The Cambridge Companion to
SPINOZA

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Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza’s life is usually summarized in a few lines, as follows. He was born in 1632 in Amsterdam as a son of Jewish Marrano immigrants from Portugal. After having been educated as a Jew, he was excommunicated in 1656. While earning his livelihood, first by commerce and later by grinding lenses, he learned Latin in the school of Franciscus van den Enden and conversed with a circle of Amsterdam Collegiants, who were dedicated to Cartesianism. He lived in Rijnsburg near Leiden (1660–3), in Voorburg near The Hague (1663–70), and in The Hague (1670 onward). He published in 1663 under his own name Descartes’s “Principles of Philosophy” (Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae, Pars I et II, More Geometrico demonstratae), and anonymously in 1670 the Theological-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus). After his death (February 21, 1677) his Opera Posthuma – containing in Latin his main work the Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order (Ethica, Ordine Geometrico demonstrata), the Correspondence (Epistulae), the unfinished Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus), the unfinished Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione), and a Compendium of Hebrew Grammar (Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae) – was published by his friends. They also produced a Dutch translation of the Opera Posthuma (without the Hebrew Grammar), called De Nagelate Schriften, in the same year. An early forerunner of the Ethics, in Dutch and entitled Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand), was discovered and published in the nineteenth century. Spinoza was a seventeenth-century rationalist philosopher much decried on account of his atheism.

Even in this rough survey some features are false, inaccurate, or
slightly misleading. For the purpose of a reliable biography, a critical
discussion of the available biographical documents is unavoidable.
This is the more necessary because the old biographies sometimes
show considerable differences in their presentation. I warn the
reader that this chapter is a reconstruction of Spinoza’s life story on
the basis of a new interpretation of the sources and the presentation
of some new sources. I will, however, offer the basic material so that
the reader may judge whether I am right or not.

Baruch’s father, Michael Spinoza, born in 1587 in Vidiger (Portu­
gal), was a respected and influential member of the Jewish commu­
nity in Amsterdam. He was regularly elected a member of the
_Parnassim_ (Senhores Quinze), a board which discussed common af­
fairs. He earned his living as a merchant; he must have traded in
dried citrus fruit. Business was successful in the period before 1652;
his bank balances were high. He lived in the Amsterdam Jewish
quarter Vlooienburg, the place where today the Music House and
Townhall are erected. Michael married three times within his own
family: first to Rachel de Spinoza, who died in 1627; then to Hanna
Debora Despinosa, who died in 1638; and finally to Ester d’Espinosa,
who died in 1653. Two children, Isaac and Rebecca, were born to
Michael and Rachel; Baruch, Mirjam, and Gabriel were born to Mi­
chael and Debora.

Spinoza was born on November 24, 1632 and given the Jewish
name “Baruch,” although his family called him “Bento.” “Baruch,”
“Bento,” and the later latinization “Benedict” or “Benedictus”
have the same meaning, namely “blessed person.” His mother
tongue was Portuguese, but as a young child Bento would very
quickly have picked up some Dutch words when playing on the
street with Dutch children. Spanish was the cultural language
among the Sephardim Marranos, whose forefathers had been ex­
pelled from Spain to Portugal. But the education, of course, was
primarily an introduction to Hebrew, the language of the Holy
Scripture, and the study of the Law and the Talmud. His parents
sent him to the excellent Talmud Torah school, which was famous
because of its well-planned educational system. A certain rabbi
Sabattai Scheftel Hurwitz, who visited Amsterdam in 1649, wrote:
“I also came in their school, which was lodged in a large building. I
saw that the small children learned the Pentateuch from the first to
the last words, after this the other twenty-four Books of the Bible
and then the whole Mischna.” Among Spinoza’s schoolmasters were the famous Saul Levi Morteira and Menasseh ben Israel. He must have attended the school until he was a young man of about fourteen years old.

Historians suggest today that he did not finish the higher education which prepares for the rabbinate, but that he became involved in commercial activities, first together with his father and then, from 1654 onward, when his father had died, together with his brother Gabriel in the firm of “Bento y Gabriel Despinoza.” In April and May 1655 the young merchant had a bitter experience with a debtor named Anthonij Alveres who failed to repay a large amount of money. Alveres even assaulted him, as is attested in an official document:

Today, the 7th of May, 1655, appeared before me, Adriaen Lock, notary &c. in the presence of the witnesses mentioned hereafter, Hendrick Fransen, about 35 years old and Jan Lodwijcxsen, about 32 years old, both in the service of the honourable Cornelis de Vlamingh from Outshooren, chief-sherriff of this city, and in true words and offering to take the oath, they solemnly testified, declared and attested at the request of Bento Dispinose, merchant here, that it is true that about a week and a half ago, without remembering the exact day, they arrested at the request of the requisitionist, the person of Anthonij Alveres for debt and that they took him to the inn De Vier Hollanders in the Nes here, to obtain payment of a certain bill of exchange of five hundred guilders that the requisitionist owned, chargeable to him and that said Anthonij Alveres then asked the requisitionist to come to the inn to reach an agreement with him; that when the requisitionist arrived there, the said Anthonij Alveres hit the requisitionist on the head with his fist without there having been spoken a word in return and without the requisitionist doing anything. (Vaz Diaz and Van der Tak 1982: 160; emphasis added)

In March 1656 we see Spinoza—through the mediation of the Orphan-master Lous Crayer—abstain from all claims on his father’s inheritance “since he is afraid that after the strictest application of the law the judicial allocation of the claim could be an encumbrance to him, which might be used against him by the creditors.” Also in 1656 Spinoza stopped paying his finta and his imposta, the usual contribution and tax for the benefit of the community that were calculated according to the wealth and the sum of the merchandise that had been traded. We do not know whether the reason was that
business had declined or that he had already drifted away from the orthodox Jewish way of life and Jewish customs. The latter interpretation seems the most probable, because a few months later (July 27, 1656) he was formally excommunicated on account of his heresies and behavior. The text of the act of excommunication is preserved, and reads in translation:

The Senhores of the Mahamad make it known that they have long since been cognizant of the wrong opinions and behavior of Baruch d'Espinoza, and tried various means and promises to dissuade him from his evil ways. But as they effected no improvement, obtaining on the contrary more information every day of the horrible heresies which he practiced and taught, and of the monstrous actions which he performed, and as they had many trustworthy witnesses who in the presence of the same Espinoza reported and testified against him and convicted him; and after all this had been investigated in the presence of the rabbis, they decided with the consent of these that the same Espinoza should be excommunicated and separated from the people of Israel, as they now excommunicate him with the following ban. . . . We order that nobody should communicate with him orally or in writing, or show him any favor, or stay with him under the same roof, or come within four ells of him, or read anything composed or written by him. [emphasis added] 

The document makes a clear distinction between Spinoza's deviant behavior and his unorthodox opinions. It also supposes, however, that they had already been practiced and taught during a long period. Endeavors on the part of Jewish authorities to bring him back to the right path had remained without any result. One must realize, moreover, that the act of excommunication, as quoted above, speaks about Spinoza in the third person. Spinoza himself was already gone beforehand and was already "converted" to another worldview and another lifestyle.

After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as my mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good.

I surmise that Spinoza's conversion took place at least half a year before he was excommunicated. The excommunication was not at all a tragic experience in his life. Other things were more so, including
the violence of human emotional reactions and the life-threatening danger of human greed, ambition, and bigotry.

Spinoza’s intellectual power, which emerged shortly after 1656 in his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intelect*, must have had a long incubation. A philosophical genius cannot come from nowhere; ideas have their causes, like other things, and need time for their development. It is dangerous to propose a history of Spinoza’s mental evolution. But one may at least speculate. In 1648 Spinoza was a young man of sixteen. He had refused to continue his studies in the higher courses in Jewish theology given by his masters, although his father, a faithful and perhaps also conservative member of the community, recommended them forcefully. He read the Jewish theological authors, first of all Maimonides, but they could not satisfy his inquisitive mind. His critique of the Jewish system, the many prescriptions and their vindication, deepened. He could only free himself from their pressure by a commercial participation in public life in his father’s business; this seemed to him a promising way out. Along this line he came into contact with other merchants, many of them of Mennonite origin, who had free minds and were much interested in the new philosophy of Descartes. Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles, both of them merchants and later friends, as we know from the correspondence, were among them; he could have met them on the Bourse. Descartes was praised for his new physics and geometry. Although he left Holland for Sweden in 1649, where he died a year later, Descartes’s writings were published in Holland and raised much discussion. The religious freethinkers held special meetings – “colleges” – in which everyone was welcome. Perhaps Spinoza joined these *Collegianten*. He soon realized that he could not avoid learning Latin. There was a marvelous opportunity to become acquainted with the language of the sciences and with the new science itself in the newly (since 1652) established Latin school of the medical doctor Franciscus van den Enden. This Van den Enden participated in scientific disputationes, attended the meetings of the *Collegianten*, and instructed the youth of the well-to-do citizens, who did not want to send their sons and daughters to the official, but reformed, Latin school of the town. Many biographical documents confirm that Spinoza learned Latin and atheism from Van den Enden, without saying whether this was before or after the excommunication.

In my view, we cannot doubt that Spinoza’s process of seculariza-
tion must have started four or five years before 1656. The reformed theologian Salomon van Til, professor in Leiden, writes in 1694 about Spinoza's development and his "Apologia":

A great instrument for the dispersion of the evil owned the Prince of Darkness some years ago in an Amsterdam schoolmaster [Van den Enden], who in this turbulent town tried to spread on all occasions his sentiment, that *nature had to be considered the only God*. . . . Who tried to build further on those fundaments and to give a nice glimmer to this sentiment, was Benedictus de Spinoza, a deserted Jew, who in the beginning played the admirer and expositor of the Cartesian Philosophy, attracted pupils for instruction under that pretension, but started to contradict some of Descartes' fundaments inconspicuously. His familiarity with mathematics and experience in grinding lenses opened the door for him, to have access to many great men. *Afterwards* manifesting himself a bit clearer, this assaulter of religious doctrine first endeavored to overthrow the authority of the books of the Old and New Testament. And he tried to show the world, how these writings of human industry were transformed and recast various times. And how it could happen that they were lifted up to the esteem of divinity. Such objections were extensively collected by him in a Spanish treatise under the name of *A Justification of his Departure from Judaism*. But holding back this writing on the advice of friends, he dared to introduce these things more skillfully and more economically in another work, published by him under the name of *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in the year 1670. [Van Til 1694: 5; emphasis added]

I stressed the word "afterwards" ("Daarna"). According to Van Til, Spinoza became interested in science and became familiar with mathematics and optics before the break with Jewish tradition.

A confirmation of this new chronology of his life may be found in the biography of Jean Maximilien Lucas, who had been, as he states himself, Spinoza's friend. His *La vie et l'esprit de Mr. Benoit de Spinoza* (which appears in Freudenthal 1899) was published rather late, in 1719, but certainly written not longer than a year after Spinoza's death. In it one finds a fairly reliable report of Spinoza's life, which in my opinion is much underestimated by scholars because they do not like the tone of admiration, even adoration, which runs through the pages. I think that Lucas, though not always precise in his details, is very close to Spinoza's intellectual level. This French immigrant to the Low Countries, who had conversed with Spinoza and may have asked him questions about his youth, twice explicitly
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gives an early date to Spinoza's critical attitude concerning the Jewish articles of belief:

His father . . . decided to let him learn the Hebrew Literature. This kind of study, which constitutes the whole science of the Jews, could not satisfy his brilliant mind. He had not yet fifteen years, when he proposed objections, which could not be solved by the most learned among the Jews. . . . He concluded that he henceforward could better consult himself and had to take all pains to discover the truth himself. One needs a great mind and an extraordinary power to conceive under the age of twenty (au-dessous de vingt ans) such an important plan. [emphasis added]

Lucas continues that Spinoza went on to analyze for himself the biblical texts and Jewish theological authors and that, as an autodidact, he came to his heretical conclusions, for which the rabbis, especially Morteira, would sentence him. He has the rabbis declare that they had heard him scoff the Jews because they were superstitious people, born and educated in ignorance, who do not know what God is and nevertheless are so audacious as to consider themselves as his people, despising thereby other peoples. And the Law would have been instituted by a man who was much more adroit than they concerning the truth in political matters but who was not at all so much enlightened in physics neither in theology; and that if one had only an ounce of common sense, one could easily unveil the imposture; one had to be equally stupid as the Hebrews in the time of Moses, in order to keep oneself to the orders of this man.

