

Spinoza and Philosophers Today*

written for K&K



obraz Spinozu od Wallernuta Vaillantana

U To what extent is Spinoza's interpretation of scriptures and revealed religion relevant today?

Steven Smith: Spinoza's critique of Scripture is exceptionally relevant today. Not only have we seen the rise of religious fundamentalisms, but we have also witnessed the publication of several books by, e.g., Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens arguing against traditional religion and sometimes even citing Spinoza in defense of atheism. The thing I cannot help but notice is how generally impoverished the whole debate is today in comparison with the immense learning and erudition that Spinoza brought to the topic. He was a philosopher and a philologist and this combination is certainly lacking in today's polemicists.

DeDijn: Spinoza was one of the very first people to see the Bible as a text with human origins, i.e. to be studied as to its meaning in the same way as any other text: with the help of knowledge of the language (grammar, semantics), context of origin, intentions of the writers etc. Yet the result of his interpretation, what Spinoza calls the determination of the kernel message of the Bible is not decided only by exegesis and hermeneutics, but also by some philosophical presuppositions, e.g. his conception of the difference between reason and imagination, and his conviction that the moral message of the prophets and of Christ was for some reason (which he thinks he knows with moral certainty) in agreement with the moral teaching of his philosophy. See further Herman De Dijn, "Over de interpretatie van de Schrift volgens Spinoza", *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 29 (1967), 667-704; and Herman De Dijn, "Spinoza and Revealed Religion", *Studia Spinozana* 11 (1995), 39-52.

* questions posed by Béla Egyed

Gatens: Spinoza's reflections on scripture and religion in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP) remain relevant today because they offer an account of the constitution of society. The study of biblical narratives and language, Spinoza says, "can be very profitable in the matter of social relations" insofar as they reveal "the ways and manners of men" (TTP, Chap 5). What the study of historical narratives shows is that the prophets and scripture appeal to the imagination in order to convey simple ideas and to encourage obedience to the authority that serves to bind together the collective body. Scripture is not concerned with philosophy (or an adequate knowledge of Nature) but rather "teaches only what men can imitate by a definite code of conduct" (TTP, Chap 12). Some read the TTP as a condemnation of the Bible, theology and faith, on the grounds that these promote false beliefs (god is a judge) and sad passions (fear and hope). But on Spinoza's own account, imagination is a power, not a defect, of the human being and the knowledge to which it gives rise – though partial or inadequate - is of enormous social utility. Spinoza's tirade against theologians who wish to legislate over speculative matters, and so turn disagreements into crimes (TTP Pref. 3), should not be allowed to overshadow his conviction that much good has come from religion. Even though religious beliefs, when judged from a philosophical perspective, are false they can nevertheless promote the attainment of important human goods. Religion aims for obedience and piety that, in turn, promote the peace and security of the state. It should not aim for axiomatic knowledge of nature in general; rather, the variable rules, customs and knowledge that constitute a given religion will be tailored to fit particular peoples at particular times and places. In my view, the TTP contains two important insights: first, the central role that is played by the imagination in religion, sociability and politics; and second, the idea that the 'imaginary' dimension of human sociability, although permanent, is open to reformation over time.

Boros: There are different layers to be distinguished in Spinoza's interpretation of (Holy) Scriptures and revealed religion(s). (1) Basically, he urges us to part with the tradition of interpreting Scripture in a purely internal-religious way: the Bible cannot be seen as an unmediated exchange between God and human beings, nor as an exchange mediated solely by the institution(s) of the church(es). (2) He turns our attention to a certain alliance of the "spiritual" and the worldly powers whose aim is to develop a theory that is able to make people obey both powers without any reflection. At the same time he offers an interpretation of the weakness of man's mind – its being imaginative in character rather than purely rational or intellectual – that refuses to treat it as a consequence of the original sin of the first human creatures. Finally, Spinoza offers a special hermeneutics of Scripture, one that is based on descriptive-scientific investigations of its main tenets. This method, he claims, differs both from the internal-religious way of looking at it, and from a method that uses secular philosophy as an external criterion of its interpretation. Fourthly, he thinks there are considerable differences among religions

that claim to be based on revelation; he treats separately the Hebrew, the Christian and the Muslim religions. He maintains that the Hebrew prophetic religion was based on the lively imagination of the prophets – even if there were several wise men among the Hebrews: for example, Solomon; at the same time this religion proved to be successful as a means of strengthening the coherence among the members of the community. He does not seem to be very interested in a detailed analysis of the Muslim religion; he only observes that this was by far the most successful in making people ready to surrender themselves totally to a power the worldly and religious aspects of which could hardly be separated. Concerning Christianity its main merit seemed for him to stem from his own peculiar way of interpreting Jesus as the unique person who exchanged with God in an absolutely unmediated way independent of the senses (*de mente ad mentem*).

Drawing our attention to the political aspects of all religious thinking is certainly one of the main merits of Spinoza's thought that will have a lasting effect. On the other hand, if one mentions the expression "political theology" today, one will hardly think of Spinoza in the first place; for it was the highly influential German political thinker Carl Schmitt who gave a decisive, non-Spinozistic, turn to this concept in the 20th century.

Considering the strength and weakness of human beings as something to be understood without referring to the revelations of a transcendent Creator of the world, is a basic assumption of today's natural, human and social sciences.

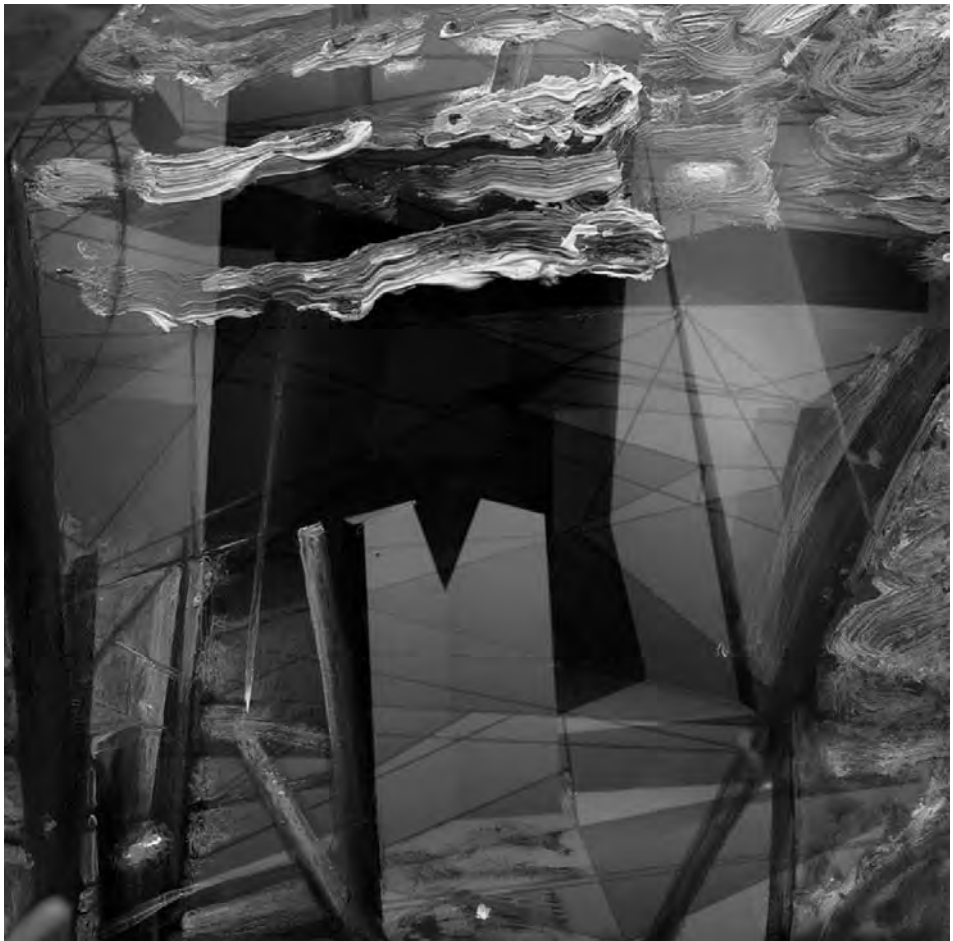
Concerning hermeneutics of the Bible, Spinoza's own hermeneutics is a highly interesting one; his suggestion is that the meaning of Scripture must be collected from its own history. Freeing Scripture from philosophy is for him nothing else than attaching it to sciences such as ethnology, archeology, linguistics, etc. – a tenet that is hardly contested nowadays even among the scholars of religious studies.

The differentiated picture Spinoza makes of the different revealed religions does not seem to be a matter of much interest today except for secularized Jewish intellectuals who try to save Spinoza from the consequences of the ban in order to be able to draw some lessons from his works on modern Jewish identity.

