

# *Spinoza's Life: 1677–1802*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Few issues in the history of early modern philosophy have recently drawn as much attention as Spinoza's role in the European Enlightenment. Jonathan Israel's attempts to situate Spinoza at the heart of the Radical Enlightenment, which according to Israel took the lead in the major debates defining the Enlightenment as such, have been hailed as a decisive breakthrough, but they have also become the target of increasingly critical reviews.<sup>1</sup> This paper does not seek to address the fate of Spinoza's works during the eighteenth century. Instead, it attempts to chart the way in which, almost immediately after Spinoza's death in 1677, a highly specific life of the Dutch philosopher was produced and how this contributed to the rediscovery of Spinoza by the end of the eighteenth century as a serious philosopher and, in the Netherlands, as a proper Dutchman.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights, 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a full list of reviews and other critical assessments, see <http://www.hs.ias.edu/israel/publications>.

In this paper, it will be argued first that it was only after agreement had been reached that Spinoza had lived a life becoming to a genuine philosopher that his work came to be included in the canon of the history of philosophy, and second that it was largely due to Pierre Bayle's intervention that in the course of the eighteenth century Spinoza's life could come to the rescue of his works. Bayle's efforts, together with Jarig Jelles's and the other editors of Spinoza's *Opera posthuma*, appear to have laid the foundation of a very basic fact concerning the eighteenth-century perception of Spinoza, a fact that could easily be overlooked: nobody, not even his fiercest critics, seems to have had any doubt as to the nature of his identity *as a philosopher*, at a time, it should be added, that this very identity was subject to larger debate. For what *was* a philosopher supposed to be, to do, to act like, in the early modern age? The authors who had made it into the philosophical canon no longer necessarily served as university professors; they could write about almost everything, and their status and comportment in society could be equally diverse.

In the introduction to a recent, important collection of essays edited by Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Ian Hunter, simply entitled *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe*, in which Spinoza curiously enough is not mentioned once, some of the characteristics identifying the persona of the early modern philosopher are summarized, and to all intents and purposes Bayle's and Jelles's Spinoza fitted the bill perfectly: "[d]uring the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ancient notions of philosophical personae were preserved or recovered and made central to the elaboration of the philosophical debate." Being a philosopher once more became tied up with following a special praxis: "[i]ssues of living a certain kind of philosophical life and exhibiting a specific moral decorum persisted."<sup>2</sup>

Spinoza's works hardly abound with references to his own life, but the one crucial exception to the virtual absence of autobiographical elements in his writings brilliantly confirms the existential ambition of his philosophy, an ambition that is far from obvious from the style of his magnum opus, the *Ethica ordine geometrico demonstrata*. Just read the opening lines of what is generally regarded as Spinoza's earliest text, the *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione*, with its emphasis on the urgency of acquiring a new nature, which will allow the philosopher to follow a "new plan of life," leading to "the highest good," that is, "the greatest joy, to eternity."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Ian Hunter, eds., *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Herman de Dijn, *Spinoza: The Way to Wisdom* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1996), 19–29. See Theo Zwieman, *L'introduction à la philosophie selon Spinoza*:

Spinoza's earnestness and his obvious commitment both to being a philosopher and to living the life appropriate to this office earned him the respect even of many of his critics.

## II. THE SOURCES

The number of sources on Spinoza's life available to eighteenth-century readers was fairly limited, and not that much has changed. The details that have been added during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are fascinating, but we still face many crucial gaps in his biography that can only be dealt with by reconstructing the wider cultural context from which Spinoza emerged. The facts, unfortunately, are few. Eighteenth-century readers interested in Spinoza's life essentially had five major sources, plus one minor one.<sup>4</sup> There was, first of all, the biographical sketch supplied by Jarig Jelles in the preface to the *Opera posthuma* of 1677.<sup>5</sup> Jelles, a well-to-do grocer and a member of the Mennonite community of Amsterdam, was one of Spinoza's closest friends and, although he was hardly an impartial spectator or a disengaged historian, he must have been very well informed about the details of Spinoza's biography. Jelles clearly belonged to Spinoza's inner circle, and he was one of the few people who must have known Spinoza from the late 1650s, and possibly even before he was banned in 1656, to the end of his life.