Spinoza's departure (sortie) from the Jewish community as well as his entry into Van den Enden's school and his being lodged in the latter's private house are both dated by Lucas before his solemn condemnation (the herem) in the Synagogue. The study of the sciences and their language (Latin) kept Spinoza already busy for quite a time before the Parnassim thought it necessary to drive out his shadow. "Spinoza, who had found an asylum, only thought of making progress in the human Sciences" (Freudenthal 1899: 10).

It should not be supposed that the "human Sciences" ("Sciences humaines") referred to in this text are identical with today's "soft" sciences of man. There was only one science in the days of Galileo, Descartes, Huygens, and Newton, the science of nature, alternatively called "philosophia" or "mathematica"; and this was the science to which Spinoza henceforth was dedicated. One may read this also in the other biographies available. Colerus, a Lutheran minister, who
came to The Hague some years after Spinoza’s death, lived in a house where Spinoza had dwelled, did some research on his famous forerunner, and then wrote the Korte, dog waaragtige Levens-Beschrijving van Benedictus de Spinoza, uit Autentique Stukken en mondeling getuigenis van nog levende Personen, opgestelt (Short but true Biography of Benedictus de Spinoza, drawn up from authentic pieces and oral testimonies of still living people), is also very clear about this point:

Spinoza now understanding the Latin Language . . . and finding himself more capable for research into physical things (natuurkundige zaaken), dropped theology and dedicated himself totally to philosophy (wysgeerte). For some time he looked for a good Master and for writings which served his intentions, until he finally hit upon Renatus Descartes. He often pretended to have received the greatest light in his natural science (in zijn natuurkunde) from Descartes, and that he had learned through him, to accept nothing that could not be proved with sound and clear reasons. . . . As a consequence (Dienvolgens) he started to avoid more and more the intercourse with his Jewish Masters and to appear only seldom in the Synagogue, whereupon they started to hate him. [Colerus 1705: 6]

There is no misunderstanding possible concerning the reference of “sciences humaines” or “natuurkunde.” The testimony of a third biographer, the critical Pierre Bayle in his influential article, “Spinoza,” in Dictionnaire historique et critique, must be interpreted in the same vein:

He studied Latin language under a medical doctor, who taught in Amsterdam, and he applied himself very early to the study of theology to which he spent several years, after this he dedicated himself totally to the study of philosophy. Since he had the attitude of a geometrician (l’esprit géomètre) and he wanted to be paid with reasons for all things, he soon understood that the doctrine of the rabbis did not fit his taste. . . . He withdrew little by little from the Synagogue. [Bayle 1697]

According to the evidence of these documents, the departure from the Synagogue was more the end point of an introduction into natural science than its starting point, as is usually supposed. The new physics of Descartes must have played an important role in Spinoza’s process of enlightenment. This is confirmed by Lucas. I will come back to this influence in a moment.

The period 1656–61 is rather invisible for the eyes of the Spinoza
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historian. We may suppose that Spinoza was for one or two years still in the Latin school of Van den Enden; independent evidence for this hypothesis is the fact that Spinoza's latinity shows much familiarity with the Latin of Terence. We know from other sources that this Latin comedy writer had an important place in Van den Enden's educational method. Under his leadership, the pupils played the Andria and the Eunuchus in the Town Theater of Amsterdam several times during the first months of 1657 and 1658. Many of Spinoza's crypto-citations of Terence may be traced back to certain roles of the comedies which, therefore, could have been played by Spinoza himself, one of the older pupils. A curious thing is that quotations from Terence seem to be completely absent from the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect; this absence could be interpreted as an indication for a very early date of this text, namely before Spinoza's participation on the stage. The content and Latin of this work are much nearer to the tragedies and letters of Seneca and the Metamorphoses of Ovid. An early origin of the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect not only fits Mignini's theory about a later origin of the Short Treatise (to be discussed later), but is also confirmed by Jarig Jelles in his Voorreeden [Preface] to the Nagelate Schriften; in which he provides us with a very reliable survey of Spinoza's life, works, and philosophy. He writes, "The Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect was one of the first works of the Author as is testified by its style and concepts themselves." Jelles must have known about Spinoza's "Apologia." It is tempting to substantiate his plural, "one of the author's first works," by connecting the esoteric Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect with the time of the exoteric "Apologia" as an unfinished endeavor to render an account of his conversion to philosophy. The first pages of the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect can only be explained as being very close to Spinoza's personal experiences and the beginning of his new "institution," his new point of view: the unity of the mind with the whole of nature. They are, as it were, notations drawn from his private journal, from the time of his transition to a new "system." Apart from the orthodox majority there were also Jewish freethinkers in the Amsterdam Jewish community. The tragedy of Uriel da Costa, who, after a life of humiliation, defamation and repeated excommunication, finally committed suicide, must have made a deep
impression in the family of Spinoza. Bento was eight years old when

the news came that Uriel da Costa had shot himself. His rejection of

the Law of Moses had brought him into deep misery and drawn upon

him the hatred of the rabbis. Another radical type in “Freetown”

("Vrijstad"), as Amsterdam was called in underground literature, was

a certain Juan de Prado, a Spanish medical doctor, born in 1610 in

Alcalà in Spain, who had settled in Amsterdam in 1641. His works

show that he was a naturalist who identified God with nature and

rejected superstitious dogmatic doctrines. C. Gebhardt was the first
to point to a possible relationship between Spinoza and De Prado at

the end of the 1650s (Gebhardt 1923), but it is the merit of the histo­
rian I. Révah to have discovered interesting documents in the archive

of the Inquisition in Madrid, which demonstrate that Spinoza and De

Prado were in contact with each other (Révah 1959, 1964). The monk

Solano y Robles answers to the questions of the Inquisitors on 8

August 1659, referring to his stay in Amsterdam the year before, that:

He also got acquaintance with Dr. Juan de Prado, physician, who called

himself Juan—he did not know his Jewish name—who had studied in

Alcalà and a fellow named De Espinosa, who he thought was a native from

one of the Dutch towns, because he had studied in Leiden and was a good

philosopher. Those two persons had confessed the Law of Moses, and the

Synagogue had expelled and excommunicated them since they had turned

atheists. And they themselves had said to the witness, that they had been
circumcised and had observed the Law of the Jews, but that they had
changed their opinion, because it seemed to them that the Law mentioned
was not true and that the souls died with the bodies and that there is no God
other than philosophically (ni había Dios sino filosofalmente).

In this hearing, Spinoza was described as “a small man, with a

beautiful face, a clear tint, black hair, black eyes. He is twenty-four

years old [sic]. He had no job and was Jewish from birth.” The next
day (August 9, 1659) the captain Miguel Perez de Maltraniilla was
heard, who confessed that he had often (muchas veces) spoken with

Dr. Prado and Spinoza in the house of a chevalier of the Canaries. He

painted Spinoza’s appearance thus: “a young man with a well-
formed body, slight, long black hair, a small moustache of the same
color, a beautiful face; his age is thirty-three years.” Moreover, Spi­

noza told him that he never had seen Spain but that he wished to see
this country.
It is important to find the two heterodox Jews, who had suffered the same fate of excommunication in 1656–7, together in the years 1658–9. The “Dios de la naturaleza” was their common ground, the foundation of their enlightenment. It is not impossible that Spinoza and De Prado arrived, with each other’s help, at the distinction between the several kinds of knowledge, explicitly presented in the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect 19–29. There is a letter from De Prado to the Parnassim of the Talmud Torah, written in 1658, in which one discovers the distinction:

When I taught him [i.e. the spy sent by the rabbis] about the norms of certainty, asserting that we know some things by natural light, other things from a syllogistic order, other things from experience, other things finally from belief, I gave him at last this example: “I don’t believe from experience that there exists a reward and punishment neither do I, forced by reason, assent to the immortality of the soul” (Albiac 1987: 509)

The documents from the Inquisition Archive show that there were contacts between Spinoza and De Prado in the years 1658–9. I cannot, however, follow Révah’s overestimation of De Prado’s influence, which brings him to the conclusion “that the historians of Spinoza have exaggerated the precocity of the philosophical development of the young Baruch” (Révah 1959: 37). One may imagine that Spinoza opposed De Prado’s rejection of the immortality of the soul on account of his early insight into the mind’s eternity, as already expressed in the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect.

A third testimony about the “dark period” in Spinoza’s life is contained in the journal of a Danish traveler in the Low Countries, Olaus Borch (Klever 1989b). The notations in the diary of this learned anatomist bring us to the threshold of the slightly better known period of Spinoza’s life from which we have at least some letters and other writings. They also show that Spinoza in his Amsterdam period belonged to a group of radical Cartesians. As I noted earlier, the works of Descartes were much discussed in intellectual circles and in the universities.19 On May 17, 1661, Borch was told, “that there were certain atheists in Amsterdam, most of them Cartesians, among which an impudent atheist Jew.” Some months later, on the 10th of September of the same year, when he was traveling in the neighborhood of Leiden, Borch again had something to report about this Jew: People said,
that here in the village Rijnsburg lived somebody who had become a Chris-
tian from a Jew and now was nearly an atheist. He does not care about
(non curat) the Old Testament. The New Testament, the Koran and the
fables of Aesop would have the same weight according to him. But for the
rest this man behaves quite sincerely and lives without doing harm to
other people; and he occupies himself with the construction of telescopes
and microscopes.

In 1661 Spinoza was already well-known for his atheism and the
fabrication of optical instruments. This text, only recently discov-
ered, is historically the earliest attestation of Spinoza’s work in op-
tics, the scientific technology in which he later cooperated with
Huygens and the mathematician Hudde. One should not underesti-
mate the value of Borch’s testimony. Borch had no special interest in
this field and was more fascinated by anatomical lessons than opti-
cal theories or theological disputes. What he writes in his diary are
the things he casually picks up in his many contacts with other
scientists and with professors of the Leiden University. He is, as it
were, the echo of the renown that Spinoza already enjoyed in that
period. In the same month he once more writes about Spinoza, say-
ing this time “that he excelled in the Cartesian philosophy, what is
more that he superseded Descartes, namely with his distinct and
probable ideas; that all those [Cartesian] ideas were far converted by
the Amsterdammer Hudde, who added his ‘de forkeren’ to the recent
edition of Descartes’ geometrical works” (emphasis added).