Munz: Yes, they are still relevant today, for several reasons: Spinoza's was the first critical, scientific, study of the Scriptures and of revealed religions. The novelty of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* (TPT) was that it combined historical, linguistic, psychological and, mainly, philosophical insights in its approach to sacred texts – primarily those of the Old Testament.

His own conception of God as impersonal infinite nature coloured his views of Biblical authors whom – especially the Hebrew prophets – he found to rely more on their imagination than on reason; thereby giving rise to fantastic, and even contradictory, views of God. His views on the New Testament were more favourable because he felt that the way Christ communicated with God (mind-to-mind) was closer to his own conception. Today, Bible critique is an independent scientific discipline that owes much to Spinoza, who could be considered as one of its founders.

Malinowski-Charles: Spinoza was the first author to elaborate a genuine method of interpretation of the revealed Scripture, so that he may truly be called the inventor of Biblical exegesis. His view, notably in the TTP (Theological-Political Treatise), is that Scripture should be explained by Scripture, and that any dogmas must be derived from it, rather than the other way around: Dogmas or the tradition (elaborated in a given political and historical context) should not decide which passages to privilege in the holy text. The truth is, indeed, that some passages of the Bible contradict each other, or stress different aspects of the same event. Spinoza's method of interpretation leaves very little place – if any at all – to subjectivity and external influences. The method is quantitative – one has to follow that which is most repeated – and logical – one should not believe anything that contradicts other established teachings when an alternative interpretation is possible. This is, as anyone can see, of utmost relevance today. The method is focused on the internal meaning of the text. So, one of the leading – and most condemned – figures of atheism in the 17th century turns out to be one of the most influential theorists



Daniel Fischer: Under a Burdock

of religious interpretation – more for Christianity than for the religion that was his own and from which he was expelled. Judaism is still greatly influenced by the view that tradition is, in and by itself, decisive for what one ought to do, and to believe. Christianity, on the other hand, seems to have (unknowingly) integrated more of Spinoza's methodology for interpreting the Bible.

Montag: I would say that there is perhaps nothing in Spinoza's work more relevant today than his critical examination of scripture. In saying this I do not refer simply or even primarily to the emergence in the last thirty years of the phenomena whose diversity and complexity is often reduced to the single term "fundamentalism," phenomena whose existence cannot be confined to a realm of "faith" or "belief" but which have taken on a practical, institutional and thus political existence. It should be absolutely clear that by invoking the name, "fundamentalism" I am not speaking only about "Islamic fundamentalism" a phrase that more often than not incites the suspension of rational thought, at least in the West, but about Jewish and above all Christian fundamentalisms as well.

Spinoza's critique of "superstition" (transcendence, teleology/providence, the systematic devaluation of body and pleasure) would appear more relevant than anytime since the Middle Ages. According to a certain reading of his work, Spinoza belongs to the tradition of the Enlightenment, as if he were the complex original of which Voltaire and Diderot represented popular versions. Spinoza would thus represent an Enlightenment that not only remains unfinished, but which faces new and unprecedented challenges from the formidable armies of Faith. To further establish his contemporaneity, could we not say that as the first "secular Jew" to use Strauss's problematic and perhaps oxymoronic phrase, the singular case of a man who, expelled from the Jewish community into which he had been born, neither sought to return to it (as had so many others before him, including Uriel da Costa), nor accepted Christianity in any of the myriad forms extant in the Amsterdam of his time, Spinoza was the first great thinker of secularism?

I am afraid, and this is the point at which the excellence and difficulty of his work most nearly coincide, that Spinoza is far more insidious and subversive than this. Althusser was right to assert that he is a heretic in our time, as well as his own, which means not only that he remains relevant but that his work retains its capacity to disturb and offend even the most enlightened and secular among us, those who unable to bury it once again, attempt to annex it to their own projects, just as those thinkers Althusser describes who, unable to defeat Marxism, ended up taking it over to empty it of its content.

Why would Spinoza spend so much time on a detailed examination of not the Bible (he excused himself from the task of interpreting the "New Testament," citing his lack of expertise in Greek), but the Hebrew Scriptures? Further, why would Spinoza, who read, in addition to Hebrew, both Aramaic and Syriac, devote significant effort to the

composition of a manual of Hebrew grammar, going so far as to develop a new theory of the Hebrew verb? Certainly not merely to negate it, to declare it a “fake,” as one says of a painting, written by imposters, in order to diminish its authority and appeal. All men, Spinoza says in the preface to the TTP, “are liable to superstition.” It is perhaps the most effective content of the universal existence of humanity: in no way is it localized in Jews, Muslims or Christians or any of their writings. In fact, Spinoza goes out of his way to denounce the intrusion of philosophy in religion, in that philosophy in its dominant forms is every bit as much the bearer of superstition as “religion” itself.

To translate this into contemporary terms would be to question the opposition of the religious and the secular, of faith and enlightenment. As Althusser has shown, Spinoza’s critique of Biblical interpretation applies with equal force to the most militantly secular practices of reading as well as the secular texts to which they are directed, in the same way that his critique of providence calls into question the notion of “the economy,” and reveals it to be the secularization of ideas often associated with Christianity, but which also have their Jewish equivalents, up to and including the moral values of acquiescence and sacrifice. Spinoza seeks to deconstruct the interpretive practices that dematerialize the Hebrew Scriptures and distort them into an allegorical anticipation of the truth that will succeed them and render their statements in their literal existence null and void.

Thus, it is not the “resurgence” of religion that confers such importance on Spinoza’s project, for such a notion implies that “religion” disappeared or was largely diminished in the face of the secular culture that issued from the European Enlightenment. In my view nothing could be more naive than to think we have finished with Christianity or even religion simply because our discourse does not contain references to the Bible as divine authority, God or Christ the King. On the contrary it is clear that the most malignant characteristics of two millennia of Christian missions and the holy wars, crusades and inquisitions they necessitate, persist in various perfectly secular, even “scientific” forms. The modern form of universalism which seeks to convert the other into itself and regards the other who remains other as enemy is strikingly Christian even without a single reference to God: how do we begin to free ourselves from superstition in both its religious and secular forms. It is this that makes it imperative to study scripture.



Are Spinoza’s criticisms of the Scriptures excessively rationalistic?

Steven Smith: In a sense, yes, depending upon what you mean by “excessively.” Spinoza wished to hold Scripture up to the cold light of reason and in this light he found much of the text wanting. He took pleasure in debunking the claims of Scripture and ascribing them to ignorant men living in primitive times. His critique was both rationalistic and historicist. He was a great believer in what philosophers have taken to calling “the

principle of sufficient reason.' The question is whether this principle alone is sufficient. As Leo Strauss, one of the truly great readers of Spinoza, has asked: what justifies the claims of reason? Is Spinoza's commitment to reason itself based upon reason or is it an act of faith perhaps no different in kind from the faith that inspires belief in Scripture? This is the great question implied, but not answered, in Spinoza's "Ethics."

DeDijn: No, of course not, because he sees the biblical message as originating (at least in the prophets) in the imagination: the message of the Bible cannot be determined positively or negatively by its correspondence to scientific or philosophical truth. (See Herman De Dijn, "Spinoza and Revealed Religion").

Gatens: On the contrary, I see Spinoza's engagement with Scriptural texts as a strong challenge to his alleged 'rationalism'. Imaginative knowledge is embodied knowledge. Prophets who are farmers will report their visions in terms of crops and droughts. Those who are soldiers or fishermen will tell their narratives using metaphors drawn from battles or fishing. In this manner, Spinoza shows the way in which embodied ways of life impact on the different modalities of knowing and practical knowledge.

Boros: Spinoza's criticism of the Scripture is not "rationalistic" if what we mean by rationalistic is only the application of reason's own standards in knowing things. Spinoza's criticism is "historic" in the sense that we are urged to launch extensive descriptive investigations on the basic circumstances, under which the various parts of the Scripture were written down. These investigations should reveal the "real meaning" of the Scripture, and it is only after the supposedly real meaning has become unveiled that the question can be posed whether the particular doctrines of the Scripture are true. This method is the opposite of how traditional interpreters do their work: they take the truth of the Scripture for granted, and on the basis of this presupposition they ask for its real meaning. Spinoza's criticism is reasonable but not (excessively) rationalistic.

Munz: I cannot say that Spinoza's criticisms of the Scripture were excessively rationalistic. Spinoza was a rationalist philosopher, and while he brought rational arguments against the exaggerated claims made in the Scriptures, he understood that neither the prophets nor their audience were fully rational beings. He did not consider the Bible's role to be the improving of man's understanding. He saw its primary role to be the promotion of obedience, simple piety, justice and charity. In other words, for him the main purpose of the Bible was moral and political education. If fear of an anthropocentric God could inspire social harmony, and would lead to political stability, Spinoza would find it useful.