Second, *La vie de Spinoza* should be mentioned—first published in 1719, almost simultaneously both in the *Nouvelles littéraires* and in a joint edition with *L'esprit de Spinoza*. The latter, however, in a classic case of cold feet, was largely suppressed by its publisher from the Hague, Charles Levier, who initially was bold enough to have this explosive material printed, but whose courage appears to have deserted him once it came to distributing it.<sup>6</sup> Most experts believe *La vie* was written shortly after Spinoza's death, probably by Jean-Maximilien Lucas, a disenchanted Huguenot

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*Une analyse structurelle de l'introduction du Traité de la réforme de l'entendement suivie d'un commentaire de ce texte* (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 2 vols., ed. Manfred Walther and Michael Czelinski (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Fromann Holzboog, 2006). K. O. Meinsma's crucially important *Spinoza en zijn kring* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1896) had been published just before Freudenthal's authoritative collection of sources. See also Michael Czelinski-Uesbeck, *Der tugendhafte Atheist: Studien zur Vorgeschichte der Spinoza-Renaissance in Deutschland* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2006), 40–68.

<sup>5</sup> F. Akkerman and H. G. Hubbeling, "The Preface to Spinoza's Posthumous Works and Its Author Jarig Jelles (c. 1619/1620–1683)," *Lias* 6 (1979): 103–73.

<sup>6</sup> Silvia Berti, ed., *Trattato dei tre impostori: La vita e lo spirit del signor Benedetto de Spinoza* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1994).

living in the Hague, and that after this, *L'esprit* was penned, edited, and enlarged by a group of *esprits forts* close to Levier, possibly including Jan Vroesen.<sup>7</sup> The US scholar Travis Frampton, however, believes *La vie* must have been composed in the early eighteenth century. This is not the occasion to address this chronological issue; I mention Frampton's work mainly because he has delivered a fascinating literary analysis of *La vie*. According to Frampton, *La vie* is no biography at all, but a very special hagiography based explicitly on the life of Jesus as told in the New Testament, which makes it a hazardous historical source.<sup>8</sup>

Third, Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* of 1697 also offered vital information on the Dutch philosopher, and the second edition of 1702 added several long footnotes.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, the wide dissemination of the *Dictionnaire*, which went into five separate editions within several decades and was translated into German and English, suggests it to have been a crucial source for the European Enlightenment as a whole. In fact, the entry on Spinoza was soon also translated into Dutch and published as a separate booklet.<sup>10</sup> While the question of whether Bayle's rendering of Spinoza's metaphysics was adequate and fair continued to be discussed throughout the century, the general drift of Bayle's assessment of Spinoza's moral character was to become extremely influential.

Fourth, another important source stems from the German Lutheran minister Johann Köhler, better known as Colerus, who held a ministry in the Hague and in 1705 published his *Korte, dog waarachtige Levensbeschryving van Benedictus de Spinoza*, which also appeared in French as early as 1706, after which it was included in Nicolas Lenglet de Dufresnoy's collection of *Spinozana*, oddly entitled *Réfutation des erreurs de M. Benoit de Spinoza*, of 1731, which would in turn serve as one of the crucial vehicles

<sup>7</sup> Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 696.

