
Religion and power in Spinoza. Essays on the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus

Josep Olesti and Jörg Zimmer (editors)

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Religion and power in Spinoza. Essays on the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus is the outcome of a painstaking effort to offer a multifaceted vision of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth, TTP). Josep Olesti and Jörg Zimmer, both professors at the Universitat de Girona, have managed to compile six articles that address different salient aspects of the work, giving rise to a whole that embraces different points of interest for scholars of Spinoza's political thinking. The choice of English as the language of the compilation reveals Olesti's and Zimmer's goal for the book to engage in dialogue with recent international scholarly works on Spinoza and the TTP. With this gesture, Olesti and Zimmer are contributing to helping Catalan philosophical research to gain international traction and thus consolidate its place within the contemporary scholarly world. A quick glance at the contents of the different articles reveals the precision of the contributions and their interest within the context of current debates on the TTP.

In the first article, Miquel Beltrán starts with Oberto Marrama's English translation of Alexandre Koyré's text 'Le Chien, constellation céleste, et le chien, animal aboyant' (1950). According to Koyré, Marrama suggests that Spinoza's God must be attributed 'creative understanding' that is capable of conceiving everything he creates before actually creating it. Beltrán develops the article as a critical response to the interpretation of Koyré and Marrama, arguing that in Spinoza's God, the source of everything real, understanding and creation are two inseparable things. Beltrán's critique brings up a key point in properly interpreting Spinoza's philosophy: the need not to attribute to God understanding and will *qua* autonomous faculties separate from each other. Thus, relying on a solid exercise in exegetics, Beltrán shows how God 'wants' what he 'understands', in the sense that establishes all the truths contained in his infinite essence eternal.

Next, Francisco David Corrales Cerdón's article reveals the existence of important similarities between the concept of prophecy that Spinoza presents in the TTP and the notion of prophecy

that Averroes outlines in *Talkhis kitab al-hiss wa-al-mahsus (Epitome of the Parva Naturalia)*. As Corrales Cordón demonstrates, there are three main parallelisms between Spinoza's and Averroes' concepts of prophecy. First, they dovetail from an epistemological standpoint, in that both authors describe prophecy as an imaginative act lacking the rigour and precision inherent to rational knowledge. Secondly, they address the anthropological dimension in a similar fashion: a prophet is not a chosen messenger with privileged access to the revealed truth but a being anointed with an extraordinary imagination and good rhetorical gifts to communicate the fruit of his or her imagination. Finally, they also share a way of understanding the social role of prophecy: thanks to his or her picturesque and striking language, the prophet can teach the divine law to everyone who does not have the means to access it.

Next, in the article '*Imperium in imperio: themes and variations*', Josep Olesti undertakes a curious analysis of the expression '*Imperium in imperio*'. According to Olesti, two major uses of it can be distinguished: a political one and a metaphysical one. The political one is used in chapter XVII of the TTP in connection with Spinoza's Hobbes-inspired thesis that all power must rest with the sovereign who is given the right to enact laws. In the TTP, '*imperium in imperio*' means the circumstance which emerges when there is a religious estate which tries to appropriate competences like the power to decide on sacred and liturgical jobs: this estate ends up becoming a 'state within a state', which undermines the power of the real state and leads it towards its destruction. The metaphysical use appears in the *Ethica* and the *Tractatus Politicus*: there, Spinoza uses the expression to refer to the biased conception of man as an '*imperium in imperio*', that is, as a unique being capable of transcending nature's determinism. Having analysed both uses, Olesti concludes the article by arguing that the realities that they both denote are rooted in an erroneous, non-Spinozian conception of power.

In the fourth article in the compilation, Josep Maria Ruiz Simon undertakes a meticulous contextualisation of the elements of the TTP that hark back to Tacitus' *Annals*. In the extensive first section of the article, Ruiz Simon situates Spinoza's references to Tacitus within the framework of the ideological disputes between Remonstrants and non-Remonstrants, the latter victorious after the synod of Dort (1618-19). The victory of the anti-Remonstrant Protestants must have concerned Spinoza given his defence of a 'dual sovereignty', in which there had to be a religious power with a series of its own authorities outside of political power. Because of this event, the anti-Remonstrants held a 'seditious opinion', which endangered the integrity of the state in that it opened the door to an '*imperium in imperio*', to borrow from Olesti. In fact, once again linking up with Tacitus, Ruiz Simon suggests that Spinoza saw the anti-Remonstrants as a potential threat to freedom of expression similar what, according to Tacitus, fatally occurred in the times of Augustus and Tiberius. Based on this vast contextualisation, in the rest of the article Ruiz Simon traces the maxims of Tacitus and Machiavelli which Spinoza drew from as a remedy to these potential perils.

To complete the work, the last two articles by Moshe Shner and Jörg Zimmer focus on the footprint of Spinoza's political thinking on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophy. Shner

presents the historicisation of the Scriptures and the claims of intolerance among religions as the novelties of the TTP. These two milestones must have gelled in two of the most prominent Jewish intellectuals from the second half of the eighteenth century: Moses Mendelssohn, the peerless advocate of tolerance, and Solomon Maimon, the ‘Spinoza of the eighteenth century’, who once again insisted on the historical nature of the Holy Scriptures. Finally, Jörg Zimmer scrutinises Marx’s and Feuerbach’s interpretations of the TTP, first outlining the complex reception of Spinozian philosophy in Germany based on the pronounced stigmatisation it experienced from the early eighteenth century until Schelling and Hegel’s enthusiastic readings of his metaphysics.

The last two contributions by Shner and Zimmer ultimately end up comprising a rich whole which coherently brings together remarkably different facets of the TTP. Beltrán and Olesti address issues in the TTP that dovetail with the core themes of the *Ethica*: their interpretations seek to shed light on issues in Spinoza’s political thinking by referring to core elements in Spinozian metaphysics. Corrales Cordón and Ruiz Simon reveal a more historical mission by shedding light on the ties between the TTP and Averroes and the political theories influenced by Tacitus, respectively. Finally, Shner and Zimmer complete Corrales Cordón’s and Ruiz Simon’s historical perspective by shifting the focus to two key junctures within the reception of the TTP. Therefore, with only six articles, Olesti and Zimmer have managed to assemble a complete corpus which deserves a worthy place within contemporary Spinozian studies.