It is not quite clear what he means with his reference to Hudde’s
activity, but it is nonetheless very intriguing to find the famous
Hudde already as a neo-Cartesian in Spinoza’s companionship and
those two among the radical Cartesians of the early 1660s. A third
man in this stream of Cartesianizing philosophers was Franciscus
van den Enden, probably the mastermind of the circle. He is the first
named participant on another day (April 3, 1662), on which Borch,
being in Amsterdam, writes in his journal, that:

there are here atheists and they are principally Cartesianists, like Van den
Enden, Glasemaker etc.; and they also teach other people. They don’t preach
openly atheism, because they often speak about God, but by God they do
understand nothing else than this whole universe, as appears more clearly
from a certain Dutch writing, which was recently artificially written while
the name of the Author was suppressed. (emphasis added)
It is tantalizing to suppose that this mention of a “certain Dutch writing” is a reference to Spinoza’s *Short Treatise* and thereby also a confirmation of its then fairly recent composition. In the same month (April 1662) Spinoza writes to Oldenburg:

As for your question how things have begun to be, and by what connection they depend on the first cause, I have composed a whole short work devoted to this matter. I am engaged in transcribing and emending it, but sometimes I put it to one side because I do not yet have any definite plan regarding its publication. I fear, of course, that the theologians of our time may be offended and with their usual hatred attack me, who absolutely dread quarrels. . . . I regard as creatures many attributes which they – and everyone, so far as I know – attribute to God. Conversely, other things, which they, because of their prejudices, regard as creatures, I contend are attributes of God, which they have misunderstood. Also, I do not separate God from nature, as everyone known to me has done. (Ep 6; emphasis added)

It was F. Mignini who first proposed on internal evidence the theory that the *Short Treatise* was written after the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, probably in the years 1661–2. The *Short Treatise* is clearly an esoteric work, destined for private use in the circle of friends, as is stated explicitly at its conclusion:

To bring all this to an end, it remains only for me to say to the friends to whom I write this: do not be surprised at these novelties. . . . And as you are also aware of the age in which we live, I would ask you urgently to be very careful about communicating these things to others. I do not mean that you should keep them altogether to yourselves, but only that if you ever begin to communicate them to someone, you should have no other aim or motive than the salvation of your fellow man, and make as sure as possible that you will not work in vain. (KV II.26.10; emphasis added)

As far as I can see, all evidence converges on the hypothesis that the treatise referred to in Borch’s journal must be Spinoza’s *Short Treatise*. This work is, though not yet in geometrical form, a systematically (and in that sense also artificially) composed treatise, a provisional presentation of the material that later would be geometrically deduced in the *Ethics*.

As Borch states elsewhere in his journal, Van den Enden had also written some works and handed over to certain friends “*quaedam philosophiae suae arcaniora . . . manuscripta,*” (“certain more secret things of his philosophy . . . in manuscript”). We do not actually
have manuscripts of Van den Enden from this period; but we do have a printed pamphlet written by him in 1661 and 1662 with the title *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants...* (1662) and another one, published in 1665 under the title *Vrije Politijcke Stellingen*, but written in 1663. These pamphlets were recently unearthed by this author and were also discovered nineteen years earlier, but not published, by M. Bedjai, as I came to hear some weeks later. On the basis of the mentioned works I came to the conclusion that Van den Enden must be considered a proto-Spinoza, the genius behind Spinoza; Bedjai defends in his thesis the same idea, by claiming that the so-called Amsterdam Spinoza circle could better be named “Van den Enden and his circle” (Bedjai 1990). The works of Van den Enden contain a political theory which is in fact the same as the one worked out by Spinoza in his *Theological-Political Treatise* and *Political Treatise*. One finds moreover between the lines all the items which would later be proven deductively by Spinoza in his *Ethics*: full-fledged determinism, the distinction between three kinds of knowledge (and other epistemological claims), human passivity, the *conatus* theory, the intellectual love of God, and so on. Much research has still to be done, but one may already conclude that the group of Amsterdam friends, to which Meyer and Bouwmeester also belonged, had a common philosophy, to which they were inspired by the Latin schoolmaster, the radical Cartesian and medical doctor Franciscus van den Enden. This man is very much praised by contemporary poets on account of his extraordinary capacities in science and letters, in education and politics. He appears to have been strongly occupied with political theory and practice. Spinoza’s intention to contribute as much as possible to the formation of society, about which he spoke on the third page of his earliest writing, may be interpreted as an echo of Van den Enden’s main interest.

Spinoza’s preoccupation with Descartes can also be demonstrated from other sources. In the early 1660s (1660–3), he had many contacts with the Danish anatomist Niels Stensen (Steno), who was at the time a medical student in Leiden. In the letter which Steno addressed to him in 1671, not quite four years after his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1667, he described Spinoza as “a man who once was very familiar with me.” He explicitly acknowledges in this letter, that Spinoza was very much at home in the Cartesian philosophy, which is “very diligently elaborated and reformed by you” (em-
phasis added). In the same year, 1671, Steno wrote to the famous Malpighi: "I have certain friends in Holland who are altogether lost to *dati tutti alla* Cartesian philosophy, in such a way that they make philosophy the judge about all knowledge of grace" (Stenonis 1952: 248).

It cannot be doubted that Spinoza had chosen the career of a scientist, that is, the "investigation of nature" in all its aspects. For some years he had concentrated on the laws of human nature, the results of which were laid down in his *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*. Nature was a continuum for him, of which all things were simply modes or modifications. Man is such a mode of the one, divine, infinite nature, determined by other modes in a never-ending series, but always according to the eternal laws, partly known to us in the so-called common notions. For a scientist, everything is caused by something else in the same attribute. This principle is also valid for human behavior, that is, for the motions of human bodies, which must be considered as effects of other motions, inside or (mainly) outside those bodies. This was the point on which he criticized his master in physics, Descartes, as he said in his first letter (September 1661) to the Secretary of the English Royal Society, Henry Oldenburg: "particular volitions cannot be called free (because they require a cause in order to exist), but must be as their causes have determined them to be" (Ep 2).

The English scientists, foremost Robert Boyle, and Spinoza, with other Dutchmen like Huygens and Hudde, had a common field of interest and research, and entertained considerable communication with each other. Oldenburg had told Spinoza about Boyle's physiological essays and his experiments about the elasticity of air, about fluidity and fixity of matter (Ep 1), and he wrote:

*In our Philosophical College we devote ourselves as energetically as we can to making experiments and observations, and are much occupied with putting together a History of Mechanical Arts. For we regard it as settled that the forms and qualities of things can best be explained on mechanical Principles, that all nature's effects are produced by motion, shape and texture, and their various combinations, and that there is no need for us to seek a refuge for our ignorance in inexplicable forms and occult qualities. (Ep 3)*

Spinoza must have been fascinated by this news because he fully subscribed to this research program himself. In his Letter 6 he com-
mented as an expert on the results of Boyle’s experiments concerning the constitution of saltpeter (niter), using for his criticism the upshot of the three experiments he had done himself. This proves that he must have been introduced to this type of work in an earlier period. In fact, we know that Van den Enden also, together with a certain Johan Glauber, was devoted to chemical analysis. It is likely that Spinoza also had participated in this work when he was still living in Amsterdam. His critique of Boyle’s book was that Boyle was not consistent enough in his endeavor to give only mechanical explanations of natural phenomena:

In paragraph 25 the Distinguished Gentleman seems to wish to demonstrate that the alkaline parts are carried here and there by the impulse of the saline particles, but that the saline particles raise themselves into the air by their own impulse.

In explaining this Phenomenon I have said that the particles of Spirit of Niter acquire a more violent motion because, when they enter wider passages, they must necessarily be surrounded by a very fine matter and driven upwards by it, as particles of wood are by fire, but that the alkaline particles receive their motion from the impulse of particles of Spirit of Niter penetrating through the narrower passages. (Ep 6; emphasis added)

Another remark, on a passage in which Boyle supposes that nature has designed birds and fishes for flying and for swimming, could not be shorter and sharper: “He seeks the cause in the purpose.” A natural scientist is not allowed to explain by final causes.

The reader should consult Letters 6 and 13 in order to discover how much Spinoza was involved in empirical science – without, however, neglecting the principles of mathematical method.28 We should realize that this was the type of work to which he was mostly dedicated as a “philosopher.” His philosophy was not a kind of “armchair philosophy,” far away from the center of natural science. On the contrary, he conceived and practiced a type of philosophy which was continuous with what we call today “natural science.” This claim can also be proved in another way.

The Amsterdam friends, who in early 1663 already possessed some of Spinoza’s writings and discussed them in their circle, suddenly discovered that Spinoza, as a professional tutor, had explained Cartesian philosophy to a Leiden University student named Casearius. This made them jealous. “Fortunate, indeed, most fortunate is your companion, Casearius, who lives under the same roof with you, and
can talk to you about the most important matters at breakfast, at
dinner, and on your walks” (De Vries, in Ep 8). In fact, Cassearius
received from Spinoza a very professional introduction in Cartesian
physics; in their contact hours they concentrated on the second and
following books of Descartes’s *Principles of Philosophy.*

Here is how Lodewijk Meyer, a learned friend and himself a *doctor
medicinae* from Leiden University, introduces the 1663 edition of
Spinoza’s *Descartes’s “Principles of Philosophy.”* After having de­
clared “that the best and surest method of seeking and teaching the
truth in the sciences is that of the mathematicians, who demonstrate
their conclusions from definitions, postulates, and axioms, since a
certain and firm knowledge of anything unknown can only be derived
from things known certainly beforehand,” he says that his time is
privileged because it is enlightened by the “brightest star” of the age,
René Descartes, whose writings contain a mathematical method,
though not yet fully formalized. Because unskilled readers need some
help with their study of Descartes’s work, Meyer had often wished
that someone who possessed “a thorough knowledge of Descartes’s
writings and philosophy” would be able to bring these people some
assistance by rendering in the synthetic order what Descartes had
written in the analytic order, thereby demonstrating everything in
the manner familiar to the geometricians. He felt himself unequal to
so great a task and was, moreover, occupied by other things:

Therefore I was very pleased to learn from our Author that he had dictated,
to a certain pupil of his, whom he was teaching the Cartesian Philosophy,
the whole Second Part of the *Principles,* and part of the Third, demonstrated
in that geometric manner, along with some of the principal and more diffi­
cult questions, which are disputed in Metaphysics and had not yet been
resolved by Descartes, and that in response to the entreaties and demands of
his friends, he had agreed that, once he corrected and added to them, these
writings might be published. So I too commended this project to him, and at
the same time gladly offered my help in publishing, if he should require it.
Moreover, I advised him – indeed entreated him – to render also the first
part of the *Principles* in a like order, and set it before what he had already
written, so that by having been arranged in this manner from the beginning,
the matter could be better understood and more pleasing. When he saw the
soundness of this argument, he did not wish to deny both the requests of a
friend and the utility of the reader. And he entrusted to my care the whole
business of printing and publishing, since he lives in the country, far from
the city, and so could not be present. (DPP Preface)
Having summarized, then, the contents of the work, Meyer continues by asserting that Spinoza not only often deviates from Descartes in the arrangement and explanation of the axioms, demonstrations, and conclusions, but also that Spinoza himself in many cases does not agree with Descartes's propositions, which are faithfully presented by him. "So let no one think that he is teaching here either his own opinions, or only those which he approves of." Spinoza, for example, does not think that the will is distinct from the intellect, much less that it is endowed with freedom. According to him, Descartes is only assuming and does not prove that the human mind is a substance thinking absolutely. Another important point of disagreement between Descartes and his expositor is that Descartes is too quick in stating that this or that surpasses the human understanding concerning things which in the opinion of Spinoza are entirely clear and can be explained satisfactorily. The foundations of Descartes's science, says Meyer, are not the same as those of Spinoza's. Meyer's introduction to Descartes's "Principles of Philosophy" is extremely valuable as an authentic document about an early period in Spinoza's career, containing a clear statement of Spinoza's position on Cartesian science.