<sup>8</sup> Travis M. Frampton, *Spinoza, Religious Heterodoxy, and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (London: Continuum, 2006), chap. 4. See also Paul Vernière, *Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954), 27: "Spinoza devant les docteurs juifs fait penser à Jésus devant Caïphe"; and, more generally, Dinah Ribard, *Raconter, vivre, penser: Histoires de philosophes, 1650–1766* (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2003), chap. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Écrits sur Spinoza*, ed. Françoise Charles Daubert and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: L'Autre Rive, 1983). See Isabelle Delpla, "Bayle: Pensées diverses sur l'athéisme ou le paradoxe de l'athée citoyen," *Figures du théologico-politique*, ed. Emmanuel Cattin, Laurent Jaffro, and Alain Petit (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1999), 117–47; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, chap. 18; Winfried Schröder, "Zwei 'tugendhafte Atheisten': Zum Verhältniss von Moral und Religion bei Bayle," *Aufklärung* 16 (2004): 9–20; Czelinski-Uesbeck, *Der tugendhafte Atheist*, 100–115.

<sup>10</sup> François Halma, *Het leven van B. de Spinoza, met eenige Aanteekeningen over zijn Bedryf, Schriften en Gevoelens* (Utrecht: François Halma-Willem vande Water, 1698).

of the early French Radical Enlightenment.<sup>11</sup> Colerus's biography appeared twice in German, in 1733 and 1734.<sup>12</sup> Colerus made a special effort to clarify the *hows* and *whys* of Spinoza's removal from the Jewish community of Amsterdam.

Fifth, we should not forget that perhaps the most important source had already become available with the publication of Spinoza's posthumous works in 1677. Fortunately, the editors of the *Opera posthuma* had taken the trouble to collect some eighty letters to and from Spinoza, and arguably, these still constitute the most important contemporary source on Spinoza's life. By the same token, however, these letters present us with a major problem. For Spinoza's is a tiny correspondence compared to that of Descartes, Bayle, Locke, or Leibniz. Descartes's correspondence includes over 800 letters, Bayle's over 1,600, Locke's over 3,600, and Leibniz's somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 letters. More importantly, the editors, including most notably Jarig Jelles, Lodewijk Meyer, and Johannes Bouwmeester, did not simply print whatever they had collected after Spinoza's death; they obviously made a carefully edited selection.<sup>13</sup> They made sure, for instance, not to implicate people who could suffer from being associated with Spinoza. Clearly, they aimed to counter the many dangerous rumors relating to Spinoza and wanted to forestall violent reactions, particularly in response to the *Ethics*, and thus they created a life of Spinoza, the essence of which was never seriously questioned by later biographers—a *life* revolving entirely around his *works*. Here was a man, or so Spinoza's first editors wanted posterity to believe, whose life was entirely devoted to the pursuit of truth. This is especially obvious in Jelles's preface, which relates how Spinoza's pursuit of truth was so dedicated that, according to the people whose house he shared, at one time he did not leave the premises for three consecutive months.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Fénelon, Lamy, Boulainvilliers, *Réfutation des erreurs de M. Benoit de Spinoza*, ed. Nicolas Lenglet Dufresnoy (Brussels [= Amsterdam]: Francois Foppens, 1731). See Geraldine Sheridan, "Aux origines de l'Essai de métaphysique du comte de Boulainviller: Le Korte Verhandeling," in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 321–32; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 565–74. The French translation of Colerus's biography appeared just before Bayle passed away. "Le philosophe de Rotterdam" was not happy with the way in which Colerus had corrected some of his own observations. See Pierre Bayle, *Ceuvres diverses*, 4 vols. (The Hague: Compagnie des Libraires, 1737), 4:875–76.

<sup>12</sup> Rüdiger Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1994), 47n49.

<sup>13</sup> Piet Steenbakkens, *Spinoza's Ethica from Manuscript to Print: Studies on Text, Form, and Related Topics* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1995), chap. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 1:5.

