortality of the soul was quite important for Blount as it is for Hobbesians who conclude clearly in favor of a mortal soul, however. Blount argued for immortality, but in a way that is "purposely ambiguous and unconvincing throughout", so he may have been sceptic, indeed.¹⁹

TvB: To come back to the relationship between truth and authority, it seems as if Blount is quite worried with the question of truth being controlled by authority. After all, he actively subverted censorship by publishing anonymously or pseudonymously and by writing against the Licensing Order of 1643 and in favor of a greater freedom of the press.²⁰ How do you see Blount's polemical or political engagement?

LS: There is no doubt that Blount is very much concerned with many things happening in English society at the time. I would say he is best situated alongside Milton on questions concerning the freedom of the press and Hobbes on more advanced questions concerning politics.

TvB: I would like to raise another topic that is very relevant to the context of the early English reception of the *TTP*, namely science. Besides, the relationship between truth and authority can without doubt also be discussed through the relationship between science and religion. It is well-known that Spinoza's earliest contact with an English public happened through his correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the 'Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge'. The *curiositas* was reciprocal and soon Oldenburg, Robert Boyle and other members of the Royal Society learned of the *TTP*.²¹ However, if Spinoza and the English scientists disagreed between a Cartesian-materialist and a Newtonian-atomist conception of natural philosophy to start with,²² from now they also disagreed on natural religion.²³

Moreover, many speakers at the “Boyle Lectures” criticized Spinoza’s metaphysics and judged him an atheist. While Spinoza categorically denied all supernaturalness, thinkers like Boyle and Locke did reserve the possibility of miracles being “above reason”.²⁴ How did the Royal Society formulate and present the question of the relationship between truth and authority, between science and religion?

LS: My thesis would be that the *TTP* arrived directly among the scientists, because Oldenburg and other members of the Royal Society were very interested in finding a serious historical-critical approach to theology, namely a methodology that is valid for religion as well as for the sciences. “If I be a naturalist, it is possible to be so without being an atheist, or of kin to it,” wrote Boyle in the *The Christian Virtuoso* (1690),²⁵ and in many of his other works he struggled to reconcile his scientific commitment with being a “good Christian”: to bring faith and reason into an agreement, and to demonstrate that mechanism and the corpuscular philosophy, if correctly interpreted, constitute a firm basis for religion, a proof for the existence of God and of His creative and mysterious force. The problem amounts to being good scientists while being virtuous Christians. The initial interest for Spinoza arises from this problem which is very present in the mind of these scientists. Later they actually read the *TTP* and that will obviously set off a firm attack against the book and its author. Actually, Oldenburg was hoping to find in Spinoza someone that would analyze better questions concerning “Angels, prophecy and miracles”,²⁶ but finally he found out that he was dealing with someone trying to subvert religion. Nevertheless, I think there was a real and lasting interest of the Royal Society to bring together religious truth – the authority of the text – and scientific truth. Boyle was a rich man and decided then to put in place the “Boyle Lectures” to further the effort among scientists to defend the authority and truth of the Christian faith. The contributions by speakers such as Richard Kidder, John Harris or Samuel Clarke were apologetic, but I believe that with Oldenburg and Boyle, there’s also a real methodological question.

TvB: How would you characterize the relation between the famous scientists of the Royal Society and the religious leadership? Through his method of biblical interpretation Spinoza seems to advance the perspective of the common reader and ultimately the multitude of believers, but the scientists seem to favor the clergy as intermediary interpreters. Do you agree?

LS: Yes, Boyle and the “Boyle lecturers” were obviously speaking in favor of the establishment reinforcing the position of the Anglican High Church. This is the general impression. Spinoza, on the other hand, is the man who chose the liberty of critical research – he refused a chair in Heidelberg – and in a way also the solitude of analysis. He died completely consumed by his thoughts which he sought to communicate directly with his readers, without mediation. The project of the “Boyle Lectures” and that of Spinoza are two very different efforts, indeed.

TvB: There is another point concerning science that I would like to raise. Boyle and Locke, among other members of the Royal Society, were also interested in new techniques of agricultural ‘improvement’,²⁷ new conceptions of property and new forms of value creation.²⁸ It is the time of ‘agrarian capitalism’,²⁹ a unique domestic market and the foundation of the Bank of England (1694). How do you see the relation between economics, science and religion at the end of the 17th century?