Meyer was an important scientist and author in his own right. He held Spinoza in high respect, but the converse is also true, as may be concluded from Spinoza's letters to him (Ep 12, 12A, 15). It is not impossible that it was he who pushed Spinoza towards the geometrization of his philosophy. After having written his medical and physical doctoral dissertations in 1662 at Leiden University, he returned to Amsterdam as a "liberalium artium magister" and dedicated his powers first to the question of the interpretation of the Scripture, which was an important topic in the theological disputes of those years. The results of this research program were published in his Philosophias s. scripturae interpres (Meyer 1666). The text of this work, however, was written a few years before (in 1663–4) as Meyer remarks in his postscript. I will attend to this work in order to clarify the meaning of the word "philosophy" in that period and, also, to use the work as a source which not only refers to Spinoza's early influence but likewise to its effects on Spinoza. Secondary literature constructs an opposition between Meyer and Spinoza, in my opinion without any foundation. Both Spinoza and Meyer maintain that the true sense (sensus verus) of scriptural phrases, paragraphs,
sections, or works can only be discovered in a rational, that is, scientific, way. They both reject the idea that the meaning of words and sentences would depend on or should have to be accommodated to a certain philosophical system or to other prejudices of readers and interpreters. When they call "philosophy" or "the understanding" the judge of revelation, they do not intend anything other than scientific treatment, professional reading with the help of philology, history, and so on. One should, as a real expert, show and prove by means of linguistic principles, grammar and lexicography, and practical methods like comparison of words and metaphors, that a certain sense is indeed the meaning of the author, even when it is not at all understandable why he wants to say it. "Philosophy" is equivalent to "knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences" (Meyer 1666: 53), "especially grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, and physics" (Meyer 1666: 122), and knowledge of particular languages – in the case of the Scripture, the oriental languages. On the last page of his work Meyer alludes to people (plural) who, following in Descartes's footsteps, "will bring to light such things of God, the rational soul, and human highest happiness and similar things, belonging to the acquisition of eternal life." The sequence of words in this sentence is, for the insiders, a salute to the title of Spinoza's Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being. Some pages earlier, however, Meyer had referred to an anonymous singular: "the most illustrious and experienced man in those things" (i.e. philology), or to "this same man, by far the most exercised in all sort of similar knowledge and learning, who does not hesitate to declare in clear words that when somebody would compare all the written books of the New Testament with each other, he would find as many differences in them as words" (Meyer 1666: 131).33 Elsewhere, this man is called the "eminent philosopher of our age" (Meyer 1666: 134). Meyer, who must have been very close to Spinoza and was fully trusted by him, pays great honor to his scientific companion with these words. His own scientific career was filled with philological, grammatical, and poetical studies. He composed a famous Dutch dictionary, Woordenschat, which ran into various editions; an Italian grammar; a Latin vocabulary; and many plays for the theater. He also cooperated with another friend of Spinoza, Johannes Bouwmeester, in the art academy "Nil Volentibus Arduum" [NVA], which was the collective author of Onderwijs in de tooneelpoëzy [Science of theater poetry].34
Spinoza continued his work in the science of letters with his *Theological-Political Treatise* (to which I will refer later) and with his *Compendium of Hebrew Grammar* – an unfinished but still quite voluminous work – published in the *Opera Posthuma*, which he must have started in the same years in which NVA flourished (1669–71). The editors of the *Opera Posthuma*, which included the same linguists Meyer and Bouwmeester, declared in their “admonition to the reader” that Spinoza had written this grammar “at the request of some of his friends ([rogatu amicorum quorundam suorum) who very much studied the holy language],” by which words they probably indicated themselves. It is very likely that this work was meant as a contribution from Spinoza to the linguistic research program of the academy NVA of his friends. They further said in their foreword that they knew that he was “imbibed with this language from his early youth, that he had studied it during many years with great effort and understood its ‘genius’ very well, and that he was an excellent expert in it.” In Spinoza’s (and Meyer’s) view the scientific analysis of the Hebrew language was very important for the interpretation of the Scripture. Spinoza would demonstrate this in the seventh chapter of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, but said it also in his satirical remark in the *Compendium of Hebrew Grammar* that “there have been many people who wrote a grammar [explication] of the Scripture but none who wrote one of the Hebrew language” (CGLH vii.2). It is very misleading, to say the least, that historiographers of philosophy do not even mention that this “philosopher,” Spinoza, spent a considerable amount of his valuable time in the analysis and description of the linguistic structures of Hebrew, and composed a grammar of it which manifested a very personal style.

Jelles testifies in retrospect about Spinoza in his biographical Preface to the *Nagelate Schriften*, that:

He has exercised himself in linguistics and literature ([Letteren]) from childhood on. . . . He has, apart from his usual occupation in the sciences ([wetenschappen]) taken his special exercise in the optics ([Gezichtkunde]), and in the grinding of magnifying glasses and telescopes. . . . He spent most of his time in the research of the nature of things and in ordering the things he had found in order to communicate them to other people. [Akkerman 1980: 216; emphasis added]
Spinoza's life and works

Spinoza was—I cannot repeat it enough—a man of science rather than a twentieth-century kind of philosopher. Optics had his special interest. I must now say a few words more about this topic, because historians tend to neglect also this aspect of his work, in the opinion that it was only marginal. All biographical sources, however, stress that Spinoza was very much occupied with and interested in this field of research, on a theoretical level but also practically. When Leibniz called him an "insignis opticus" (Freudenthal 1899: 193), this was not a rhetorical trick in order to avoid the title (and praise) of the philosopher, but a telling assessment.

I have already said that Spinoza's work was more than handicraft, and may be compared with optical industry, which implied optical theory. The German travelers Stolle and Hallmann (Freudenthal 1899: 225), Pierre Bayle (Bayle 1697: 346), Colerus, Jelles, Lucas, Christiaan Huygens, Theodor Kerckringh, and many others relate that Spinoza personally constructed microscopes and telescopes which were highly praised by the scientists of his day. Leibniz praised him as the maker of famous peep tubes and confessed in his letter to him (October 5, 1671) that "he would not easily find somebody who in this field of studies could judge better." In his Observations anatomicae, Kerckringh, a comrade of Spinoza's in Van den Enden's Latin school who had become a famous anatomist, wrote: "I own a first class microscope (microscopium praestantissimum) made by that Benedictus Spinoza, that noble mathematician and philosopher, which enables me to see the lymphatic vascular bundles. . . . Well, this that I have clearly discovered by means of my marvelous instrument, is itself still more marvelous" (Kerckringh 1670: 177).

The famous astronomer and mathematician Christiaan Huygens spoke about the excellent instruments fabricated by "that Israelite" (a somewhat deprecative expression) living nearby in Voorburg. Being in Paris, he frequently requested his brother to give him all possible information about the theoretical and technical progress Spinoza made in this field. After some disagreement, he had in the end to confess that Spinoza was right: "It is true that experience confirms what is said by Spinoza, namely that the small objectives in the microscope represent the objects much finer than the large ones" (Huygens 1888–1950: IV,140; letter of May 11, 1668). A trace
of the scientific discussions between Huygens and Spinoza can also be found in Spinoza's letter of May 1665 to Oldenburg:

Mr. Huygens also has the book on microscopic observations, but unless I am mistaken, it is in English. He has told me wonderful things about these microscopes and also about certain Telescopes, made in Italy, with which they could observe eclipses of Jupiter caused by the interposition of its satellites, and also a certain shadow on Saturn, which looked as if it were caused by a ring. These things make me astonished at Descartes's haste. He says that the reason why the Planets next to Saturn – for he thought its projections were Planets, perhaps because he never observed them touching Saturn – do not move may be that Saturn does not rotate around its own axis. But this does not agree very well with his principles. [Ep 26]

Spinoza certainly joined Huygens during one of his nightly observations of Jupiter by means of his thirty-foot telescope. Spinoza was quite sure of his own position in optics and was not afraid to criticize Huygens. After having summarized in Letter 30 some points of Huygens's *Dioptrics* for Oldenburg in London, he adds to it the remark: "Until now this seems to me fully impossible." Of another mathematician, the later Amsterdam Burgomaster Johannes Hudde, Spinoza asked advice. Letter 36 from June 1666 shows that Spinoza in one and the same letter explained to him the properties of the infinite divine nature and proposed to him an optical formula which would enable him to construct the best new dishes for grinding lenses. Optical questions were also the subject of some correspondence with Jarig Jelles [Ep 39].

Spinoza not only specialized in optical theory and technology but also tried to make observations himself as well as possible, where it was appropriate by means of instruments. To Ostens he wrote that "the nicest hand looks terrible when seen through a microscope" [Ep 54]. And the famous Letter 32, in which the harmony in the infinite world is illustrated by the example of a worm living in the blood and pushing against other particles and viruses, clearly suggests that Spinoza practiced the study of the blood by means of his microscope. In Colerus's biography we find a trace of this pleasure in microscopic observation, where he relates about Spinoza:

He also often took his magnifying glass, observing through this the smallest mosquitoes and flies, at the same time reasoning about them.

He knew, however, that things cannot be seen as they are in themselves.
The eternal properties and laws of things and processes can only be discovered by deduction from common notions and evident axioms. "The eyes of the mind, by which it sees and observes the things, are the demonstrations."38

The practice of science to which Spinoza was fully dedicated raised much criticism against his person on the side of the ministers of the Reformed Church, who, having discovered that he identified God with nature in unpublished manuscripts, and being afraid of his growing influence, accused him of atheism and tried to warn their flocks against his "pernicious" doctrines. In a local dispute in Voorburg concerning the appointment of a new minister – in which Spinoza’s landlord Daniel Tydeman was also involved – the pious people of the church council spread the following report:

That the aforesaid Daniel Tydeman has rented an apartment to an A... Spinosa, born from Jewish parents, who is now (as it is said) an atheist or someone who scoffs at all religions and therefore is a harmful instrument in this republic, as so many learned men and preachers, among which Rev. Lantman and who know him, may testify, who has written the request presented to the Burgomasters. [Freudenthal 1899: 117-19]

The preachers did not shrink from instigating theological hatred and so, with an appeal to divine revelation, calling a halt to the threatening natural science. From the pulpit and with many polemical pamphlets, the political authorities were accused of negligence in the campaign against this evil. The pressure of the Orangistic party directed by them drove the liberal states-party, the party of the so-called regenten (i.e., the political governors), more and more into the corner. The tensions between the Reformed Church and the government resulted in a grim relationship.

Spinoza was not the only one to experience the negative consequences of a life of reason devoted to the causal explanation of things. His friend Lodewijk Meyer wrote in 1665 in the Postscript of his Interpres, "The discomfort and harm, which hang above my head, is the hatred of the theologians, who will despise and reject my sentiments. ... They usually elevate themselves above all scientists, imagining that the divine enunciations are only confided to them." His prediction was accurate. Six undignified refutations followed immediately upon the publication of his scientific treatment of the Scriptures, in which he had done nothing more than to try to discover the "true sense" (verus sensus) of the prophecies with lin-
guistic proofs. The first words written in Onderwijs by another friend, Johannes Bouwmeester, read: “Everywhere and in all times are the Arts and Sciences most hated by the ignorant,” and he stated that especially the ministers of all religious sects tried to darken the truth for their audience in favor of their own profit.

It seemed to Spinoza that it would become impossible for him to remain in security and at the same time explain to his fellow citizens the principles of nature and their application to human behavior, as he had done according to the method of the geometricians in the first drafts of his Ethics, already sent to his friends in Amsterdam. Hence, he decided to interrupt this work, which would likely end in disaster, in order first to pave the way for a truly free communication of thoughts. And had it not always been his intention to do his utmost for the well-being of the state in order to derive for himself the maximum of happiness and safety from it? Personal safety depends on the stability of the state. But a sound state is impossible where freedom of thought, speech, and publication is excluded or restricted by the narrow-mindedness of the bigots. In October 1665 he informed Oldenburg about his new activity:

I have now started writing a treatise with my insights concerning the Scripture. I am motivated to do so by:

1. The prejudices of the theologians, because I realize that they are the main obstacles which restrain people from the dedication to science. Therefore I exert myself to reveal them and to ban them from the mind of the more prudent people.

2. The opinion that the common people cherish concerning me: it does not stop to accuse me of atheism. I feel myself compelled to avert as far as possible also this evil.

3. The freedom to practice science and to express our thoughts. I wish to defend with all means this freedom, which is suppressed here by the too great authority and brutality of the preachers.