Finally, there is a sixth, minor source, slightly smaller than the others, and outside Germany probably not as well known as the five just mentioned. But it is not without interest: the preface added in 1700 by Sebastian Kortholt to his late father Christian's *De tribus impostoribus magnis*, which had first been published twenty years earlier. Father and son were unequivocally disgusted by Spinoza's philosophy: the impostors in question were not Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, but Cherbury, Hobbes, and Spinoza. Yet the Kortholts, too, painted a picture of a man singularly devoted to his work. In Sebastian Kortholt's rendering, however, this dedication, first noticed by Jelles, acquired a slightly perverted twist:

For, being much too diligent, he devoted himself to his studies far into the night, and for the most part toiled over his dark writings by lamplight from the tenth evening hour until the third, and mostly abstained from human intercourse in the daytime, so that not a hour be lost for the work of his own undoing, and the perdition of others.<sup>15</sup>

While it is tempting to discard such lines as the product of the revulsion Spinoza's "atheism" provoked among scores of theologians across Europe, they also appear to indicate a typically eighteenth-century and specifically "enlightened" concern over a perceived lack of sociability.<sup>16</sup> Kortholt's Spinoza is a sickly loner. The way in which Spinoza set out to find his "truth" was definitely unhealthy, or so Kortholt wanted us to believe.

Thus, Kortholt's assessment of Spinoza's character tried to correct the image presented by Spinoza's correspondence in particular. It is impossible to determine the extent to which this image had been framed by the editors. Yet every modern reader must be struck by the ubiquitous presence in Spinoza's correspondence of the theme of friendship. Again and again, Spinoza and his correspondents reveal a remarkable eagerness to establish and to

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:75: "Allzu fleissig hat er bis tief in der Nacht hinein sich den Studien hingegeben . . . und sich bei Tage dem Umgang mit Menschen entzogen, damit keine Stunde verdorben würde in der er an seinem eigenen und dem Verderben der anderen arbeitete." The translation is borrowed from *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*, ed. A. Wolf (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1927), 166. See Jacqueline Lagrée, "Christian Kortholt (1633–1694) et son *De tribus impostoribus magnis*," in *L'hérésie spinoziste: La discussion sur le Tractatus theologico-politicus, 1670–1677 de Benedictus de Spinoza*, ed. Paulo Cristofolini (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995), 169–83.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, the excellent entry by Daniel Gordon on "Sociability," in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, 4 vols., ed. Alan Charles Kors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4:96–108.

elaborate upon the friendship binding them together, even if they disagree fundamentally about ideas or opinions. Read, for instance, the exchange of letters with Henri Oldenburg, first secretary of the Royal Society. Consider the fact that Spinoza remained friends with his Amsterdam circle after leaving the city, and the beautiful way in which he denied his friendship to the correspondent Willem van Blijenbergh. And it was in the name of former friendship that Spinoza decided to reply to Albert Burgh's curious attempt to have him convert to the Church of Rome.<sup>17</sup> These exchanges clearly followed an early modern humanist *topos*: Aristotle and Cicero had argued that friendship was a prime civic virtue, necessary for the maintenance of political unity. In Spinoza's case, however, his dedication to friendship appears to go beyond such well-trodden paths, as it returns in the *Ethics* itself, most notably in E III, 59 schol, E IV, app12, and E IV, 70 and 71dem.

To put this into perspective, we should probably realize, first, how important friendships were in the context of the Republic of Letters, in which the status of its inhabitants was largely defined by the people they could call their friends; and second, that most early modern Europeans owed their livelihood to some sort of family business—be it a farm, a shop, or some other family firm. It would seem that Spinoza, after he was banned from the Jewish community of Amsterdam in 1656, was in special need of a social as well as an economic network that could serve as an alternative to the family, which is why, or so I should like to suggest, the continual reaffirmation of the importance of friendship illustrates a real and vital element in his biography—an element that transcended contemporary literary conventions and enabled the editors of his correspondence to demonstrate that their friend was, indeed, a thoroughly decent *and* sociable human being.<sup>18</sup>

Following the extremely hostile reactions to the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* of 1670, the editors of Spinoza's correspondence had every reason to create a life of Spinoza that would counter the many accusations hurled