Montag: A number of years ago I realized that there were few individuals capable of understanding Spinoza's reading of Scripture: those who possessed an adequate knowl-

edge of the numerous Jewish sources on which Spinoza constantly draws throughout his work (often without acknowledgement) did not, would not and in all probability could not read Spinoza, while those who read him (I include myself here) did not possess the knowledge of his Hebrew sources to the extent necessary to understand his theologico-political strategy. In no way does Spinoza counterpose reason to religion: on the contrary, he draws a line of demarcation within the discursive realm in which he was steeped and from which he drew so many of his most startling ideas: the extraordinary world of Medieval Jewish philosophy and commentary. In saying this, I want to be very clear that I have no intention of restoring Spinoza to “Judaism.” On the contrary, to read Spinoza carefully, to trace his references not only to Maimonides (and the definitive study of these two thinkers remains to be written), but also to the two great commentators, Rashi and Ibn Ezra is to understand the ways in which he seeks to open this still forbidden and largely unknown philosophical world to a larger audience, to establish once and for all their “universal” significance (although a universalism quite distinct



Daniel Fischer: Velká geometria - malba

from that of The Good News). The line of demarcation that Spinoza draws makes visible what we might call the spontaneous materialism of this philosophical practice. Rashi, for example, in response to mystical currents within Judaism, but above all to Christian interpretations of the “old Testament,” produced a theory (albeit in the practical state) of the irreducible materiality of writing. What passes for Spinoza’s “rationalism” is in fact a playing of this underground materialist current against the forms of Christian reading. The consequence is a liberation of the materialist currents within the Scriptures themselves, for example, the Epicureanism of Ecclesiastes, against the eschatological statements in Ezekiel or Daniel. We have only recently seen the door Spinoza opened to us centuries ago; we have yet to enter it. Beyond it lies a world to be explored.



Could Spinoza be called a reductive naturalist?

Steven Smith: Is there any other kind?

DeDijn: No, not in the usual sense(s), for several reasons. Nature for him is not just matter, but its essence consists of infinite attributes, each perfect in their own kind; mind is not reducible to body or brain; a human being, although not the centre of the universe, but only a part of Nature, yet has a much more complex nature than that of animals, is capable even of *Amor intellectualis Dei*, and is in a (special) sense immortal.

Gatens: It follows from Spinoza’s substance monism that the human mind is not an individual substance. Rather, mind and body are conceived as modifications of the attributes – thought and extension – of the unique Substance (God or Nature). Far from taking the attributes to be creations of an omnipotent God, they are better understood as ‘aspects’ or ‘essences’ of God. In some sense, God is Nature. Some have seen this part of Spinoza’s philosophy as the ‘divinising’ of Nature (or pantheism) but it may just as well be interpreted as the ‘naturalising’ of God. This interpretation is consistent with Spinoza’s assertion that we “acquire a greater and more perfect knowledge of God as we gain more knowledge of natural phenomena” (TTP, Chap 4). Is this reductive naturalism? I don’t think so. Thought cannot be reduced to extension. It expresses an aspect of reality that is irreducible to passive nature, or matter.

Boros: I don’t think so. First of all, his concept of nature itself is not reductionist. As is well-known, he distinguishes between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, and the later can in no sense be reduced to the former. The place of human beings within nature, their relations to the productive and the produced aspect of nature is, of course a delicate issue that cannot be answered without detailed analyses of the relevant texts. My idea is that however strongly Spinoza might have emphasized that humans are rooted

in, and are not above, the order of nature, the self-consciousness he conceptualizes as the idea *ideae* does mean a sort of gap between human beings and other finite modes.

Munz: It is not entirely clear to me in what sense Spinoza could be thought of as a “reductive naturalist”. According to his philosophy God is all of nature, which also included human nature - not as an exception, but as its equal and integral part. While he believed that no special laws were required to explain human nature, he was not a “reductive materialist”. On the contrary, he held that mind and body were parallel expressions (modes) of two (among infinitely many) equal attributes of one God. And, neither of these attributes (or of their modes) could be reduced to the other. Still, human beings, who are themselves equally minds and bodies, are different from the rest of nature in that they are also aware – mostly in a confused way – of this union.

U Spinoza’s conception of nature had a major impact on German Idealism; to what extent is it still relevant today for a holistic understanding of the universe, and the place of human beings in it?

Steven Smith: Very few philosophers today would be as bold or audacious as Spinoza. This has always been part of his attraction: the sheer audacity of the claim to understand the essence of God or nature (to use his formulation). Still Spinoza’s naturalism has had a profound, if often unacknowledged, affect on the way in which both philosophers and ordinary men and women think about themselves and their place in the whole. His account of causality, his solution to the mind-body problem, and his theory of the passions are all, I believe, a constitutive part of the way many (certainly not all) of us think about ourselves.

DeDijn: I suppose holistic means here (in reference to German Idealism) that the universe is seen as meaningful and that human beings play a central role in the development of this meaning (cf. also the views of Ilya Prigogine, *La nouvelle alliance*; or Teilhard de Chardin). If this is close to the meaning of holistic, then Spinoza is not a holistic philosopher: There is no meaning to Nature as a whole or to history; neither is man the centre of the universe or a crucial part of its development. (See Herman De Dijn, “Naturalism, freedom and ethics in Spinoza” in Geneviève Lloyd (ed.), *Spinoza. Critical Assessments*. Vol. II New York, Routledge, 2001, 332-346.)

Gatens: Spinoza’s conception of nature greatly influenced the development of German philosophy in the 19th century. I am inclined to say that his influence on the generation after the heyday of German Idealism was strong. The researches of Ludwig Feuerbach, Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx are unthinkable in the absence of Spinoza. The critiques of religion, morality and society, developed by each can be traced back to

Spinoza's radical theses on power, ethics and politics. It is worth noting that Spinoza's thought also had a great influence on British Romantic Naturalism through figures such as S. T. Coleridge and George Eliot. The idea that all of nature is interconnected was much admired by poets and artists of the 19th century (and later).

Munz: I do not know how the first half of the question relates to the other one. I will answer only the second one.

I think we would not have to change anything important about Spinoza's philosophy in this matter. Spinoza would have called the whole universe "God-nature". After all, he saw the starry sky; he surely knew about the discoveries of Galileo in it, and had assumed that the universe constitutes a whole. The earth is part of this whole and man belongs to this whole in that he/she belongs to nature: to the earth. The spiritual and the material exist in God in the same way as they exist now on the earth.

It is questionable if life, let alone other people, would also exist also in the universe. The idea of evolution was unknown to Spinoza; he does not say when and how man was created on the earth, whether plants or animals were prior to man, or whether man is a necessary part of God-nature. God is eternal, according to him, whereas man is not, because for Spinoza the substance is prior to its different forms; although, man plays an important role in his system because through human thinking God recognizes himself. The man is also a part of God and, after all, God is everything. However, man does not have to be alone in the universe. I do not know how Spinoza (from the standpoint of his philosophy) would react to the fact that there is no life on the moon. He would have to admit that if the moon is material, there is also spirit in it, but not in the form of thinking and even less thinking about itself (in terms of self-awareness). It would exist in the form of some kind of "ranked spirituality". Thinking beings do not have to be in all of nature, but only where conditions allow them to be. We do not know even today if we are alone in the whole universe.

Spinoza did not talk about these things. However, it might be interesting to speculate how he would react to current tendencies in cosmology. I think Spinoza might approve of the notion that "man is an observer" of this cosmos. After all, it is his idea that man is the only creature, who observes nature and, also, him/herself drawing consequences from these observations. Naturally, Spinoza's God would not be outside the universe, for, He is the universe itself. Similarly, the universe could not develop any further because that would mean that God is imperfect - that he still needs something achieve. According to Spinoza, God is eternally perfect and so he does not

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NÁBOŽENSKÉ
PRESVEDČENIA
Z FILOZOFICKÉHO
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NESPRÁVNE, MÔŽU
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PODOBÁM DOBRA
V ČLOVEKU.**

have to develop. Therefore, God as a (self)-creating nature does not move at all. One might also wonder what Spinoza might have thought of the theory that the (physical) universe was created from some kind of original proto-atom which constitutes everything that is in the current and future universe. Spinoza was not only a rationalist he was also a mystic who drew on the neo-platonic idea of a proto-original One: the undifferentiated One from which everything emerges through the differentiation of all difference. This idea is encompassed in his aforementioned opinion about a creative nature that is superior to created nature: perceived around us, and in us. Hegel, who is unthinkable without Spinoza, expressed this later on by the idea that progress moves from the abstract to the concrete, whereby everything concrete is potentially included in the abstract. Such was— *mutatis mutandis* — the proto-atom. The proto-atom had only the material form, yet according to Spinoza there would have to be included also, from the beginning, the spirit which has been confirmed throughout the development by the creation of life and thinking beings. Of course, on the other hand Spinoza would accept neither the idea of the development of the universe, nor our current scientific opinions on the spirit. We would have had also other reasons for that.