The first objective, the unmasking and dismantling of the prejudices of the theologians, consisting in false interpretations and a political misuse of the Scripture, was fulfilled in the first part of the Theological-Political Treatise (i.e., Chapters i–xv). An elucidation of this target is also given in the Preface. Having stated that those who call themselves Christians only see mysterious and incredible things in the Scripture, Spinoza continued:
When I revolved this in my mind, namely that the natural light was not only despised but that it was also damned by many as the source of impiety, that human fictions were considered as divine doctrines and credulity was estimated as belief, that in church and court the highest emotions were stirred by philosophical controversies and as a consequence the most cruel hatred and discord originated by which people easily came to rebellion... I made the serious decision, to study the Scriptures again, to examine them with a free mind, to neither affirm nor admit anything as its doctrine, that could not be most clearly demonstrated to be so.

The method to fulfill this project is the same as that indicated and practiced by Meyer. Spinoza explained his principles for the scientific understanding and explanation of a text such as the Scriptures in Chapter vii. They consist mainly in the knowledge of the Hebrew language, in a historical approach to the separate books, in a comparison of various parts of a book, and so on. The method of explaining texts does not differ from the method of explaining natural phenomena: In both cases the phenomena are deduced from general principles.

Spinoza's second purpose, namely his defense of himself, as a scientist, against the charge of atheism, is fulfilled in Chapter vi, where he rejects the possibility of miracles and claims that we have a better knowledge of God in the degree we have more knowledge of nature. "If there would happen something in nature, which would not follow from its laws... , that would be against nature and its laws and consequently the belief in it would make us doubt everything and lead us to atheism" (TTP vi.28).

Spinoza realizes the third objective, the defense of the freedom of science, of publication of scientific results, and of discussion on all kinds of topics, in the five last chapters. According to the theory of the state developed in Chapters xvi–xx, the "libertas philosophandi" constitutes the very essence of a political society, as is likewise indicated in the formulation of the subtitle, "that this freedom can only be taken away (tollī) together with the peace and piety of the republic." Doctrinal prescriptions can only cause dissension, sectarianism, and schisms among the people, by which the freedom of the state [not to mention the possibility of sciences and arts] is necessarily undermined. A government which mixes itself in questions of theology will stimulate the fury of parties and change piety into rage. Dutch history had provided a tragic example of such a rage, which should
serve as a warning for all times that laws about religion are pernicious. This example was the battle between the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants, mentioned by Spinoza on the penultimate page of the \textit{Theological-Political Treatise} \cite{TTP xx.41}. The puritanical Calvinists, together with Prince Maurice, had succeeded in bringing the state of Holland to the edge of the abyss. The great statesman of the time, the pensionary Oldenbarnevelt, a Remonstrant with liberal ideas, had to pay with his life \cite[in 1619]. It is to him that Spinoza cynically alludes in \textit{Theological-Political Treatise} xx.35:

What, I say, can be more hurtful than that men who have committed no crime or wickedness should because they are enlightened, be treated as enemies and put to death and that the scaffold, the terror of the delinquents, should become the finest theatre to show the highest example of tolerance and virtue to the sharp disgrace of the majesty?

Amsterdam, in contrast, was a positive example in the eyes of Spinoza. "In this most flourishing republic and excellent town people of all nations and sects live together with highest unanimity" \cite{TTP xx.40}. As a member of a community of political refugees, the minority of Portuguese Jews, Spinoza had had no notably bad experiences with the state authorities and their justice. But was Amsterdam still so tolerant in the late 1660s?

As Spinoza was writing his treatise, the situation worsened because of a serious economic malaise and the political isolation of the Dutch Republic. Intolerance was aggravated also, and came very close to Spinoza himself. To the circle of his friends and followers belonged a certain Adriaan Koerbagh, who had studied medicine and law in Utrecht and Leiden. He had \cite[with his brother Johan] became persuaded by Spinoza's naturalism, and was also acquainted with Franciscus van den Enden. This man, only two years younger than Spinoza, started to spread all the essentials of the Spinozistic theory from 1665 onward, and published them in 1668, in plain Dutch.\footnote{His main work, \textit{Een ligt}, was on many pages more open about Spinoza's esoteric doctrine than the \textit{Theological-Political Treatise}. God is defined as "the essence of all modes of existence, consisting of infinite attributes, of which each one is infinite in its kind." The work as a whole may be considered as a parallel to the \textit{Theological-Political Treatise}, with chapters on Essence (God is consequently called "Wesen"!), the Savior (Jesus), the Holy Spirit (reason), good
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and evil, religion, the Bible, heretics, heaven, miracles, and so on. Nowhere in the book is Spinoza’s name mentioned, but his doctrine is elaborated on many pages. The author was, however, much less prudent than Spinoza himself, and launched strong attacks on the preachers and theologians. When he was arrested, he confessed at his trial to his relations with Spinoza and Van den Enden. He was sentenced, in the free town of Amsterdam, to ten years in the house of correction (tuchthuis), ten years exile afterward, and a fine of 6,000 guilders. He was thrown into the Rasphuis, a prison with very bad circumstances, in which he died a year later (in 1669).

This case of theological fury resulting in political repercussions – to which his friend and pupil Adriaan Koerbagh fell a victim, in a town which according to his own memory was so tolerant to every kind of religion – must have made a deep impression on Spinoza, occupied with the later chapters of the Theological-Political Treatise. The authorities had sentenced Koerbagh under the pressure of the ministers of the Reformed Church, who had decried Koerbagh as a very great danger to public life. Having explained how the Pharisees had accused the Sadducees of impiety, Spinoza continued in Theological-Political Treatise xviii.24, probably thinking of the unhappy fate of his friend: “Following this example of the Pharisees the vilest hypocrites, agitated by the same frenzy (rabie agitati) which they call zeal by divine right, have always persecuted men distinguished by their honesty and their virtue and therefore envied by the mob; they do this by publicly despising their opinions and inflaming the anger of the furious multitude against them.”

The Theological-Political Treatise was published in 1670, anonymously and under a false impress. The work soon proved to be counterproductive. It neither helped to reduce the influence of theological prejudices among philosophically-minded readers nor furthered the freedom required for the enlightened citizen. In fact, the Theological-Political Treatise did not at all prepare the way for the publication and reception of Spinoza’s overall philosophy. Its publication, on the contrary, aggravated the situation by unchaining a series of devastating refutations and defamations. A good example of a negative reaction in a person who was considered a liberal philosopher, and therefore especially addressed by Spinoza in his preface as a “philosophical reader,” was Lambert van Velthuysen, a member of the Utrecht “College der scavanten,” who attacked the Theological-
Political Treatise as an atheistic writing in a letter to Ostens. Spinoza was disappointed and even indignant about this "sinister" interpretation, as he called it in his Letter 43 to Jacob Ostens. Van Velthuysen had consciously misrepresented the claims and objectives of the treatise in his summary, the "libellum" that he had sent to their common friend. How could he call him an atheist? "Atheists are used to strive immoderately to honors and riches, which I always have despised, as all know who are acquainted with me. . . . In this way was Descartes formerly denounced by Voetius, and so the best people are everywhere betrayed!"  

The Councils and Synods of the Reformed Church showed a high degree of vigilance. They immediately condemned the Theological-Political Treatise as "a harmful book" (Amsterdam), a "treatise of idolatry and superstitition" (The Hague, July 1670), as "the vilest and most sacrilegious book the world has ever seen" (Schiedam, July 1670). The theologian J. Melchior published in the same year a refutation in which Spinoza's name was spoiled to "Xinospa" and he was characterized as a freak (monstrum). A professor in Utrecht, a certain J. G. Graevius, wrote in a letter to Leibniz about the "liber pestilentissimus," full of "monstrous opinions." The effect of the book, in which Spinoza "talked as a scientist about the Scripture" was nothing less than "a torrent of persecutors."  

The upheaval, though, was soon overshadowed by a political revolution of far-reaching consequences. The regime of the liberal grandpensionary Jan de Witt, who had been in power uninterruptedly since 1654, came to a bloody end with the invasion of the French and German armies in the so-called disaster year (rampjaar) of Dutch history (1672). The whole country was "radeloos, redeloos en reddeloos," that is, desperate, irrational, and past recovery. Jan de Witt, together with his brother, was abducted by the mob and cruelly murdered. The dynasty of the Orange lieutenants (Stadhouders) returned in the person of the young prince William III (later king of England). It was said by Leibniz, who visited Spinoza in 1676, that Spinoza, who must have conversed with Jan de Witt, was in great distress at this rebellion and at the death of his political friend and protector, and therefore wanted to protest against it by means of a placard on which he had written "Ultimi Barbarorum." But the landlord restrained him from such a dangerous demonstration.  

Notwithstanding the grim rejection of the Theological-Political
Treatise by the ministers of the Reformed Church, the work became a commercial success for the publisher, Spinoza’s friend Jan Rieuwertsz. The gales of indignation could not withhold the presses from printing new editions. After five quarto editions in 1670, a series of octavo editions with misleading title pages was laid up. In 1673 the Theological-Political Treatise appeared as Francisci Henriquez de Villacorta, doctoris medici Opera Chirurgica omnia (Amstelodami: apud Jacobum Paulli). Another edition from the same year was baptized Danielis Heinsii Operum Historicorum collectio prima. Editio secunda, priori editione multo emendatior et auctior. Accedunt quaedam hactenus inedita (Lugd. Batav: Apud Isaacum Herculis). A third edition in octavo was named Totius Medicinae idea nova, seu Francisci de le Boe Sylvii, medici inter Batavos celeberrimi Opera Omnia novas potissimum super morborum causis, symptomatis et curandi ratione meditationes et disputaciones continentia (Amstelodami: apud Carolum Gratiani). Rieuwertsz was a courageous entrepreneur, not deprived of some humor. His shop, called “In het Martelaersboeck” (In the Book of the Martyrs), was a center of freethinkers’ discussions in which news was exchanged between radical Cartesians and Spinozists.

Spinoza knew, however, that he had to be careful and that his life could be in danger when the common people were stirred against him. He had not forgotten the case of Adriaan Koerbagh, who had published his ideas in plain Dutch. Therefore, he tried with all available means to forestall the publication of the Dutch translation of his Theological-Political Treatise. On February 17, 1671, when he still enjoyed the protection of Jan de Witt, he wrote to his Amsterdam friend Jarig Jelles:

When recently the professor . . . paid a visit to me, he told me among other things that he had heard that my Tractatus theologico-politicus was translated into Dutch and that somebody - he did not know who - intends to give it in print. Therefore I beseech you urgently to do your best to get information and, if possible, to prevent the printing. This is not only my request but also that of many of my friends and acquaintances, who would not like to see that the book would be forbidden, as will undoubtedly happen when it will be published in Dutch. (Ep 44)

Spinoza’s fame, which had already begun to spread by 1665 now reached a higher pitch. His ideas reached through the whole of Eu-
rope: London, Paris, Florence, Rome, Stockholm, and other cities. The court of Heidelberg invited him for a professorship in the newly founded academy of the illustrious monarch Karl Ludwig of the Palts. But Spinoza did not hesitate to decline this offer. In his letter of invitation, the councillor Fabricius (who was himself against the invitation) had mentioned a condition that was impossible for Spinoza to fulfill because it did not depend on himself. He was to receive the ampest freedom of philosophizing (“philosophandi libertatem”), but it was expected that he would not “misuse it in order to disturb the publicly established religion” (Ep 47; February 16, 1673). Spinoza’s answer was to the point: “I think that I do not know in what boundaries that freedom of philosophizing should be included in order not to make the impression that I have the intention to perturb the publicly-instituted religion.” Spinoza did not want to take the risk. He had already experienced how easily he could be misunderstood and misinterpreted, even when he aimed for a very clear presentation of his thoughts. “And since I have already experienced this while leading a private and solitary life, how much more have I to fear this in case I will ascend towards such a degree of dignity” (Ep 48; March 30, 1673). Another reason Spinoza offered for not accepting the invitation was that it never had been his wish to be a professor with public teaching responsibility. The instruction of the youth would hinder him from being free for the promotion of science. The background of this argument must be the same as the other motive just mentioned: A man who is employed by certain authorities and paid for his academic work is in fact a subordinate, who has to keep himself to certain prescriptions and expectations, and has no full freedom of speech. As Spinoza wrote: “Academies that are founded at the public expense are instituted not so much to cultivate men’s natural abilities as to restrain them. But in a free commonwealth, arts and sciences (scientiae et artes) will be best cultivated to the full if everyone that asks leave is allowed to teach publicly, and that at his own cost and risk” (TTP viii.49). A scientist must be completely independent. One’s freedom is unavoidably restrained when one allows oneself to be paid for one’s work.