<sup>17</sup> Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet, *La République des Lettres* (Paris: Belin-DeBoeck, 1997); Saskia Stegeman, *Patronage and Service in the Republic of Letters: The Network of Theodorus Janssonius van Almelooven (1657–1712)* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 2005); Luuc Kooijmans, *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven in de 17<sup>de</sup> en 18<sup>de</sup> eeuw* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1997); Frank Lucash, "Spinoza on Friendship," *Philosophia* 40 (2012): 305–17.

at their friend. Clearly, Spinoza's reputation within the Jewish community had been destroyed for good in 1656. But also, soon after the *herem* dangerous rumors concerning the atheism propounded in Spinoza's "circle" had started to circulate beyond this rather isolated Portuguese enclave in the Netherlands.<sup>19</sup> Once Spinoza started to publish, things got even worse, and arguably the most troubling element of the early criticisms of the *TTP* in particular concerned the recurring suggestion of foul play. According to Johannes Bredenburg, for instance—the Rotterdam author of an ambitious *Energatio tractatus theologico-politici* (1675)—Spinoza's hermeneutical claim that he had Scripture interpret itself was as unfair as it was ludicrous, since it merely served to hide from view the obviously atheist metaphysics underlying his exegetics.<sup>20</sup> Once the *Ethics* had become available, seven years after the publication of the *Tractatus*, Spinoza's early critics felt Bredenburg had been proven right: Spinoza had been an atheist all along, and it was only after his death, or so it was felt, that he had come clean. Similar sentiments were expressed throughout the eighteenth century, as is evident, for instance, from *The Christian Freethinker* (1740), according to which Spinoza had deliberately and perniciously "dissembled his principles."<sup>21</sup>

Like father and son Kortholt, Bayle and Colerus both rejected Spinoza's views, but unlike the Kortholts they also admired his moral character. In Bayle's case, Spinoza's way of life took on special interest since it confirmed his view, first expressed in his 1682 comments on the appearance of the comet of Halley, that there was such a thing as a "virtuous atheist." As will be only too familiar, Bayle had been inspired to elaborate on the tenuous relationship between religion and morality by Le Mothe le Vayer, whose *La vertu des païens* had appeared as early as 1642. By turning Spinoza into the ultimate virtuous atheist, Bayle provided the entire eighteenth century with a format to make sense out of what was apparently regarded as a problem. If anything, the case of Spinoza's biography confirms the massive European impact of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chaps. 7–9.

<sup>20</sup> Johannes Bredenburg, *Energatio tractatus theologico-politici* (Rotterdam: Isaac Naeranus, 1675).

<sup>21</sup> *The Christian Freethinker: Or an Epistolary Discourse on Freedom of Thought* (London, 1740), 58. See Paul J. Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology and Politics: A Reading of Benedict Spinoza's Tractatus theologico-politicus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 48n54.

<sup>22</sup> Still very impressive: Pierre Rétat, *Le Dictionnaire de Bayle et la lutte philosophique au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1971).



### III. TOLAND TO VOLTAIRE ON THE VIRTUOUS ATHEIST

One of the first early Enlightenment philosophers to pick up on Bayle's comments was the elusive Irish freethinker John Toland. In Toland's fourth *Letter to Serena* (1704), Bayle's observations are simply reiterated. In what appears to be a direct critique of Jelles's observation that the editors of the *Opera posthuma* were convinced Spinoza did not want his full name on the title page of his works because he did not want his philosophy named after him,<sup>23</sup> Toland accused Spinoza of cherishing the ambition to head a philosophical "sect."<sup>24</sup> Yet he agreed with Bayle that atheists need not be immoral, and that, in Spinoza's case, it was impossible to deny that

he was truly sober, observant of the Laws of his Country, and not possess with the sordid Passion of heaping up Riches: for there's nothing more undeniable from antient History and present Experience, than that as the Professors of Truth are not always the greatest Saints, so Men of erroneous Principles have often led excellent Lives . . .<sup>25</sup>