I would add, on this occasion, that even though Spinoza's God was not subject to progress or to perfectibility, man - a part of God - has progressed: his/her life went through enormous changes. Man started from the savage and anarchistic state to the civic state, organized, political in which he/she perfected further him/herself. Man had improved his/her life by getting to know and obey God-nature and he/she had improved spiritual as well as material and after all also political life because he/she ended up with democracy which suited him/her as social being mostly.

(Note of the editor: While the editor has made every effort to render the English version of this reply grammatically acceptable, he has reservations about some of the views ascribed to Spinoza in it.)

What do you think about the attention Spinoza's theory of emotions is receiving today from psychologists and cognitive scientists?

Steven Smith: To my mind, Spinoza's greatest contribution has always been, not as a metaphysician, but as a moral psychologist. His account of the affects or emotions plays a central part in his understanding of human psychology. I am not so well-versed in contemporary cognitive science, but there is much new work being done on the "history of the passions" and the way in which philosophers have understood the power of the emotions and the relation of reason to the passions. Spinoza always writes as an ethical physician, viewing the passions as a sort of doctor to the soul. His great equals are probably only Plato and Freud.

DeDijn: Spinoza's theory of the emotions has received attention from psychoanalysts (Lacan e.g.) and from psychologists like Nico Frijda (The Emotions). According to Frijda (and the philosopher of psychology Donald Davidson), Spinoza is a very interesting early modern example of a sophisticated cognitive theory of the emotions. Cognitive scientists like Antonio Damasio see Spinoza as the forerunner of a neuro-physiological account of the emotions in which the emotions are based on purely bodily feelings. This is of course impossible since Spinoza does not accept interaction between body and mind, and is certainly not a reductionist. (See Herman De Dijn, "Spinoza's Theory of the Emotions in Relation to Therapy", Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy forthcoming Vol. 5 (2009).)

Gatens: Authors such as Antonio Damasio and Heidi Ravven applaud Spinoza's prescience in proposing an integrated, network model of the mind, cognition and emotion, rather than a modular model that tends to compartmentalize judgments, beliefs and desires. His theory of the affects challenges triumphalist accounts of free will that praise those who enjoy privilege and good fortune while blaming the unfortunate for their circumstances. Spinoza's theory of the emotions presages some aspects of Freudian psychoanalysis insofar as it associates freedom (but not free will) with the ability to understand the causal links that determine behaviour. Placed in a socio-political context (human life is always embodied in particular places and times, and embedded in specific historical practices, as the TTP shows), this account of the emotions draws attention away from praising or blaming individuals and onto systemic causes of the features of human societies that cause misery (e.g., poverty, poor health, lack of education).

Boros: I am convinced that Spinoza is a great thinker who merits all possible sorts of attention. In an earlier attempt to interpret his Ethics I myself took his theory of affects as my starting point, and tried to develop his ethical tenets in a strict sense on the basis of Book 3 of Ethics. I think Spinoza's theory of affects is an ingenious one, not only for its inner merits but also for the organic way he made this theory part of his broader system consisting in his respective theories not only of metaphysics and theory of knowledge but also of religion and politics.

Malinowski-Charles: Contemporary psychologists and cognitive scientists such as Antonio Damasio have credited Spinoza with being "right" about the emotions. Spinoza's unitary view of human beings enables him to explain the emotions, called "affects" in his terminology, as manifestations of one's power of being both in the mental and in the physical realm. Traditionally, the emotions were seen as the effects of the body on the mind. Spinoza breaks with this view by saying that there is only one reality expressed in two ways, and that it is wrong to believe that the body causes the mind's emotion. This is, I think, one of the main reasons why Spinoza's analysis of emotional life is so

appealing to contemporary – mostly materialistic – psychologists. There is, in sum, no need for two different entities acting one on the other; everything that takes place in the attribute of extension is sufficient in order to explain emotional life. Spinoza's theory offers an ontological support to the study of the role of the different physiological factors, such as endocrinal glands, hormones and cerebral zones play in the determination of emotions. In addition, Spinoza's powerful understanding of the way elaborate emotions are constructed out of simple (he calls them "primitive") emotions, namely, desire, joy and sadness, provides an important contribution to understanding them. Spinoza analyses with subtlety and depth the diverse mechanisms (such as the desire of imitation, or the love of whatever resembles us) that explain the birth of complex attitudes towards objects and beings in a totally mechanical – hence both universal and objective – way. I personally regret that contemporary specialists, who study emotions, largely in ignorance of the history of ideas, cut Spinoza's theory of the emotions off from the rest of his ethics, seeing it only as it fits into their own purposes. All too often, they study only those intuitions of Spinoza which are forerunners to contemporary theories, without understanding the specific role that they play in Spinoza's system as a whole. However, it can only be good for the study of this author to show that in many respects he was, indeed, "right."

U What do you take to be the advantages and disadvantages of Spinoza's separation of political and religious authorities?

DeDijn: No democratic state is possible without this separation, so it seems Spinoza is right. Yet his view on religion as basically an inner attitude is one-sided: religion is probably intrinsically related to ritual and ceremony (i.e. external actions). This may mean that it will be not so easy to have a peaceful coexistence of good-willing believers and the state.

Gatens: Does he advocate the complete separation of political and religious authorities? One might rather say that he denies the legitimacy of the theologians' claim to political authority and describes the limits the religious authority of the sovereign. The seven dogmas of universal faith presented in Chapter 14 of the TTP represent a basic creed that persons of all persuasions should be able to endorse. These dogmas are: god exists; he is one; he is omnipresent; he has supreme right; worship of god consists only in love towards one's neighbour; only those who worship god are saved; and, finally, god forgives the repentant. These dogmas encourage people to act charitably towards each other. The most important thing to note about the dogmas is that they should be acceptable to all because each individual should be free to interpret them according to his or her own understanding. This is crucial because in Spinoza's view the power to think is

the inalienable natural right of every individual. We are determined by nature to think, that is, to imagine, to judge, and to try to understand ourselves, others and Nature. Just as fish are determined to swim – and do so by sovereign natural right – human beings are determined to think and this we do by a sovereign natural right that cannot be transferred or surrendered (TTP Chaps 19 & 20). Each interpretation of the dogmas then will reflect the type of power and the kind of knowledge possessed by an individual: does he have a simple, an imaginative, or a philosophical mind? Of course, it is preferable that as many as possible will come to understand God or Nature philosophically. However, this understanding cannot be compelled (TTP, Chap 7) and, as the Ethics indicates, philosophical understanding is a rare achievement that requires both ability and time to study and reflect, privileges that few enjoy. Meanwhile, the security and peace of the state must be protected from internal conflict – such as religious wars – and morality must be able to harness self-interest to the common good. The multiplicity of ways in which the seven dogmas may be ‘adapted’ or ‘interpreted’ acknowledges the power of the sovereign to dogmatically determine what shall count as ‘right and wrong’ action at the same time that they accommodate the different kinds of powers and the different types of knowledge possessed by citizens. Without a stable state and an effective moral community the development of human powers and knowledge is impossible.

Boros: I cannot see any real disadvantages of Spinoza’s separation of political and religious authorities. In our Western societies, where the unified religious stance has almost generally been replaced by a unified scientific stance, it seems natural that the official interpreters of (revealed) religious lore have no automatic access to worldly political power. To put it roughly, in all regimes where political power has been backed by religious or quasi-religious authorities the dissenters have been persecuted for their dissension or disbelief. If the separation of the two sorts of authorities were the price for putting an end to the persecution of dissenters – persecuting them just because they have another opinion - then the separation must be taken to be good in an unqualified sense. However, the main religious worldviews have furnished the mind with abstract thinking almost automatically, and with the separation, this almost automatic capability of ours to think on a meta-level - to go behind the many surfaces that overwhelm us nowadays - seems to have been lost, and at the moment I cannot see any means to recover it.

Munz: Spinoza advocated the separation of religious and political authorities only because he wanted to deprive religious institutions of their public authority. On the one hand, he considered religious faith to be a private matter. On the other hand, he considered it a moral and political matter for which, in a democratic society, the political authority should have sole responsibility. Since for Spinoza religion serves as the moral basis for stabilizing the state, the separa-

tion of the two powers is only temporary. And, by overcoming superstition all members of society could arrive at the “true” religion. This would be a form of Christianity which would, in turn, approximate Spinoza’s philosophy. At this point, when religion would completely and adequately serve the interests of the rational state, the two could once again live in harmony. Therefore, the separation between political and religious authority would disappear. The state religion would, in fact, become Spinoza’s philosophy. But this would result in a form of theologico-philosophical theocracy that would be alien to a democratic state.