LS: This is an interesting point. Concerning the Royal Society I am not sure, but concerning Locke we know that he took part in several companies involved in political-economical and commercial activities. He even received a piece of land to cultivate in Carolina in North America as a present for his contributions, namely for writing the constitution of Carolina together with his friend Lord Shaftesbury. Moreover, he knew and discussed social-economic arithmetic with the prominent economist William Petty and others. In general, Locke was very interested in these questions. In his travel notes from when he was in France we can read many comments as to the cultivation of olives, wine, etc. He even had the idea to transport some cultivated products to England or Carolina. Locke was a thinker very attentive of political and religious issues, for instance as to the Huguenot question or the intolerance of the Catholics. His manuscripts contain notes on

the political and administrative organization of cities and the ecclesiastical systems of two religions, but his curiosity also went to social practices and cultural experiences, ranging from the fields of medicine and pharmacopoeias to medicinal plants and agricultural crops, and even the Mediterranean crops that could be transplanted to the other side of the world. This particular type of curiosity also materialized in the writings that appeared after his death dealing with the cultivation of vines and olives.³⁰

TvB: The transforming political economy came with specific state formation and a revolution in 1688.³¹ Yet, most early English readers of the *TTP* remain remarkably negligent of political philosophy, even in the post-1688 context. How can we understand this? To take Locke, was he even interested in the *TTP*'s political part?

LS: Locke had in his library not only the *TTP* but also the *Opera Posthuma* and the *Principia philosophiae cartesianae*, as well as Lodewijk Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (1666). These are important indications even if not exhaustive; anyway, he lived and wrote in any case in an environment in which the book was discussed – for instance, by the Remonstrants in Holland. However, Locke rarely cited his sources in his works. He read a lot, but then he would close all books and just write his thoughts. I think his *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689) is also relevant in this context.

TvB: Not his *Two Treatises of Government* (1689)?

LS: I would rather say the *Letter* and the whole debate that it provoked. I would even emphasize this debate, because – as attested by Locke-scholars – the *Second Treatise* was composed before his departure to Holland. Both treatises are mainly related to the English context, though upon returning home Locke of course revised the text by adding some famous passages, etc. It were, however, his relations with radical Dutch Protestantism and the English Unitarian environment that led to the reproach of Locke being a Socinian. But at the same time, it probably gave him the status of the man that gave the Glorious Revolution its philosophical and political élan. By the way, Toland will later find inspiration in Spinoza, but in Locke certainly as well. However, for the drafting of the *Epistola*, Locke chose to live in a secluded place during the winter of 1685-86. He was in Kleve in Brandenburg, so somewhere far from the polemics of the theologians of London, Rotterdam or Amsterdam, and in that sense also far from all references to Spinoza. He saw Kleve as a particularly liberal place and this is probably why he went there looking for inspiration for his letter on toleration. Kleve and Brandenburg actually offer a quite specific context instituted by the laws from after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 that secured the possibility of having churches simultaneously used by the different denominations, that is, by Calvinist, Lutheran and Catholic communities. This – rather than Spinoza – is perhaps Locke's principal source of inspiration for his letter.³²

TvB: Moving away from Locke, we find in the early 18th century, next to Blount, four other famous deists who positively received the *TTP* and Spinoza's philosophy more generally: John Toland, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal and Bernard Mandeville.³³ While the link with Collins and Mandeville is less explicit, Tindal (1706), on the one hand, adapted *De jure ecclesiasticorum* (1665), a radical political work from Spinoza's circle,³⁴ and was called out for being a Spinozist by the obsessively anti-deist and anti-Spinozist priest William Carroll (1709; 1711).³⁵ Toland (1696; 1709; 1714), on the other hand, made all over his work ample use of the *TTP* to stress his anticlericalism and to develop an original theological-political republicanism based on a Spinozist Mozes.³⁶ Yet, important differences remain, as Justin Champion notes: "Where Spinoza's work was clandestine, Toland's was public. Where Spinoza was prosecuted and his works proscribed, Toland wrote for Queens and Princes. Where Spinoza had a rigorous and philosophically robust metaphysical system, Toland was eclectic, ludic and erudite."³⁷ These deists were also known as freethinkers, but how free were they to actually think and philosophize freely? Or differently: on which constraints did they depend? I am interested here in the social life and politics that shaped their intellectual lives.

LS: This is not a question with an obvious answer, but I would like to point out an evolution starting in the second half of the 17th century. In the middle of that century, we still have general erudite correspondence – people like Oldenburg wrote and received letters and gave them to read to a circle of friends and colleagues. This idea of a somewhat private exchange inside and through a circle was very important, in a sense, it is the illustrious Republic of Letters. Later there is another way of communication and dissemination that develops around the journals and their notices, reviews, translations, polemics, news from the war, etc. From the 1680s you have the *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* by Jean Le Clerc, but also the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, the *Acta Eruditorum* in Germany, the *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe* in Amsterdam, and many more. There is a true explosion of erudite journals, instead of erudite private correspondence. This changed the landscape of the circulation of ideas across Europe. As soon as these small volumes were printed in Amsterdam and Leiden, they arrived in Naples, for example, in the erudite circle of Valletta.