Elsewhere, Toland affirmed that despite his rejection of Spinoza's philosophy, "yet Spinosa was for all that a great and good man in many respects, as may not onely be seen by his Works; but also by the *Account of his Life* since that time publish'd by Colerus."<sup>26</sup> According to Rosalie Colie, early British Deists such as Toland came to appropriate Spinoza's biography: "Aloof, apparently uncommitted to anything but truth, Spinoza's life could be read as a moral exemplum for the life of reason."<sup>27</sup> This process, she claimed, took place from 1680 to 1720, and it would seem that it set the precedent for a much wider, gradual acceptance of Spinoza into the canon of philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Freudenthal, *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinozas*, 1:5. See also Bayle, *Écrits sur Spinoza*, 89. Similar assessments of Spinoza's *ambitio* and *superbia* are to be found in early German sources: Czeliński-Uesbeck, *Der tugendhafte Atheist*, 77–82.

<sup>24</sup> John Toland, *Letters to Serena* (London: Bernard Lintot, 1704), 135–36. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 615.

<sup>25</sup> Toland, *Letters to Serena*, 133.

<sup>26</sup> [John Toland], *Mangoneutes: Being a Defence of Nazarenus* (London, 1720), 186.

<sup>27</sup> Rosalie L. Colie, "Spinoza and the Early English Deists," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 23–46, at 46.

<sup>28</sup> See, most recently, Penelope J. Corfield, "'An Age of Infidelity': Secularization in Eighteenth-Century England," *Social History* 39 (2014): 229–47.

Occasionally, radical authors gave a shrewd twist to Bayle's account, as is evident from a clandestine manuscript dating from the 1720s and probably composed by César Chesneau Du Marsais, entitled *De la conduite qu'un honnête homme doit garder pendant sa vie*. While Bayle's conception of the virtuous atheist was based on his conviction that reason has little to do with moral character, and that human behavior is first and foremost the result of our temperaments, Du Marsais felt that reason is fully capable of triumphing over the passions, and that, as a consequence, reasonable men were necessarily unbelievers, since religion is the product of our passions. Therefore, Du Marsais continued, Spinoza's moral virtue should not be conceived of as demonstrating the theoretical possibility of virtuous atheism, but rather as illustrating the general rule that a life guided by reason is morally superior.<sup>29</sup> Jean-Frédéric Bernard, the author of the *Histoires et coutûmes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, the massive and brilliantly illustrated series (1723–43) that has recently been dubbed *The Book that Changed Europe*, concurred wholeheartedly in his work's fourth volume (1736).<sup>30</sup> Bernard felt that even Bayle's glowing comments on Spinoza's life did not do justice to the man, as Bayle had had no access to Lucas's *La vie de Spinoza*.<sup>31</sup> Bernard cited several pages of *La vie*, and added some insights of his own, including a particularly poignant assessment of the way in which Spinoza reacted to criticism: Spinoza, according to Bernard, never fostered the slightest resentment against his critics, and displayed a virtue perfectly suited to "civil society."<sup>32</sup> Then again, according to Bernard, Spinoza was no atheist at all,

<sup>29</sup> For an edition, by Antony McKenna, see *Lias* 14 (1987): 229–56, at 245: "Benoît Spinoza était d'une vie irréprochable, n'enseignait que la vertu et nombre de bonnes maximes sur le devoir de l'honnête homme. Toutes ses conversations étaient édifiantes, il ne jurait jamais, ni ne parlait non plus avec irrévérence de Dieu, ne se souciait ni de vin ni de bonne chère ni d'argent, ne songeait qu'à l'étude et y passait une meilleure partie de la nuit." See also Antony McKenna, "Spinoza et les 'athées vertueux' dans un manuscrit clandestin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Spinoza au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Olivier Bloch (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1990), 85–92, at 89. The cited passage is almost a verbatim quote from Bayle's note (I): *Écrits sur Spinoza*, 52.