**SPINOZA
NEVIDEL POSLANIE
BIBLIE VO
VZDELÁVANÍ,
ALE V
UMRAVŇOVANÍ
VERIACICH**



Do you think that Spinoza’s denial of free choice makes morality impossible?

Steven Smith: I don’t believe this. For reasons that I have discussed in my “Spinoza’s Book of Life,” Spinoza does not deny choice. What he denies is that our choices are somehow free-standing or uncaused, the result of some mysterious quality called the “will.” Our choices are just like any other happening, that is, an event with its antecedent causes and conditions. To say that our choices have been caused is not for Spinoza to deny

morality because once we understand the causes of our decisions, we are in a position to alter them. Our reason becomes a force in the causal chain of events that can allow us to choose more wisely, more self-consciously, and ultimately more freely. Far from being at odds with morality, Spinoza wants to show how morality is possible.

DeDijn: Many philosophers think that determinism and morality can go together (see also Hume). Spinoza clearly thinks so, and probably with good reason in view of his conception of morality (See: Herman De Dijn, “The Possibility of an Ethic in a Deterministic System like Spinoza’s” in Jon Wetlesen (ed.), *Spinoza’s Philosophy of Man*. Proceedings of the Scandinavian Spinoza Symposium 1977. Oslo-Bergen-Tromso, Universitetsforlaget, 1978, 27-35). Furthermore even if one has a more Humean understanding of morality, compatibilism seems perfectly defensible, as is clear from Strawson’s famous paper “Freedom and Resentment” (See Herman De Dijn, “The Compatibility of Determinism and Moral Attitudes” in E. Giancotti (ed.), *Spinoza nel 350° Anniversario della Nascita*. Atti del Congresso (Urbino 4-8 ottobre 1982) – Proceedings of the First Italian International Congress on Spinoza. Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1985, 205-219.)

deterministickej filozofii nie je miesto na nastolenie problému slobodnej vôle; toto je jedna z fikcií, ktoré vyprodukovala predstavivosť, lebo iba čiastočne uchopuje realitu: predstavivosť zakúsi účinky bez toho, aby pochopila ich príčiny. Možno je prekvapivé, že odmietnutie slobodnej vôle neznamená odmietnutie slobody. Spinoza definuje slobodu ako samopríčinnú činnosť. Prísne vzaté, iba Podstata (Boh čiže Príroda) sú skutočne slobodné, pretože pre ne nejestvuje nič vonkajšie. Teda nejestvuje vonkajšia príčina, ktorá by na ne mohla pôsobiť. Očividná sloboda alebo moc ľudských bytostí tkvie v našej schopnosti tvoriť primerané idey a zdokonaľovať poznanie prírody: „Povedal som, že slobodný je ten, koho vedie len rozum” (Etika, 4. časť, tvrdenie 68, dôkaz). Inak povedané, sloboda nie je spôsobilosť presadiť čokoľvek, čo si prajem, ale skôr schopnosť pochopiť príčiny, ktoré determinujú všetky veci vrátane mojich prianí. To, ako Spinoza vníma, že sa stávame rozumnými, je vec vývoja aj dynamiky.

Spinoza rozkladá množstvo dichotómií, ktoré ovládali západnú filozofiu: nestavia proti sebe myseľ a telo, rozum a cit, či slobodu a nevyhnutnosť. Jeho základný protiklad je skôr medzi pasivitou a aktivitou a náš postoj v spektre pasivita–aktivita je tým, čo určí tvar našich etických životov. Toto je hlavnou podmienkou našej slobody, čo má ďaleko od protikladu slobody a nevyhnutnosti. Čím viac spoznáme nevyhnutnosť, tým aktívnejšími sa staneme a čím sa staneme aktívnejšími, tým viac vyjadríme svoju slobodu alebo moc alebo podstatu. Naša moc, naša sloboda, naša cnosť a naše *conatus* (úsilie) sa začnú zbíhať a podľa 5. časti Etiky sú tieto termíny nerozlíšiteľné. Čím zložitejšie je telo, tým spletitejšia bude jeho myseľ. Spinozova úvaha o ľudskej mysli–tele poskytuje nesúdiace etické stanovisko. Pre Spinozu cnosť nemôže byť o tom, že myseľ umravňuje telo a vášň. Cnosť sa skôr týka moci jednotlivca konať, chápať a rozvíjať sa. Avšak človek sa nikdy nerozvíja iba vďaka vlastnému úsiliu. Nevyhnutne k tomu potrebuje spoločenský a politický kontext, ktorý nemarí jeho či jej rozumné úsilie zvyšovať svoju moc konať. Rozličné formy sociability a rozličné druhy politického zriadenia môžu obmedzovať alebo umožňovať rozvoj schopností svojich zakladajúcich členov. Spinozova teologicko-politická teória objasňuje, že kvality, atribúty a spôsobilosti subjektov či občanov do veľkej miery určujú zákony a zvyky spoločnosti, v ktorej sa vyvíjajú.

Boros: Spinoza určite nie je prvý a jediný filozof, ktorý odmietol slobodnú voľbu a zároveň tvrdil, že morálka je možná. Na druhej strane si myslím, že morálka je opisný termín, ktorý sa vzťahuje na prevládajúce presvedčenia v rámci danej komunity o tom, ako žiť cnostne, čo nevelmi súvisí s názorom daného filozofa na slobodnú voľbu. Komunity skutočných ľudí zriedka dbajú na návrhy filozofov. Myslím, že ak sa tu skrýva nejaký problém, je to problém konzistencie: ako harmonizovať metafyziku založenú na neosobnom Bohu s etikou, ktorá radí veľmi osobným ľudským bytostiam, ako žiť. Ale teoreticky mi nepripadá zložitejšie vyriešiť tento problém ako tie, ktoré sa vynoria, keď to postavíme naopak: Myslíte si, že neúspešné pokusy kresťanských filozofov zladit slobodu voľby s božskou vševedúcosťou morálku znemožňujú?

Gatens: Spinoza's notion of freedom is not opposed to power, nor is freedom opposed to necessity. Rather, necessity is the condition of the possibility of becoming conscious of our power, or put differently: 'freedom does not remove the necessity of action, but imposes it' (TP, Chap 2). There is no place in Spinoza's deterministic philosophy to pose the problem of free will; this is one of the fictions produced by the imagination because of its partial grasp on reality: the imagination experiences affects without understanding their causes. Perhaps surprisingly, the rejection of free will does not entail the denial of freedom. Spinoza defines freedom as self-caused activity. Strictly speaking, only Substance (God or Nature) is truly free because nothing external to it exists. Hence, no external cause exists that could affect it. The distinct freedom, or power, of human being lies in our capacity to form adequate ideas and enhance our understanding of nature: "I call him free who is led by reason alone" (E, IV, Prop. 68, Dem.). Freedom, put differently, is not the capacity to will whatever I desire but rather the ability to understand the causes that determine all things, including my desires. Spinoza's account of how we come to be reasonable is both developmental and dynamic.

Spinoza dissolves a number of dichotomies that have dominated Western philosophy: he does not oppose mind to body, reason to emotion, or freedom to necessity. Rather, his fundamental contrast is between passivity and activity, and it is our position on the passivity-activity spectrum that will determine the shape of our ethical lives. Far from freedom being opposed to necessity, it is the very condition of our liberty. The more we understand necessity, the more active we become, and the more active we become the more we express our freedom, or power, or essence. Our power, our freedom, our virtue and our conatus all begin to converge, and by Part V of the Ethics, these terms are all but indistinguishable. The more complex a body is then the more complex will be its mind. Spinoza's account of the human mind-body yields a non-judgemental ethical stance. Virtue, for Spinoza, cannot be about mind disciplining the body and passion. Rather, virtue concerns the power of the individual to act, to understand, and to flourish. However, human flourishing is never simply a matter of individual striving. Human flourishing necessarily assumes a social and political context that does not thwart the reasonable striving of each to increase her or his powers of action. Different forms of sociability and different kinds of body politic may act to constrain or enable the development of the capacities of their constituent members. Spinoza's theologico-political theory makes clear that the qualities, attributes and capacities of subjects or citizens are determined, in large part, by the laws and customs of the social body in which these capacities develop.

Boros: To be sure, Spinoza is not the first and only philosopher who has denied free choice, while maintaining that morality is possible. On the other hand, morality is, in my view, a descriptive term that refers to the prevailing persuasions within a given community concerning how to live virtuously, and this has not much to do with what a given

philosopher thinks about free choice. Real people's communities seldom care about the proposals made by philosophers. I think if there lurks any problem here, it is the problem of consistency: how to harmonize metaphysics based on a God without personality with an ethics that gives suggestions concerning how to live, for highly personal human beings. But theoretically this problem does not seem to me more difficult to solve than the problems that pop up when we set out the other way round: Do you think that the Christian philosophers' unsuccessful attempts to harmonize free choice with divine foreknowledge makes morality impossible?