It is not impossible that a third reason played a role in Spinoza’s declining the invitation of Karl Ludwig, who was known to be a monarch with a free mind. Fabricius himself was an orthodox theolo-
gian who had studied reformed theology in Utrecht under Voetius and had many relations with Dutch Contra-Remonstrant theologians such as Frederik Spanheim. A certain J. H. Heidegger later said in his obituary of this Fabricius that Fabricius, after having read the "horrible book" (the Theological-Political Treatise), had told him that he hoped that this blasphemous material would never be allowed to enter and be promulgated inside the German borders. He further had remarked that he much preferred that similar pernicious opinions be suppressed rather than refuted.\textsuperscript{52} In a small world with only a few networks of relationships this attitude of the Dutch Fabricius may have been known to Spinoza.

Another invitation, however, was not refused: Spinoza was asked by the general, the Prince De Condé, to come to the headquarters of the French Army in Utrecht. The sources (Bayle, Colerus) do not reveal the reason why he was invited. The prince was an "esprit fort" or libertarian, who could have wished to meet the famous Dutch thinker who had already entertained contacts with many other French libertarians. Spinoza, on the other hand, may have thought that he might profit from the opportunity to meet the French authorities, in order to do something in favor of his country, which was still in great distress because of the war with the French invaders. This latter seems probable, inasmuch as it was a principle of Spinoza's behavior to contribute as much as possible to the well-being of the state, wherever he could. "I am a sincere republican," he said (Colerus 1705: 38).\textsuperscript{53} In any case, he made use of the passport presented to him and went to Utrecht in July of 1673. When he arrived there, the Prince de Condé was gone, having been called back by his superior, King Louis XIV. Colerus says that Spinoza conversed with Lieutenant Stouppe instead of with Condé. Our information remains too scarce to say anything definite on this curious visit of Spinoza to Utrecht. Did he have a permit or even a mandate from the States of Holland, or from the Stadhouder prince William III? One cannot imagine that Spinoza went without any political charge – perhaps the preparation of negotiations – to the camp of the enemy.

Stouppe, who had been a Protestant minister before he began his military career, published in the same year a small book on \textit{La religion des Hollandais} in which he paid much attention to the influ-
ence of Spinoza’s views on religion. Although he of course did not acknowledge it, he had first-hand information:

I don’t believe I have spoken enough about the religions of this country, if I have not said a word about an illustrious and learned man, who, as I have been assured, has a great number of followers (Sectateurs) who are wholly attached to his sentiments. It is a man born as a Jew, who is called Spinosa, who has not abjured the religion of the Jews neither embraced the Christian religion; he is therefore a very bad Jew nor a better Christian. Before some years he has written a book in Latin, of which the title is *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in which his main objective is the destruction of all religions, particularly the Jewish and Christian religion, and to introduce atheism, libertarianism (*le Libertinage*) and freedom in all religions. He maintains that they are altogether invented for public utility, with the purpose that the citizens live honestly and obey their magistrates, that they keep themselves virtuous, not in the hope of a compensation after death, but simply for the excellency of virtue itself and for the advantages for virtuous people in this life. (Freudenthal 1899: 195)

Spinoza must have been disappointed by the many refutations of the *Theological-Political Treatise* he saw appearing in the book-markets. Whoever had some influence in public life or in the academies seemed to turn himself against Spinoza, if only to protect himself against suspicion. But he could also be ironic about what he found. Concerning the refutation of a Reinier van Mansvelt, a professor in Utrecht, whose book he had seen in the window of a bookseller, he wrote to his friend Jelles: “And laughing to myself, I pondered how precisely the ignorant are the first with their pen and most audacious in their writing” [Ep 50].

Spinoza was not a pessimistic type nor an ascetic, and had a positive attitude towards anything that could contribute to his well-being. He enjoyed the good things of life, including a glass of wine and a pipe of tobacco, and wrote in a letter that “I seek to pass my life not in sorrow and sighing, but in peace, joy and cheerfulness.” It was not his custom, however, to laugh publicly at other people or to despise them. He wrote that it was his principle “to try, not to laugh at human actions neither to mourn about them or to detest them, but to understand them” [TP i.4]. Spinoza does not say that he always succeeded, but only that he earnestly tried to follow this maxim. It is well known that he sometimes failed and confessed as much, saying (with Terence): “Nothing human is alien to me.” It is
not my intention to make a saint of Spinoza, who himself was deeply convinced of everyone’s weakness, including his own. His way of life, however, was sober and honest. He did not seek after superfluous goods. This conduct constituted a problem for many people: How could an atheist behave so virtuously? That was also the problem of one of his later biographers, Pierre Bayle, after he had to characterize him as “un homme d’un bon commerce, affable, honnête, officieux et fort réglé dans ses moeurs” [Bayle 1697: 347].

During the life and government of Jan de Witt, the supreme court of Holland had already tried to prohibit officially the printing and spreading of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, but the Grand Pensionary had succeeded in preventing this prohibition. After the political change, the situation was quite different in this respect. In July of 1674, the Court of Holland published a “placcaet” against some harmful books, among which was the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Spinoza must have felt this as a bitter disappointment. In the text of the announcement, his book was declared one of the “sacrilegious and soul-destructive books, full of unfounded and dangerous propositions and horrors, to the disadvantage of the true religion and church service.” Severe punishments were put on the printing, promulgating, or selling of those books.

By this act of the judicial – that is, political – authorities he, who so loved his country and its much-praised freedom, had become infamous, a subject for further defamations. Many famous scientists from all over Europe had paid visits to him and discussed the progress of arts and sciences. Now it became more and more quiet in his apartment. One of his best friends and followers, the young Baron von Tschirnhaus, who was at the time in Paris, asked him whether he could pass manuscripts of parts of his *Ethics* to a certain Gottfried Leibniz, who had consulted Spinoza some years earlier about questions of optics. Spinoza refused to give him the permission: “I don’t think it advisable to entrust my writings so quickly to him. I first would like to know what he is doing in Paris” [Ep 72]. What was the reason? No doubt he was not convinced of the sincerity of Leibniz, of his endeavor to strive only after truth. But we may guess also that another thing made Spinoza fear bad consequences. It was not unlikely that the spreading of his *Ethics* would have had repercussions for his life. His master Van den Enden, who had lived in Paris since 1670, had been arrested and sentenced to death, for his political
activities but probably also for other reasons. He was hanged on December 6, 1674; his writings were burned a day later. Dutch newspapers such as *De Amsterdamsche Courant* reported the trial and the execution in all its details.

In spite of Spinoza’s warning that Tschirnhaus should be reluctant in communicating what he had received for private use, we know that Tschirnhaus nonetheless revealed many secrets to the inquisitive Leibniz. This appears from a note written by Leibniz, which he must have made shortly after a meeting. I think it worthwhile to quote this note here in full because it enables us to see how Spinoza’s doctrine was perceived, understood, and explained by his friends and followers in or around 1675. A second reason is that this note, which is not known by many scholars and is not yet available otherwise in English, contains several interesting points which cannot be found elsewhere, and is also for that reason relevant.

Sir Tschirnhaus told me many things about the handwritten book of Spinoza. There is a merchant in Amsterdam, called Gerrit Gilles [Jarig Jelles] I think, who supports Spinoza. Spinoza’s book will be about God, mind, happiness or the idea of the perfect man, the recovery of the mind and the recovery of the body. He asserts the demonstration of a number of things about God. That he alone is free. He supposes that freedom exists, when the action or determination originates not from an external impact, but only from the nature of the actor. In this sense he justly ascribes freedom to God alone.

According to him the mind itself is in a certain sense a part of God. He thinks that there is sense in all things to the degrees of their existence. God is defined by him as an absolutely infinite Being, which contains all perfections, i.e. affirmations or realities or what may be conceived. Likewise only God would be substance or a Being which exists in itself or which can be understood by itself; all creatures are nothing else than modes. Man is free in so far as he is not determined by any external things. But because this is never the case, man is not free at all, although he participates more in freedom than the bodies.

The mind would be nothing but the idea of the body. He thinks that the unity of the bodies is caused by a sort of pressure. Most people’s philosophy starts with the creatures, Des Cartes started with the mind, he [Spinoza] starts from God. Extension does not imply divisibility as was unduly supposed by Descartes; although he supposed to see this also clearly, he fell into the error that the mind acts on the body or is acted upon by the body.

He thinks that we will forget most things when we die and retain only those things that we know with the kind of knowledge he calls intuitive, of
which only a few are conscious. Because knowledge is either sensual or imaginative or intuitive. He believes a sort of Pythagorical transmigration, namely that minds go from body to body. He says that Christ is the very best philosopher. He thinks that apart from thought and extension there are an infinity of other positive attributes, but that in all of them there is thought like here in extension. How they are constituted cannot be conceived by us but every one is infinite like space here. (Leibniz 1980)

We may conclude from this substantial document that the young Tschirnhaus, who had been in contact with Spinoza when he was a student in Leiden in the early 1670s, was well initiated into the essentials of the Ethics. It is very striking how sharply he distinguishes between Spinoza's and Descartes's methods, saying that the latter starts from the soul whereas Spinoza develops his philosophy from the idea of God. The kernel in this Spinozistic physics is determinism, which includes that "oriri unionem corporum a pressione quada" – things are constituted as individuals by the pressure of the surrounding particles. Descartes's dualism and anthropological interactionism are superseded in Spinoza's theory of the attributes of the one substance, of which individual things are the modes. Moreover, Tschirnhaus credits Spinoza – and this is completely new in comparison with other sources – with a kind of Pythagoreanism, implying that souls in a certain sense transmigrate from one form of matter to another. This idea is not entirely alien to the theory of the mind's eternity, based on the adequate ideas of the "fixed and eternal things" of extension. It is likely that the comparison with Pythagoras's transmigration theory originates from Spinoza himself, who probably had recognized the similarity in his reading of Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book XV), one of his classical sources.

When Spinoza had finished the five parts of his Ethics a year before, he had gone to his Amsterdam friend Jan Rieuwertsz in order to present to him the text for publication. Good friends warned him, however, not to do so, because the situation was too dangerous. Spinoza relates the story to Oldenburg (in September or October 1675):

Just when I received your letter from 22 July, I departed for Amsterdam with the intention to trust the book, about which I had written to you, to the press. When I was busy with this, the rumor spread that a certain book of
mine about God was on the press and that I tried to demonstrate in it, that there is no God. This rumor was believed by many. Certain theologians, (probably themselves the authors of this rumor) were occasioned by it to complain about me to the Prince and the magistrates. Further stupid Cartesians – probably in order to clear themselves from the suspicion that they sympathized with me – did not stop to express their abhorrence over my opinions and writings; and they still continue doing so. When I had heard this from certain credible men, who likewise warned me that the theologians set everywhere traps for me, I decided to postpone the publication which I was preparing and to wait first how things would develop; and I planned to tell you later what I was going to do. But it seems that the situation is becoming worse from day to day; and I don’t really know what I have to do. [Ep 68; emphasis added]

Ultimately, Spinoza was anxious and felt himself insecure, perhaps also alone. He had no contacts with relatives. Many good friends, like Simon Joosten de Vries and Pieter Balling, had died; others had been persecuted until death, like Koerbagh, Jan de Witt, and Franciscus van den Enden. Two of his former comrades (Niels Stensen and Albert Burgh) had converted to Roman Catholicism and now tried to draw him towards orthodoxy. Oldenburg, his first correspondent, could not follow his radical determinism and secularism; he beseeched him, in effect, to change his mind. What would happen to him? “Sub specie aeternitatis,” death was not noxious. In the last part of the now finished Ethics he had written “that death is less harmful to us, the greater the Mind’s clear and distinct knowledge, and hence, the more the Mind loves God” (E 5p38s). But he remained a human being, like everyone else, with fears and hopes, liable to passions, caught by imaginations of all kinds. Clear insights into the eternal laws of nature and reasoning could not dispel from his mind the “first” [lowest, imaginative] kind of knowledge, although they helped him to acquiesce in the unavoidable processes and defeats of human life.