<sup>30</sup> [Jean-Frédéric Bernard, Bernard Picart], *Histoires et coutûmes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde*, tome quatrième (Amsterdam: J. F. Bernard, 1736), 335ff. See Lynn Hunt, Margaret C. Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *The Book that Changed Europe: Picart and Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). See also the accompanying volume, edited by the same authors, *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Bernard was mistaken. See Madeleine Francès, *Spinoza dans les pays néerlandais de la seconde moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Alcan, 1937), 117.

<sup>32</sup> [Bernard, Picart], *Histoires et coutûmes religieuses*, 339.

but rather the proponent of a “deïsme compliqué”;<sup>33</sup> Bernard felt that real atheism was extremely rare and virtually impossible. However, including Spinoza in the deist canon clearly was stretching the concept of deism to its limits.

By contrast, Voltaire, arguably the most famous eighteenth-century proponent of deism, was not at all inclined to consider Spinoza a deist. It should be borne in mind that Voltaire had very little sympathy for Spinoza and did not study his work in any depth. Scattered throughout his work, however, we do find more than an occasional reference to Spinoza. In *Le philosophe ignorant* (1766), for example, Voltaire developed a rather peculiar way to articulate his qualms, by attempting to couple Spinoza and Bayle. He did admire, in a way, “le philosophe de Rotterdam,” but to his mind the two Dutch philosophers shared “almost the same character” in their all too single-minded devotion to their work, for even Spinoza, although he destroyed all principles of morality, was “d’une vertu rigide.”<sup>34</sup> Coming from Voltaire, who had his own views on what a civilized life looked like, this was hardly a compliment, but in his letters to the prince of Brunswick (1768), the tone softens considerably: “It is right to detest his atheism, but wrong to be-lie his character. Never was there a man, in every sense, more averse to vain glory. This must be owned. Do not let us, while we condemn, calumniate him.”<sup>35</sup> In the *Questions sur l’Encyclopédie* (1770–74) Voltaire reminded his readers where the real enemy was to be found, arguing that (religious) fanaticism was a thousand times more dangerous than philosophical atheism, and that Spinoza had led a blameless life.<sup>36</sup> To which he added, in the *Supplément*, that it had not been Spinoza who had murdered Van Oldenbarnevelt and the brothers De Witt.<sup>37</sup> Similar sentiments were expressed in the article on Spinoza of the *Encyclopédie*, probably written by Claude Yvon.<sup>38</sup> The article was included in the fifteenth

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>34</sup> [Voltaire], *Le Philosophe ignorant* (S.l., 1766), 46. See Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, 658–75. Dinah Ribard has pointed to the real similarities between Spinoza’s and Bayle’s “solitude” and to their similar disregard for the body: *Raconter, vivre, penser*, 130–34.

<sup>35</sup> Voltaire, *Letters Addressed to His Highness The Prince of \*\*\*\** (London, 1779), 142; [Voltaire], *Lettres à son altesse monseigneur le Prince de \*\*\*\** (London, 1768), 110.

<sup>36</sup> [Voltaire], *Collection complete des œuvres*, vol. 22 (Genève, 1774), 371: “le fanatisme est un monstre mille fois plus dangereux que l’athéisme philosophique. Spinoza n’a jamais commis une seule mauvaise action.”

<sup>37</sup> [Voltaire], *Supplément aux Questions sur l’Encyclopédie* (London, 1776), 35: “ce ne fut pas lui assurément qui eut part à l’assassinat juridique de Barnevelt, ce ne fut pas lui qui déchira les deux frères de Witt en morceaux, et qui les mangea sur le gril.”