Munz: I do not think that the denial of free choice makes morality impossible. While human beings are an integral part of God-nature, and are determined to act in a certain way (being subject to God's eternal laws) they do have a certain degree of freedom. I will try to explain this more fully because it is an important point, one that Spinoza has not explained sufficiently clearly. We could use the analogy of a state and one of its components – say, a municipality. Such a municipality could legislate within the limited area of its competence, provided it respected the laws and constitutions of the state. In the same way, a human being is a finite modification of the infinite power of God and also enjoys a certain amount of autonomy within the limits of God's necessary and universal laws.

Malinowski-Charles: The conflict between morality and determinism has been an enduring problem in philosophy. There are two views about it: compatibilists see them as compatible; others (advocates of “free will”) believe that one necessarily negates the other. Aristotle was in the latter category: as he explained in chap. IX of *De Interpretatione*, contingent futures must be possible, otherwise morality would have no meaning at all. Other Ancient philosophers such as the Stoics did not share this view, however, and tried – like Spinoza in the early modern period – to build an ethical conception of freedom that would rely on a fully deterministic background. What is at stake in this difference between two broad traditions is a difference between two definitions of liberty. For the compatibilists, freedom admits of varying degrees, and corresponds to the degree of autonomy of the subject when compared to external forces. The more one acts by one's own will and internal determination, the more one is free. That there be an immanent rationality and determination to everything in the world does not prevent one from conforming one's will to these laws, thus internalizing them. In this perspective, wisdom, equated with the understanding, and accepting, of necessity, is thus just another term for liberty, and “free will,” equated with a power of deciding independently of any determinations, is denied as an illusion. This is the view that Spinoza develops in his *Ethics*, notably in the appendix to the first part. For partisans of free will, however, there can be no degrees between being more or less free: either one is free, or one is not. As Descartes develops in the fourth of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, the will is not something that can be cut into parts or divided in any way, which is the reason

why humans must have as great a will as God himself. By equating will with free will, Descartes clearly means that freedom is given to all humans in the same degree; namely, they are all absolutely free. According to him, as to all non-compatibilists, only freedom as free choice can save morality and explain that our actions are really “ours.” As was sketched above, this is obviously not a view shared by compatibilists such as Spinoza, who believe that one may be only “in part” free, and for whom ethics is a reconciliation of freedom with determination.

U How is one to interpret Spinoza’s political philosophy against the background of the liberal tradition?

Steven Smith: Spinoza has always been a hero within the liberal tradition, although his reputation has waxed and waned over the years. His defense of freedom in all of its varieties, but especially freedom of mind – remember the title of the final chapter of the TTP: “That a free man can think what he likes and say what he thinks” – should rank him along with the other great figures of the liberal tradition like Milton, Locke, Constant, Tocqueville, and Mill.

DeDijn: If the liberal tradition is centered around the idea of the individual and its original rights, then I am afraid, Spinoza’s political philosophy is incompatible with the liberal tradition. (See Herman De Dijn, “Recht is macht. Ontmaskering van de autoriteit? Korte inleiding in Spinoza’s politieke filosofie”, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 68:3 (2006), 507-524.)

Gatens: Those who claim Spinoza as an early liberal political theorist must turn a blind eye to a crucial difference between his stance and that of liberalism. Spinoza does not allow the existence of any special rights to property or the person prior to civil life. The sovereign, on Spinoza’s view, does not exist in order to enforce pre-civil moral, personal or property rights. Consequently, Spinoza’s sovereign has a much greater responsibility to, and for, its citizens than in the liberal view. Spinoza’s rejection of the notion of human ‘natural’ right (apart from the right to think) or natural justice places responsibilities on the civil body which go much further than its acts of omission, for example, the failure to provide protection for its citizens. Such a rejection places the onus of responsibility on the civil body for acts of commission also, that is, the actual behaviour and values of the citizens, since their morality is largely constituted through, and dependent on, the particular laws of the state in which they dwell.

Boros: Assuredly, Spinoza’s political philosophy is part and parcel of the liberal tradition, even if neither the main thinkers of that tradition nor the historians of political

thought take notice of this fact. He argues for the main liberties of the western tradition: freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion. These claims remain, to be made even during the deep crisis facing the liberal economic world order. Indeed, I can hardly believe this crisis could be overcome without making abundant use of those liberties.

Munz: I would interpret them quite positively. Spinoza preferred democracy to all other political systems because he thought that in a democracy “it is almost impossible that the majority of the people, especially if it be a large one, should agree in an irrational design” (TPT 206). He also believed that a democracy is “most consonant with individual liberty” (TPT 207). It is less certain, however, that Spinoza would endorse the unrestrained individual freedoms demanded by libertarians today. Nevertheless, his advocacy of freedom of thought and of expression earns him a special place in the liberal tradition.

Spinoza was a strong defender of freedom of thought, and of speech, provided the latter did not overtly attack the laws of the state. Freedom of thought implies freedom of religious thought.

I do not know how Spinoza would react to the reckless capitalism that exists today. He would not be opposed to the acquisition of property, if it was done justly. In his Political Treatise (PT) he seems to endorse the Calvinist doctrine of predetermination when he quotes one its favored passage from the writings of Paul the Apostle (Letter to the Romans, IX, 21): “we are subject to God’s authority as clay to that of the potter, who from the same lump makes some vessels into honor and others into dishonor” (PT 299). He used this idea to justify the view that neither in nature, nor in society, do men receive mercy in proportion to their merit. According to him, one ought to love God without expecting God to love one in return.

What do you make of Spinoza’s favorable comments on democratic regimes? What do you think Spinoza thought of the multitude? Why do you think so many Marxist philosophers have found inspiration in Spinoza?

Steven Smith: Spinoza’s views on democracy are far more problematic than is often suggested in part because his view of the multitude is not a flattering one. He believed the multitude was prone to superstition and this was the core of intolerance and bigotry. It also made the multitude susceptible to manipulation by ambitious political leaders whether these be secular or religious. On the whole Marxist readers have been reluctant to address this problem. Although I am great admirer of Althusser and Balibar as Marxist readers of Spinoza, neither has convinced me as to why we should think of Spinoza as a democrat.

DeDijn: The right of the individuals is limited only to their power: outside the state this means they are completely powerless (so again, human rights mean nothing on their own, outside the state). Only within the state do individuals get real rights, i.e. guaranteed by the sovereign. The same for the sovereign: his right is only real insofar as he has power over the citizens; the best kind of power is the one which can rely on the loyalty of the citizens, for whatever reason.

Gatens: Even in the early Emendation of the Intellect, Spinoza linked the achievement of our 'highest good' with the collective human endeavour to form the kind of society that would allow "as many as possible" to perfect the intellect and to attain this good. In the TTP, as well as in the Ethics, this 'highest good' consists in the increase in our knowledge of God or Nature. The best and most powerful kind of state then is one that recognises the human power of thought and that constitutes itself in a way that facilitates the fullest expression and development of this power by the greatest possible number. Democracy "comes closest to the natural state" (TTP, Chapter 20) because it recognises and promotes "that freedom which nature grants to every man" (TTP, Chapter 16). While it is true that Nature does not forbid "strife, or hatred, or anger, or deceit" (TTP, Chap 16), Parts IV and V of the Ethics present an argument for why a philosophical understanding of God or Nature, and the nested place of human nature within it, necessarily entails the desire for mutual aid, friendship and justice.

Spinoza's low opinion of the 'vulgus,' (the multitude, or the common people, or the uneducated), derives from their imaginative and superstitious disposition. This disposition is not peculiar to the vulgus: on Spinoza's account, it is the natural condition of all human beings. "All men are by nature liable to superstition", he writes, and it is the passion of fear that "engenders, preserves, and fosters superstition" (TTP, Preface). Superstition is fertile ground for the development of religion and tyrants will try to take advantage of the gullibility of the multitude. In a scathing attack on despotism, Spinoza wrote that the tyrant aims "to keep men in a state of deception, and with the specious title of religion to cloak the fear by which they must be held in check, so that they will fight for their servitude as if for salvation" (TTP, Preface).

Reasonable states, no more or less than reasonable persons, can emerge only through time and experimentation. Spinoza does not propose a radical rupture between the 'state of nature' and theologico-political life. Rather, organised forms of political collective life, based on (more or less) reasonable principles, can emerge only gradually and will retain elements of the earlier historical, theological forms that always lie at their origin. Spinoza's philosophy is attractive to Marxists for at least three reasons: his account of human society is both historical and naturalistic, he offers a critique of religion and the role of the imagination which became the models for Marxist theories of ideology, and he saw that *homo homini Deus est* [man is god to man, Ethics, IV, Prop 35, Schol]

Boros: These are actually three different questions. As for the first, not much comment is needed. Spinoza argues for an – ideal – democratic regime, even if he acknowledges that as yet no existing government could be seen as an example of such a democratic regime. So he is eager to create rules for choosing the representative leaders of all sort of government. In this way he thinks he is able to prevent the deterioration of any existing government.