TvB: Yes, this probably also means another social intellectual life and a specific impact on the content itself of the exchanges.

LS: Absolutely! For instance, in Naples in the south of Italy, intellectuals knew very well about what was happening in Holland, or about the books published in England, etc. They didn't always read Dutch or English, but now they could read the accounts in the journals. The platform through which ideas circulated changed. With the retreat of the private circles and the arrival of the journals we may speak of a European context.

TvB: The question of the public or readership of intellectual works is important, indeed. If the *libertins érudits* wrote in and for their closed circles, the deists seem to have taken this larger publishing machine into consideration. They probably didn't have the people as such in view, but perhaps rather the bourgeoisie.

LS: Yes, the curious, the “honnête homme”.

TvB: The concept of authority is clearly problematized by Spinoza throughout the *TTP*. He takes up the theological authority of revelation (prophecy and miracles), the scriptural authority of dogmatism (instead of critical hermeneutics and philology), and the political authority of sovereignty (unitary rule, monarchism). All these authorities contribute to the theological-political complex of the law which presides over “the relationship between freedom and the right or “power” [*puissance*] of the individual.” How do the freethinkers conceive of this second central question on the relationship between freedom and right in the post-1688 context?

LS: Starting with the Toleration Act of 1688, I think that the different pieces of legislation concerning toleration that will follow the Glorious Revolution show the polemical and political stages regarding the questions of liberty and tolerance. Locke's idea which advances toleration for all minus atheists as well as Catholics was quite important here. This large conception of toleration had to guarantee a Godly inspired loyalty to the law, which was impossible for atheists and also for Catholics who – differently than the Mahometans – already had a figure of Godly authority, a religious king, namely the Pope. While the Catholics were considered to be more loyal to this foreign king than to the English crown, the Hebrews and Mahometans might have been better tolerated since they only had their one God and thus the judgement of loyalty and fidelity would be a true judgement in support of a real social pact. The atheists' pact could never be valid since they didn't believe in anything, they couldn't swear on the Bible.

TvB: In any case, though the views on what a pact exactly consists of may differ, they are always linked to a certain understanding of right. Was the individual right that Locke conceived in his thought on toleration different from the right we find with the freethinkers? How is the right of the freethinkers constructed?

LS: I think we should look at the freethinkers individually. In his *Second Treatise* Locke constructs a very clear political project with a pact, citizens, guarantees concerning property, individual liberty, etc. We speak in a general way of “freethinkers”, but I think we should work case by case and research to what extent and how exactly each of them perhaps constructed a precise political project as well.

TvB: We know that English philosophy was part of continental early modern debates on Spinoza. More specifically, the Italian reception of Spinoza would have been quite attentive to the work of questionable thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke.³⁸ However, a more important line of criticism in Italy, probably mediated by Catholicism and Bayle’s article on Spinoza, was concerned with the personal atheism of the author of the *TTP*. We find Albert Burgh and Nicolas Steno stressing the truth of miracles and more generally Christianity in their correspondence with Spinoza (letters 67 and 67bis),³⁹ but also the philosopher and scientist Lorenzo Magalotti (1719) who was equally well acquainted with Spinoza but against his atheist book.⁴⁰ We can mention as well Giuseppe Valletta (1716; 1732), Biagio Garofalo (1707) and Tomasso Rossi (1747), among others, who were outspoken anti-atheists, anti-materialists and anti-Spinozists.⁴¹ Contrary to these Catholic readers, the emigrant and freethinker Alberto Radicati (1737) referred himself to the *TTP*’s political philosophy – though to not much of it – when showing “very plainly how they [the “two Authorities united”, the sacred and the civil] belong to the Prince, in a despotic State, or in a Republic, to those who represent the Prince.”⁴² How would you describe and characterize the social geography of the early Italian reception of the *TTP*?

LS: First of all, the Italians could read Latin very well, so Spinoza was really read.⁴³ Locke, however, was read in French, thanks to the translations of Pierre Coste. In general, the Italian context – both in the north and south – is very much linked to post-Cartesian metaphysics, that is, some kind of Christian philosophy of Malebranchian and conservative-leaning. Besides, the works of Spinoza were completely prohibited by the Inquisition. Although that didn’t necessarily mean a lot, it was not a good idea to cite or circulate these works. On the other hand, intellectuals learned through journals anyway about Spinozist literature. There were also people who made volumes on specific issues like English philosophy, or Arab philosophy, etc. Correspondingly, original ideas were presented in a pastiche and travelled in this form somewhat subterraneously. This is something to look at better.

