

Editorial

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

Henri Krop<sup>1</sup> and Pooyan Tamimi Arab<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Erasmus School of Philosophy, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands; krop@esphil.eur.nl

<sup>2</sup> Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University, 3512 BL Utrecht, The Netherlands

\* Correspondence: p.tamimiarab@uu.nl

## 1. Introduction

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

## 2. Forgetting a Masterpiece (1670–1700)

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. The Forgotten TTP (1700–1850)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> The lines on the TTP we find on p. 463.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 9 provides a more or less complete translation of the TTP's preface.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

## 6. Conclusions and Overview of Articles in This Special Issue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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