As for the second question one has to be aware of the distinction between two levels of consideration: the one is a strictly philosophical way of considering things; the other is a practical-political one. On the philosophical level Spinoza stresses relentlessly the importance of guiding as many people as is possible to the state of ideal happiness – which, he thinks, consists in our acknowledging the unity of the mind with the whole of nature. On the practical-political level, however, he is far from any utopian idealism. He knows most people will always be led mostly by their inadequate ideas and passive affects. That is the reason why he quotes Tacitus' saying: *terret vulgus nisi metuat* ("The mob is terrifying, if unafraid" (Curley's rendering)).

The predilection of Marxists philosophers for Spinoza has at least two sources. Firstly, there are several statements in the Ethics that can be read as advocating a sort of hidden materialist view. And secondly, the community of free people led by reason alone, described by Spinoza in the propositions 67-73 of Book 4 of the Ethics, can be seen as a pre-figuration of a self-conscious working class. But I myself am far from being convinced that either of the two interpretations is correct.

Munz: I agree with them. Spinoza advocated democracy. He considered it to be superior to monarchy and to aristocracy. He was one of the harbingers of democracy in Europe. Holland of his time was the first European state with a modern democratic system of government.

When it comes to the multitude (the masses), Spinoza was able to differentiate: on the one hand, the multitude was quite uneducated, enslaved in its interests, passions, superstitions and prejudices, devoted to a personal God, yet knowing nothing about the true God-nature. On the other hand, the multitude lived more or less according to the Decalogue which had contributed to social harmony within the state. In this sense the multitude actually supported the state, and that was praiseworthy according to Spinoza. He saw the multitude as the sovereign power in a democratic state, where "society wields its power as a whole" (TPT 205)

In my opinion, the prominence of Spinoza as an inspiration for many Marxist authors rested on their view of him as a materialist. If Spinoza divinized nature (and nature is material according to materialism), then Spinoza was a materialist according to their view. (It was also helpful that Marx and Engels had a high regard for Spinoza, even though they did not take him to be a materialist.) It was Plekhanov who first made Spinoza a champion of Marxist materialism. He even thought of Marx and Engels as

Spinozist materialists. But, although Engels perceived Spinoza as one of the “brilliant representatives of dialectics”, he did not see him as a materialist. A number of Soviet authors also talked about Spinoza’s nature only in the material sense. However, several others held a correct view on Spinoza’s nature.

Malinowski-Charles: Spinoza was the first advocate of democracy in the early modern period, and probably in philosophy since the Ancient democracy of Athens was born. However, his defense of this regime is more grounded in a contempt for, and distrust in, the multitude, than in a faith in it. Contrary to what one may expect, it is Spinoza’s very pessimistic conception of the multitude (*multitudo*) that leads him to ask for a democratic regime. Before anything else, the people are an unstable, ignorant and passion-oriented mass. It is precisely because people’s passions are in conflict that a middle-ground will be found when they decide on their own laws. For it is one of Spinoza’s most important intuitions that what is truly common to all is precisely what is rational. In order to satisfy the greatest possible number of people, the law will have to take into account what is common to all, i.e., that which is truly in everyone’s interest as a human being. Thus, in politics just as in any other field of his thought, the norm of rationality arises in an immanent way. Were his conception of reason, or of the common good, different, Spinoza would surely not have been a democrat, for he has the same negative view of the people as do defenders of monarchy or aristocracy such as Plato and Aristotle. Spinoza’s appeal to Marxists has, I think, a different source. In my view, what materialists such as Marxists like above all in Spinoza is his capacity to offer an internal understanding of social mechanisms as being the result of the interaction of human passions. Their anthropologies are different, though.

What do you make of Spinoza’s claim that the right of individuals is limited only by the extent of their power to be, to think and to act? In particular, how do you reconcile his equating power and right with his conception of political sovereignty?

DeDijn: The right of individuals is limited only by their power: outside the state this means they are completely powerless (so again, human rights mean nothing on their own, outside the state). Only within the state do individuals get real rights, i.e. guaranteed by the sovereign. The same for the sovereign: his right is only real insofar as he has power over the citizens; the best kind of power is the one which can rely on the loyalty of the citizens, for whatever reason.

Gatens: Spinoza’s political and ethical writings present multiple possible forms of sociability: associations built on superstition, tyrannies grounded in fear and hope, communities of rational individuals, and societies bound by the ties of friendship. None

of these forms of sociability contradict his deceptively simple claim that the right “of every individual is coextensive with its power” (TP, Chap 2). The coextension of right and power applies to bodies politic as well as to individuals. From a contemporary perspective this may seem to be an unlikely starting point for a philosopher whose major work is titled *Ethics* because if ‘right’ and ‘power’ are coextensive what, if anything, can justify the normative claim that a community of rational beings is superior to a tyrannical state?

In Chapter 16 of the TTP we find the thesis that the right of an individual extends as far as its power does. It follows from this – since the state counts as a kind of individual – that each state, or sovereign, has the right to do as it pleases provided it has the power to do as it pleases. The thesis that right extends as far as power can be understood in both descriptive and normative terms. Although it is not always easy to distinguish the descriptive from the normative in Spinoza’s philosophy, for present purposes I take the descriptive to be that which relates to the laws of Nature whereas the normative always relates to human interests and preservation, to which broader Nature is completely indifferent. Evil things are not evil when judged from nature’s laws alone “but only in respect of the laws of our own nature” (TTP Chap 16). If we are to understand how a specific kind of state emerges in history then in addition to knowledge about the actual peoples, and the times and places in which they dwell, we require knowledge of the universally valid axioms by which every state is determined. Historical records about the kinds of states that actually have existed (Spinoza mentions Rome, the Hebrew state, “the Turks”, and so on) are valuable because they provide empirical materials about past experiences that reveal the interactions between Nature and the struggles of particular human collectives. History, in this sense, is the experimental laboratory in which are tested the various forms that human societies may take. As such, history is a valuable source of knowledge about human capacities and limits.

The state of nature, according to Spinoza, “is prior to religion in nature and in time”; it is a condition “without religion and without law, and consequently without sin and without wrong” (TTP Chap 16). A sovereign power does not and cannot enforce pre-existing natural law for the simple reason that there is no natural law capable of enforcement. The great achievement of sovereign power is to create law. And each state – within the bounds of nature’s determinations – will make its own distinctive laws and construct its own distinctive religion and morality. Although on Spinoza’s account, (human) laws are always an a posteriori construction, his account of law is nevertheless a thoroughly naturalistic one. Religion, law and morality develop according to the invariant principles of nature, including human nature. This produces variability because (human) law and morality develop under specific conditions and in particular times and places. The variety of factors involved introduces a certain contingency into the way different peoples, states, and laws will develop. An understanding of the particular character of any given people, or nation, requires attention to its history, that is, to the conditions of its

emergence in Nature. As Spinoza stresses, the Law of Moses “was specially adapted to the character and preservation of one particular people” and has no universal application (TTP Chap 4). Nature does not supply ready-made citizens or subjects but only individuals who happen to share a common history and who, over time, will take on a “particular character”, a “particular mode of life” and a “particular set of attitudes” that will define their collective identity (TTP Chap 17) or what we might call their ‘second nature’.

It is only civil (human) laws that can be broken or disobeyed. The Christian idea that divine law is law decreed by God is a product of the imagination that grasps God as a lawgiver and judge. The laws of nature are intrinsic to nature; they do not act on nature from without like a decree. Unlike the unvarying laws of nature, an analysis of civil laws reveals the historical particularity of any given body politic. How does it understand itself? Does it imagine that its organization was divinely decreed? Are the principles underlying its laws for the benefit of all or for the few? In Spinoza’s view, no matter what is the ‘self-image’ of a given body politic there are limits to what a sovereign can oblige his subjects to do because the beliefs of his subjects cannot be coerced. A sovereign may be able to coerce his subjects to refrain from certain acts through fear of punishment but he cannot control what they think or believe. Spinoza, in other words, is an early proponent of freedom of speech and thought. Wise sovereigns understand that their rule is better secured when founded not only on fear and awe but also on love and respect. The most virtuous (for Spinoza, this always means the most powerful) sovereign understands that the ultimate purpose of the state is to enable those under its rule to develop their capacities in safety. The tension in Spinoza’s thought between the drive to democratize sovereignty, on the one hand, and the fear of the destructive imaginings and passions of the masses, on the other, is a productive one. This productive tension in Spinoza’s political theory can contribute to understanding the ways in which some citizens of contemporary democratic polities suffer an unfair burden imposed by socialized imagination that demean them (e.g., women, people of colour). Such understanding, in turn, provides a starting point for transforming destructive imagination such that the wellbeing of each can receive expression in the body politic.