His health left much to be desired. In his correspondence, Spinoza now and then intimated to his friends that not everything was well with him and that he sometimes had to excuse himself on account of not being able to work. Lucas says that he died in midlife, “after having suffered during the last years of his life.” According to Jelles it was the “tering” [phthisis, or consumption] which caused him many troubles. But the situation was not always so bad that he could
not work. His interest in the well-being of the state was so deeply rooted in his mind that he could not refrain from a new endeavor to contribute to it. After hiding in his desk the text of the Ethics, brought home from the fruitless trip to Amsterdam, he laid new blank paper on it. Spinoza now began to present a political architecture in a treatise, the Political Treatise, in which he demonstrated how different types of political societies (monarchies, aristocracies, democracies) should be organized in order to make them stable and secure for their citizens. He had gathered considerable material for his proposals from his reading of the books of the brothers De la Court; the works of his master Franciscus van den Enden, including his lecture on Machiavelli; and the Roman historians such as Livius, Tacitus, Curtius, and Flavius Josephus. What is more, he now could also use the laws of human behavior, formulated and deduced in Parts 3 and 4 of the Ethics, for his new enterprise.

Jarig Jelles wrote in his Preface to the Nagelate Schriften:

Our writer has made the Treatise about Politics not long before his death, which also prevented that it could be finished. His thoughts in this treatise are very accurate and his style is clear. Without discussing the opinions of many political writers, he proposes in this work his conception very solidly and draws everywhere conclusions from his premises. (Freudenthal 1899: 248)

Jelles reported that a work about "the nature of motion and in what way the differences in matter could be deduced a priori" was also on his program, had life given him the opportunity. We also read about this intention in the correspondence with Tschirnhaus. In Letter 59, Tschirnhaus asked about Spinoza's Generalia in physicis and when he could expect the publication of this work. Spinoza answered in Letter 60 (January 1675) that "he had not yet orderly composed" this material and that Tschirnhaus, therefore, would have to wait until another occasion. A short Algebra was likewise still on the list of works to be written according to Jelles.

Spinoza had not enough time to accomplish all the things he wished. Many of his works remained unfinished – the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, Descartes's "Principles of Philosophy (Part III)", the Political Treatise, the Compendium of Hebrew Grammar – while others were not more than planned. Only the Theological-Political Treatise and the Ethics lay before us in perfect
completeness. Yet we need not be discontent about the fruits of his life. I fully agree with the fine words of his friend J. M. Lucas: “Ses jours ont été courts; mais on peut dire néanmoins qu’il a beaucoup vécu” [Freudenthal 1899: 23]. His life lasted not more than forty-four years, but its significance can hardly be equaled by other lives. He “lived much,” though not long.

Death arrived on the 23rd of February in 1677. Colerus carefully inquired into the circumstances of it by checking the original documents. He says (three times) that the Amsterdam “medicus L. M.” [Lodewijk Meyer] was with Spinoza in his last days and was also present at his deathbed. He assures us that Spinoza did not take opium in order to die insensible of pain. He only took the bouillon, which the wife of the landlord Van der Spyk had cooked from a chicken on the request of Lodewijk Meyer. Being very thin from the disease he had had for many years, he must have expired quietly, from lack of power. His manuscripts were immediately sent to Amsterdam:

The still-living landlord of Spinoza, Mr. Hendrik van der Spyk tells me, that Spinoza had ordered that after his death his desk with the writings and letters lying in it would be sent without any delay to Jan Rieuwertzen, cityprinter in Amsterdam, as he also has executed. And Jan Rieuwertzen, in his answer to the aforementioned Mr. van der Spyk, dated Amsterdam the 25th March 1677 confesses to have received such desk. The last words of this letter were: “The friends of Spinoza wanted to know, to whom the desk was sent, since they judged that it contained much money and they intended to call in upon the skippers to whom it was delivered. Because in The Hague the packets delivered on the towboat are not registered, I don’t see how they could get it to know. It is best that they don’t know it.” [Colerus 1705: 51]

In an earlier letter dated March 6, Jan Rieuwertsz had written to Van der Spyk that he stood surety for all costs of the burial and that the friend of Schiedam (a brother of Simon Joosten de Vries) had paid to him the rent which Spinoza owed for the apartment [Colerus 1705: 78]. Van der Spyk had to dispose of the body. Colerus continues with his report: “On the 25th February the corpse was buried in the New Church on the Spuy with 6 state-carriages (karossen) and shown out by many persons of high rank (aanzienlijke luiden). . . . Coming from the burial the friends drank, according to civil custom, a glass of wine.”
Six coaches drawn by horses on a cold or misty day with prominent and distinguished people followed the corpse! No, Spinoza had not been entirely alone in his last years. The bigots had attacked him increasingly, but among intelligent people, and evidently many highly placed persons, he had become a much respected man. The “grand nombre de sectateurs,” about which the French colonel Stouppe had spoken, was as it were visualized in the spectacular funeral of the humble philosopher. Bayle testified that “les esprits forts accouraient à lui de toutes parts” (i.e., that the libertarians came to him from all sides). One may suppose that many of those political persons and esprits forts paid him the last honor.

Before they were sold, the books of Spinoza’s library were put on a short title catalog which has come down to us. It is worthwhile to examine this list, since it may convince one about Spinoza’s fields of interest and the sources he used. The collection is one of a scientist who wanted to keep abreast of developments in various fields of research. Most books are about mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, anatomy, chemistry, grammar, biblical hermeneutics, classical literature, political history and theory, or Spanish literature. There are only very few items which would fit in philosophical libraries of today. Aristotle is present in a Latin edition, but Plato is absent. The works of Descartes, in contrast, are represented with many editions, including a Dutch translation.

J. M. Lucas concluded his obituary with the words “Baruch de Spinoza vivra dans le souvenir des vrais Sçavants”: Spinoza will survive in the memory and the practice of the true scientists (Freudenthal 1899: 24). This may be verified by looking to the work of his friends after his death. Tschirnhaus, for example, a friend who was very concerned about the precise meaning of Spinoza’s propositions, as is manifest in the correspondence, dedicated his life to mathematics and medicine. His Spinozistic naturalism is elaborated in his Medicina mentis sive Artis inveniendi praeccepta generalia (Tschirnhaus 1686). On many pages he insinuates his adherence to Spinoza’s principles and propositions. The human mind is only cured from its errors by the “science of nature.”

I know that many will disagree with me when they read this. The reason of this is not unknown to me. Until now they did not form yet a correct idea of the physics about which I speak neither did they recognize or taste in effect
its fruits. By physics I understand nothing else than the science of the universe demonstrated a priori by the rigorous method of the mathematicians and confirmed a posteriori by the most evident experiences which even convince the imagination. . . . This science is truly divine. One here exposes the laws . . . according to which everything produces invariably its effects. The knowledge of this sciences liberates us also of innumerable prejudices. . . . In this way, through the mediation of the true physics, one becomes so to say a completely new man and one is regenerated philosophically. . . . One learns here to see the things from a higher point of view and to consider that nothing is more evident for the understanding than our continuous dependence on God alone, which is such that we cannot even raise our hand or produce a thought and, in a word, that never, neither in our mind nor in our body, can we absolutely do anything without the actual concurrence of God. . . . Ultimately thanks to physics we are prepared for still more important knowledge.67 Since when we bring the study of all the general items of this science to a good end, then not only the knowledge of our mind and its eternity, but also of God himself, of his real and necessary existence and his infinitely perfect attributes . . . becomes clear and evident for us. (Tschirnhaus 1686: 245–7; emphasis added)

Thus was Spinoza's legacy interpreted and practiced by one of his most intelligent correspondents: Human salvation and happiness are the products of human understanding of the laws of nature, a kind of science which is the privilege of everyone but may be professionally improved in physics. It can be shown from various documents68 that Spinoza's Amsterdam friends continued his work as linguists and mathematicians. This was the way Spinoza's reception was in fact realized: not by philosophizing about the end of life and proper morals, but by doing science as Spinoza himself had always done. An interesting example of this naturalistic Spinozism is Bur­chard de Volder, who once had been in contact with Spinoza in Amsterdam. He was appointed a professor in (traditional) philosophy in the Leiden University, but soon afterwards asked permission from the Curators to lecture on physics and mathematics.69 He began a tradition of natural science which became famous with the name of Boerhaave.70

The Opera Posthuma were published in the year of Spinoza's death, 1677. The title page showed the initials "B. d. S." but not the name of the author or of the publisher, Rieuwertsz.71 Apart from the Ethics, the Correspondence and the Political Treatise, the work also
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contained the unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, which the editors indicated was one of Spinoza's earliest works. In this work Spinoza had already delineated, after having enumerated and explained the four kinds of perceiving, the program of his *Ethics*. He wrote:

To choose the best mode of perceiving from these, we are required to enumerate briefly the means necessary to attain our end:

1. To know exactly our nature, which we desire to perfect, and at the same time,
2. [To know] as much of the nature of things as is necessary,
   (a) to infer rightly from it the differences, agreements and oppositions of things,
   (b) to conceive rightly what they can undergo and what they cannot,
   (c) to compare [the nature of things] with the nature and power of man.

This done, the highest perfection man can reach will easily manifest itself. (TdlE 25)

The *Ethics* appears to be the fulfillment of this research program. On the basis of general laws of nature (Part 1) it presents an analysis of the properties of human nature, of its power and its weakness in confrontation with other things, its passions and servitude, but also its [relative] freedom, perfection, and happiness.

On the 25th of June 1678 the States of Holland and West-Friesland officially proclaimed in a *Placcaet* their interdiction of the “trading, selling, printing, and translating” of Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma* because they considered it to be a “profane, atheistic, and blasphemous book.” The prohibition is no longer valid, but that does not mean that the text has finally become the intellectual possession of our enlightened times. There is still enormous work to do before we fully understand Spinoza's life and works.

NOTES

1 See Vaz Diaz and Van der Tak 1982.
3 See Méchoulan and Nahon 1979.
4 Nearly all possible details about Spinoza’s early youth and education may be found in *Spinoza. Troisième centenaire de la mort du philosophe* (catalog), Paris: Institut Néerlandais, 1977.
The original Portuguese text is kept in the Livro dos Acoidos of the Jewish-Portuguese community.

Pierre Bayle says that Spinoza wrote “un Apologie de sa sortie de la Synagoge.” The title of this work, written in Spanish, would have been (according to C. G. von Murr): “Apologia para justificar de su abdicacion de la synagga.”

These are the first lines of the oldest text we possess from Spinoza’s pen, the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (in Edwin Curley’s translation, Spinoza 1985a).

See Klever 1988b. With his small work, Het licht op den kandelaar (a small pamphlet, printed “for the author”), Balling was the first to publish some of Spinoza’s ideas on language, knowledge, determinism, and the passions.

See Akkerman and Hubbeling 1979.

Apart from new findings to be mentioned later on, see Meinsma 1896. This fundamental work is also translated in French and extended with many valuable notes as Meinsma 1983. See also Meininger and van Suchtelen 1980.


“Ses amis, dont la plupart etoient Cartesiens…” (Freudenthal 1899: 12).