TvB: I would like to finish by asking you about Europe. To what extent could we call the publication and reception of the *TTP* a European event? What do we gain, or lose, by calling Spinoza and the *TTP* “European”?

LS: Sure, Spinoza is very much a European character – or let’s say he’s French, English, Italian, Swiss, etc. However, I’m not sure that the Enlightenment happened through a Spinozist impulse. I think there’s much more to it. Like Luciano Canfora I always thought that we got Spinoza only because we had the philologues of the 16th century. But sure, he’s a European character, and also a Continental character: his thought – broadly speaking – runs through European culture up to the present day. I even think that Locke is a Continental character rather than merely an English philosopher, in the sense that travelling almost three years around France and spending the six years in the Low Countries were essential in his intellectual biography.

¹ This conversation was part of a workshop on November 17th 2022 organized by Sonja Lavaert and myself at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. I would like to thank Luisa Simonutti, Sonja Lavaert and the participants for their contributions.

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- ⁴ Katz, David, 'Isaac Vossius and the English biblical critics 1650-1689', in R. Popkin & A. Vanderjagt (eds.), *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Leiden, Brill, 1993, 142-184.
- ⁵ Israel, Jonathan, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 599.
- ⁶ A helpful tool for this work is the website *Biblioteche Filosofiche Private in Età Moderna e Contemporanea* by the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa and the University of Cagliari: <http://picus.unica.it/>.
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- ⁸ See Goshen-Gottstein, Moshe, 'The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: Rise, Decline, Rebirth', *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 102/3, 1983, 365-399; Goshen-Gottstein, Moshe, 'Foundations of Biblical Philology in the Seventeenth Century: Christian and Jewish Dimensions', in I. Twersky & B. Septimus (eds.), *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge, Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, 1987, 77-91. As regards Justin Champion, among his numerous studies, see "'Directions for the Profitable Reading of the Holy Scriptures": Biblical Criticism, Clerical Learning and Lay Readers, c. 1650-1720', in A. Hessayon & N. Keene (eds.), *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, 208-30.
- ⁹ Much primary literature from the English 17th century and before can be found in the database *Early English Books Online* (EEBO): <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/index>. For works after 1700 there is *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECCO).
- ¹⁰ Balibar, Étienne, *Spinoza and Politics*, London/New York, Verso, 1998/1985, 4.
- ¹¹ Cudworth, Ralph, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, London, Richard Royston, 1678, 707.
- ¹² *A treatise partly theological, and partly political containing some few discourses, to prove that the liberty of philosophizing (that is making use of natural reason) may be allow'd without any prejudice to piety, or to the peace of any common-wealth, and that the loss of public peace and religion it self must necessarily follow, where such a liberty of reasoning is taken away*, London, 1689. See Israel, Jonathan, *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, 605; L. Simonutti, 'Vindiciae miraculorum. I rimostranti e Spinoza', in C. Hermanin & L. Simonutti (eds.), *La centralità del dubbio. Un progetto di Antonio Rotondò, vol. II*, Firenze, Olschki, 2011, 613-37.
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- ²⁵ Boyle, Robert, *The Works of the Honourable Robert Boyle. In six volumes. By Thomas Birch*, Vol. II, Hildesheim, Olms, 1966, 253.
- ²⁶ Letter 29.

²⁷ “The word ‘improve’ itself, in its original meaning, did not mean just ‘make better’ in a general sense but literally meant to do something for monetary profit, especially to cultivate land for profit (based on the old French for *into*, *en*, and *profit*, *pros* – or its oblique case, *pren*). By the seventeenth century, the word ‘improver’ was firmly fixed in the language to refer to someone who rendered land productive and profitable, especially by enclosing it or reclaiming waste.” Wood, Ellen Meiksins, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, London, Verso, 2002/1999, 106.

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³¹ Hodgson, ‘1688 and all that’.

³² Cf. Simonutti, ‘Inspirational Journeys and Trunks of Books’, 135-40.

³³ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 599-627.

³⁴ Lavaert, Sonja, *Vrijheid, Gelijkheid, Veelheid. Het moderne democratie-denken van Machiavelli tot Spinoza en zijn kring*, Brussel, VUBPress, 2020, 73-83.

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³⁹ Totaro, Giuseppina, ‘Niels Stensen (1638-1686) e la prima diffusione della filosofia di Spinoza nella Firenze di Cosimo III’, in P. Cristofolini (ed.), *L’Hérésie spinoziste*, Amsterdam, APA-Holland University Press, 1995, 147-68; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 218-29.

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