There are good reasons to hold a strong interpretation of Spinoza’s claim that the state has a duty to develop the minds and bodies of its citizens. It is not the purpose of the state, he says, “to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their mental and physical faculties in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger or deceit. Thus the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom” (TTP, Chap 20). The ultimate function of the State, as Spinoza conceived it, is the increase of the capacity of its citizens to act, that is, the collective endeavour to realize freedom.

Boros: In this respect those people are to be blamed, who refer to Spinoza in order to get their might-is-right-concept legitimized by Spinoza's authority. Spinoza himself thinks there is a basic limit to one's power, namely the very nature of that species to which the individual belongs. The essence of any individual is its striving to keep and operate on the basis of its proper being. A horse would be destroyed if it continued its life as a man, and a man gets destroyed – at least in a metaphorical sense – if she ignores her reflective-rational being, of which the ethics of the Ethics is the most important evidence.

Munz: Spinoza was a philosopher of power as was Hobbes before him. "Power" was a catchword of several philosophers in the 17th century. Bacon talked about knowledge as power, and Campanella emphasized that we can do only as much as we know. In this sense, Nietzsche held Spinoza as his forerunner as well. Naturally, Spinoza did not emphasize only physical but above all the spiritual, mental (rational) power: the increase of adequate knowledge which then gave rise to other kinds of power.

People are different by nature, according to Spinoza; they differ by their mental abilities, talents, the strength of their affections and their greater or lesser mental ability to overcome these affections, and their selfish interests. One's power and one's right extend as far as one is able to exercise one's will. The exercise of one's power is one's natural right because it is an expression of God's infinite nature.

In the so called state of nature, where there is a war of all against all, this right is used quite ruthlessly. But with the entry into the society state it had to be regulated. The natural differences that exist in a state of nature do not disappear with the entry into the state. If there is equality, it is only equality under the law.

I understand Spinoza's claim that the right of individuals is limited only by the extent of their power to be, to think and to act, as their natural, unalienable, right. We could even say that it is the undisputable right of the nature, of God's "Divine Law".

According to Spinoza, state is like an individual who has as many rights, as much power it possesses. The notion of "power" is central here. As I have mentioned above, Spinoza recognized three forms of government: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. According to him monarchies are the least powerful because it is based on a rule which is not natural. The internal peace of monarchies can only be achieved by enslaving their citizens. This is not a sustainable situation, for it leads to an internal upheaval that undermines the power of the monarch, and by implication the power and stability of the state. Aristocracy is seen in a better light; it is the rule of some who are descended from the people. Arbitrariness does not occur because here reason is the supreme ruler. The right to rule depends here on the choice, selection which means that it is not given to everyone. Therefore the citizen obeys the laws, in whose creation he has not participated. That, too, is also unnatural. Therefore, neither monarchy, nor this form of state has as much power and right as a state can have. Only a democracy has maximum power

because only in it is there a unity of will between citizens and the state. In a democracy all citizens can participate in the creation of laws that apply to everyone. Who, as rational beings, obey only themselves, and hence they are free and active. Such a state has also the greatest power and the most right to exist because it gives citizens the maximum of what is available, thereby satisfying its instinct of self-preservation (its conatus), which, for Spinoza, is identical with its essence.

U How much of Spinoza's philosophical, political and religious views are relevant today? Is it, in other words, useful only for understanding the philosophical, political and religious climate of 17th century Holland; or does it also have political and religious relevance today?

Steven Smith: Spinoza's philosophy is very important for us today. Not only is he a ruthless critic of the illusions and superstitions to which human beings are prone, he has also shown us how people might live both individually and collectively freely and without fear. I cannot think of a more valuable lesson for the contemporary reader.

DeDijn: Quite relevant is his view on religion as a powerful social-political force, not likely to disappear - as some people think - once human beings all get a scientific education. Equally relevant is his view on politics as requiring real power in order for individuals to have any real right whatsoever.

Gatens: Spinoza's account of the formation of types of sociability implies historically and culturally variable conceptions of 'reasonable' associations. This view represents an important departure from his contemporaries who often conceived diversity in legal and moral codes as a sign of imperfection. Spinoza, on the contrary, offers a perspective from which to think through difference and embodiment in terms other than imperfection or notions of cultural superiority and inferiority. Take the importance of Spinoza's insight that modes of knowing imply specific ways of being. If knowledge implies a mode of being rather than having, and if our beliefs, opinions and imaginings are not 'possessions' of which we can take an inventory, then they cannot be altered by purely formal or institutional means. If, as Spinoza argues, nature forms individuals not classes or nations, then the origin of the prejudices, predispositions and peculiarities of any given society must be sought in laws and customs and particular 'ways of life' that is, in embodied beliefs and habits. An ethics that is not utopian needs to consider people as they are now, historical men and women whose passions and imaginings about each other have been formed, at least in part, by past and present social and political institutions. Understanding those past determinations can be the starting point for social and political transformations in our present.

Munz: Many of Spinoza's political, religious, and, to a lesser degree, his philosophical concepts are still relevant also today. His political thought is still relevant. His advocacy of a theory of democracy that shows it to be the best political system is still widely respected. Of course, democracy today is farther than Spinoza imagined it to be: liberalism has gained the upper hand. Nevertheless, it is still held to be valid that democratic governments be elected by all citizens, and that the government as their representative creates laws that apply to all people equally. In a democracy citizens have still the greatest freedom, and are most active and industrious. Under this political system, religion, along with other expression of personal preferences, is relegated to the private realm where freedom of thought is valued above all.

However, there has been a progress in the prestige accorded to science. The educational level of the citizenry is deepening, forcing even the traditional religion to become more rationalistic.. It forces religions to abandon the old - nowadays unacceptable – anthropomorphic, superstitious, images. The modern technological-instrumentalist world view divorced itself from the image of the classical, Judeo-Christian God – nourished by theology and theologizing philosophy for two millenniums – because it saw in him the patriarchal dictator who is not suitable for democracy. It is also to Spinoza's credit that this divorce between politics and religion has happened. On the other hand, Spinoza incorporated a lot from the scientific world view into his conception of God-nature. Although religion and theology are becoming less and less refuges of superstition, there is still a long way to go to the "true" philosophical religion (the intellectual love of God), which Spinoza saw as the culmination of his own philosophy.

I absolutely do not think that Spinoza's thought has relevance only for the comprehension of the cultural climate of the Netherlands in the 17th century. Spinoza has nowadays a twofold relevance. He had substantially influenced subsequent philosophical thinking. One could say, along with Hegel, that his ideas have been secretly preserved even where they have been overcome (aufgehoben). Also, as I have pointed out earlier, his ideas have had direct and visible impact on subsequent thinkers.

 **Spinoza's philosophy is primarily ontological. Is ontology still possible today?**

Steven Smith: I don't know, but if it is, it will be Spinoza's.

DeDijn: It is possible because it still exists. The real question is whether it is still relevant today, e.g. as an independent justification for faith, or as the basis of a morality or politics, all of which are doubtful to me. (See also Herman De Dijn, *Modernité et tradition. Essais sur l'entre-deux*. Leuven-Peeters – Paris-Vrin, 2004 (three chapters on Spinoza and Hume).)

Gatens: I would prefer to read the Ethics as an ontology of power that affirms a fluid and immanent ethics of life enhancing encounters, against the traditional offering of a of transcendent morality which dictates duty and encourages a suspicion of the body, pleasure and laughter. However, the realization of virtue, in Spinoza's sense, assumes an appropriate social and political context. Those who read the Ethics alongside the political treatises are invited to consider the manner in which different ways of knowing always imply corresponding different ways of being.

Boros: Ontology is part and parcel of "theoretical" or "general" philosophy taught at universities. If what is meant is rather the question whether or not crucial new developments within ontology are to be expected, so my answer is: I do not know. Neither do I know if, where and when will appear crucial new developments in philosophy in general.

Munz: It depends on how ontology is understood. If it is understood, with prominent philosophers of the last century, as the classical ontology of, teaching about being, its origin, its extent, its nature, its goal, etc., it is no longer possible.

Spinoza's philosophy, as a representative of the classical rationalistic metaphysics, is no more acceptable nowadays. Not only are Spinoza's theologizing tendencies unacceptable to scientific philosophers, but they will not find favour – any more than they have before – among modern theologians. But that does not mean that all of the efforts of

Spinoza's philosophy have failed. The endeavour to think about what is good for man, how to secure his freedom, how to release him from superstition and to discover the best form of government under which he could live in peace, are still at the centre of philosophical discussions, even if they are approached differently. Also, many philosophers today, who resist the tendencies of scientism and who wish to continue the old tradition in metaphysics, will find in Spinoza's philosophy fertile soil.



Obraz zo záhľavia Opera posthuma



Daniel Fischer: Záhady geometrie