The first to have demonstrated this point was the Dutch classical philologist and poet, J. H. Leopold, in Leopold 1902. See also Akkerman 1980 and especially Proietti 1985. Proietti gives an extended list of crypto-quotations in Spinoza from the different works of Terence and suggests that Spinoza had the parts of Simo and Parmeno.


See Proietti 1989b.

The text of the Voorreeden of the Nagelate Schriften and of the Praefatio of the Opera posthuma (i.e., Meyer’s translation of Jelles’s Dutch preface) has been recently republished in Akkerman 1980. The quotation is on page 250.
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17 For a fine analysis of the introductory section of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, see Zweerman 1983.

18 The works of Da Costa are collected and annotated in Osier 1983. For a survey of the problems in the Amsterdam community, see Albiac 1987 and Fuks-Mansfeld 1989.


20 Hudde, at the time already known as a young mathematical genius, would very soon become one of the most influential politicians of Amsterdam, in which town he acted as a burgomaster for more than twenty-five years. For a short biography and bibliography, see Klever 1989a.

21 See further my publication of these documents in Klever 1989b.

22 See now his *opus magnum*, Mignini 1986a.

23 See my publication of the findings in *NRC Handelsblad* [May 8, 1990].

24 See Van Suchtelen 1987. It may be demonstrated that Van den Enden's interest in politics dates at least from 1648, when he played a role in the Peace of Münster, and 1650, when he republished a Dutch political pamphlet, in which the sovereignty of the States of Holland and West-Friesland was defended against the claims of the king of Spain.

25 See *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* 13–14:

This, then is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand, so that their intellect and desire agree entirely with my intellect and desire. To do this it is necessary . . . to form a society of the kind that is desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and surely as possible.

26 This letter (Letter 67A, dated 1675 in Spinoza 1928) was published, not written, in 1675.

27 Glauber's *Miraculum mundi* (1660) was in fact an essay on saltpeter.

28 See Klever 1988d.

29 Letter 8, written by Simon Joosten de Vries on 24 February 1663, says: "Next, I thank you very much for your writings, which were imparted to me by P. Balling and which have given me great joy, particularly the remark to proposition 19" (emphasis added), from which we may conclude that a first part of the later *Ethics* belonged to the writings sent. Spinoza reacted in Letter 9 to the "questions proposed in your circle." It is important to take notice of the fact that Spinoza had urged his friends to imbibe the whole of natural science. This is presupposed in De Vries's closing remark: "I have entered an anatomy course (*collegium anatomicum*), and am about half through. When it is finished, I shall begin chemistry, and following your advice (*suasore te*), go through the whole Medical Course" (emphasis added).
The full title is: Philosophia s. scripturae interpres; Exercitatio Paradoxa, in qua, veram Philosophiam infallibilem S. Literas interpretandi Normam esse, apodictice demonstratur, et discrepantes ab hac Sententiae expenduntur, ac refelluntur. A Dutch translation by the author himself appeared in 1667. There is also a recent French translation, Meyer 1988.

He writes that "I have kept this treatise already some years from the press."

See Zac 1965; Matheron 1969; Meyer 1988. See Klever 1990c.

The italicization is in the text of Meyer and must be read as a literal quotation from what Spinoza said.

This text, written in the years 1669–71 and recently edited by A. J. E. Harmsen (Nil Volentibus Arduum 1989) contains many essays from the pen of Bouwmeester and Meyer, in which one may easily recognize the influence of their conversations with Spinoza and Van den Enden. Meyer wrote, to give only one striking example, in the first chapter:

Everybody is bound by nature to seek his own well-being; and the more capacities my fellow-man have to further my well-being and the more I have to expect from him, the more also am I bound to seek his well-being in which the aforesaid capacities are contained. This is the ground, on which stand all teachings and instructions and whatever one would be able to do for his fellow-man. And nobody directing his behavior to the right reason will toil and moil with work for another, without the expectations that some fruit from this labor will return to him. [Nil Volentibus Arduum 1989: 31]

Compare this passage with the already quoted Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect 13–14. For more information about NVA see Van Suchtelen 1987.

See Proietti 1989c.


For a more elaborate discussion of all aspects of Spinoza’s optics, see Klever and van Zuyl 1990.

The quotation is from E 5p23s.

He also did experiments in hydrostatics (Letter 41) and metallurgy. See Klever 1987.

As noted earlier, the meaning of the seventeenth century word "philosophia" is not the same as the meaning of our twentieth-century "philosophy" but is indeed closer to that of our "science."

First in Een Bloemhof van allerley lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet door Vreederijk Waarmond / ondersoeker der waarheyd / tot nut en dienst
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van al die geen die der nut en dienst uyt trekken wil. Of een vertaaling en uytlegging van al de Hebreusche / Grieksche / Latijnse / Franse / en andere vreemde bastardwoorden en wijsen van spreek . . . , a dictionary in which foreign words from theology, medicine and law were explained. Then also a systematical work: Een ligt schijnende in duystere plaatsen / om te verligten de voornaamste saaken der Godsgeleertheyd en Gods-dienst / ontsteken door Vreederijk Waarmond / ondersoeker der Waarheyd. Anders Adr. Koerbagh. The text of Een Ligt is republished in a critical edition by H. Vandenbossche, Koerbagh 1974. Also see: Vandenbossche 1978; and Evenhuis 1971: IV,351–61. At his trial, Koerbagh explicitly confessed, “that he was in contact with Spinoza and had visited him sometimes.”

42 The work is masterfully written, testifies to the strong ability of the author in linguistics and natural science, and is a first class anti-theological treatise which deserves to be taken into consideration by Spinoza scholars. One must conclude that the Theological-Political Treatise is only one of many similar writings from members of the Amsterdam circle, which all defend the same ideas. I have already mentioned Balling’s Licht op den kandelaar (1662) and Meyer’s Interpres (1666), but one must also mention Jelles’s Belijdenisse des algemeenen en christelijken geloofs (1673).

43 “Hamburgi, apud Henricum Künraht” instead of “Amsterdam, Jan Rieuwertsz.” Spinoza later (around 1675) made many annotations, some of which were quite long, to the text of the Theological-Political Treatise, which were first published in the original Latin by Chr. Th. de Murr in de Murr 1802. They were earlier published in French as Remarques curieuses et necessaires pour l'intelligence de ce livre, added to the French translation of the Theological-Political Treatise by Saint-Glen, which first appeared under the title: La clef du Sanctuaire ([Spinoza] 1678). For an erudite discussion of the problems around these annotations and their variants, see Totaro 1989.


45 For the later relations between Spinoza and Van Velthuysen see my monograph, Klever 1990d.

46 The last two quoted phrases are from J. M. Lucas, in Freudenthal 1899.

47 J. M. Lucas [Freudenthal 1899: 15] writes: “He had the advantage to be known by the sir pensionary De Witt, who wished to learn from him mathematics and who gave him often the honor to consult him on important matters.” The relationship between Spinoza and De Witt is confirmed by Sebastian Kortholt in the preface to Kortholt 1700, where it is said that Spinoza would have preferred to be torn to pieces “with the De Witts, his friends” than to look after vain glory.
Lucas confirms this writing, “that he shed many tears when he saw how his fellow citizens lacerated their common father” (Freudenthal 1899: 19).

The story seems to be truthful, since there is no reason why Leibniz would have fabricated it. We know moreover, that Spinoza was well read in Suetonius, in whose The twelve Caesars one finds an expression which is very close to “ultimi barbarorum,” namely “ultimi Romanorum.” This expression could have inspired Spinoza to his crypto-citation.

For full and precise bibliographical information see Kingma and Offenberg 1977.

Spinoza's name “coepit inclarescere.” See Klever 1989c.


Cf. Sebastian Kortholt's remark in Kortholt 1700: 27, “Politici enim nomen affectabat” – he wanted the name of a politician, i.e., a good citizen.

The passage appears in Letter 21, to Blijenbergh. A persuasive presentation of this attitude also occurs in Ethics 4p45s2:

My account of the matter, the view I have arrived at, is this: no deity, nor anyone else, unless he is envious, takes pleasure in my lack of power and my misfortune, nor does he ascribe to virtue our tears, sighs, fear, and other things of that kind, which are signs of a weak mind. To use things, therefore, and take pleasure in them as far as possible – not, of course to the point where we are disgusted with them, for there is no pleasure in that – this is the part of a wise man. It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation with pleasant food and drink, with scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind, which anyone can use without injury to another. For the human Body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole Body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the Mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things.

See also Letter 30, Ethics 2p49s, and the Preface to Ethics Part 3.

One example is his anger consequent on the murder of the brothers De Witt. Another example is indicated in a letter of Philippus van Limborch to Jean Le Clerc (January 23, 1682) in the University Library of Amsterdam (printed as appendix 10 in Meinsma 1896): “I remember that I was six years ago invited to a dinner, to which beyond my expectation also
this author was present. During the prayer he showed signs of an irreligious soul by means of gesticulations by which he seemingly tried to demonstrate our stupidity in praying to God."

"Les richesses ne le tentoient pas." He tried to be economically self-supporting by means of grinding and selling lenses. S. J. de Vries wanted to grant him 2,000 guilders but Spinoza refused to accept the gift. A yearly pension of 500 guilders, offered to him by the brother of that friend (the De Vries from Schiedam) was, at his request, reduced to 300 guilders [Freudenthal 1899: 17-18].


59 Compare Spinoza's definition of "individuum" in the physical excursus following Ethics 2p13.

60 See the interesting remark of Proietti 1989c: 266: "Il 1675 rappresenta un punto di crisi e di svolta per il cammino intellettuale di Spinoza." The year 1675 represents a turning point in Spinoza's life. He now puts everything aside [see Letter 84] for the transition from the theological-political to the political order. Spinoza prepares for a decisive battle: "un intervento politico di natura teorica." "C'è battaglia aperta, nuova, decisiva e ultima" [Proietti 1989c: 269].

61 Jelles sees Spinoza's "untimely" death as a confirmation of a general rule: "But the death has demonstrated that human intentions are seldom executed" [Akkerman 1980: 254].

62 To mention a few of them: Van Blijenbergh 1674; Mansvelt 1674; Cuper 1676; Melchior 1671; Batalier 1674; Musaeus 1674; Spizelius 1675. Spizelius calls Spinoza a "most irreligious author." Mansfelt says that the Theological-Political Treatise should be condemned forever. Similar remarks are made by the other authors.

63 The list may be found in Catalogus van de bibliotheek der Vereniging 'Het Spinozahuis' te Rijnsburg, Leiden: Brill, 1965. A more extended description appears in the Catalogus van de boekery der Vereniging Het Spinozahuis [n.d.]. The list is also printed in Préposiet, J. Bibliographie spinoziste, Besançon: Centre de Documentation [n.d.].

64 See Vulliaud 1934.

65 The authors here are: Tacitus, Livius, Virgilius, Arrianos, Petronius, Lucianus, Julius Caesar, Seneca, Sallustius, Martialis, Plinius, Ovidius, Plautus, Cicero, Curtius, and Justinianus.

66 There is also a French translation, with introduction and notes: Tschirnhaus 1980.

67 "Grâce à la physique nous sommes préparés à des connaissances beaucoup plus importantes encore."

68 See Klever 1991a.

69 See Klever 1988a.
Other examples of Spinoza’s friends who became scientists are: Dr. P. van Balen, author of *De verbetering der gedachten* (1684 and 1691) (edited by M. J. van Hoven in van Balen 1988); Dr. P. van Gent (see Klever 1991a); and Dr. A. Cuffeler, author of *Artis ratiocinandi naturalis et artificialis ad pantosophiae principia manuducens*, 1684.

Concerning Rieuwerts, the Dutch bishop Neercassel wrote in 1677 to the Roman Catholic cardinal Barberini: “This bookseller usually publishes whatever exotic and impious is thought out here by impudent and conceited minds,” alluding to the *Opera posthuma* and its author. See Klever 1988c.