<sup>38</sup> Alexandre Métraux, “Über Denis Diderots physiologisch interpretierten Spinoza,” *Studia Spinozana* 19 (1994): 121–34.

volume, published in 1765, and is essentially a rather sloppy rehash of Bayle's *Dictionnaire* entry. Despite his generally negative assessment of Spinoza's metaphysics, Yvon was adamant: everybody agreed that his life had been exemplary, and his virtuous atheism was no more astonishing than the vices displayed by Christians.<sup>39</sup>

This is not to suggest that among his French admirers Spinoza's life was a major issue. When Diderot addressed the issue of virtuous atheism, he did not refer to Spinoza at all, but to Hobbes instead.<sup>40</sup> Many crucial German and Dutch early eighteenth-century writings on Spinoza, including those by Tschirnhaus, Stosch, Wachter, Lau, and Van Leenhoff, were equally hesitant on the subject of Spinoza's life.<sup>41</sup> Many of his early critics, such as Christopher Wittichius, Samuel Clarke, and Bernard Nieuwentijt, commented little on Spinoza's biography.<sup>42</sup> Even Gottfried Arnold's *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* of 1699, which is clearly modeled on Bayle's account and which delivered a remarkably impartial assessment of Spinoza's life and thought, only offered a few lines on Spinoza's life and his "sehr spitzigen Vernunft."<sup>43</sup> Much the same holds for the entry on Spinoza in Jöcher's *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexikon* of 1751 and Trinius's *Freydenker-Lexicon* of 1759, which essentially provided its readers with an

<sup>39</sup> *Encyclopédie des arts et des métiers*, vol. 15 (Paris: Briasson, 1765), 464: "tout le monde convient qu'il avoit des mœurs sobre, modéré, pacifique, désintéressé, même généreux; son cœur n'étoit taché d'aucun de ces vices qui déshonorent. Cela est étrange; mais au fond il ne faut pas plus s'en étonner, que de voir des gens qui vivent très-mal, quoiqu'ils aient une pleine persuasion de l'Evangile."

<sup>40</sup> Vernière, *Spinoza*, 562, commenting on Diderot's *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* of 1745. It has been argued that, at the time, Diderot was not at all familiar with Hobbes's work: J. S. Spink, "La vertu politique selon Diderot ou le paradoxe du bon citoyen," *Revue des sciences humaines* 112 (1963): 471–83. Yves Citton has brilliantly emphasized the imaginary nature of eighteenth-century French "Spinozism": *L'envers de la liberté: L'invention d'un imaginaire spinoziste dans la France des Lumières* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> For two very different perspectives on early German Spinozism: Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, chap. 34, and Winfried Schröder, *Spinoza in der deutschen Frühaufklärung* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1987). On Van Leenhoff, see Michiel Wielema, *The March of the Libertines: Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660–1750)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), chap. 4.

<sup>42</sup> See, most recently, *The Bloomsbury Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Wiep van Bunge, Henri Krop, Piet Steenbakkers, and Jeroen van de Ven (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chap. 3.

<sup>43</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Thomas Fritschen Erben, 1729 [1699]), 1085. See also Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption*, 129–32, and John Christian Laursen, "What is Impartiality? Arnold on Spinoza, Mosheim on Servetus," in *Heresy in Transition: Transforming Ideas of Heresy in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Ian Hunter, John Christian Laursen, and Cary J. Nederman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 143–54.

elaborate and up-to-date bibliography.<sup>44</sup> None of the above, however, appear to have questioned Spinoza's dedication to philosophy, as evidenced by his virtuous life. The few remarks Bernard Nieuwentijt did offer on Spinoza's life paradoxically seem to confirm the emergent agreement that Spinoza was a genuine philosopher. In his *The Religious Philosopher*, a 1718 translation into English of a text published in Dutch in 1715, Nieuwentijt came up with an exceptionally nasty interpretation of the dignified way in which Spinoza had passed away. Ever since Cicero and Montaigne, philosophers were supposed to be good at dying, and we know how much the eighteenth century was fascinated by deathbed scenes.<sup>45</sup> "I cannot forbear to take Notice of what has been related," Nieuwentijt solemnly mused:

and with great Truth, as far as I could discover, touching that of Spinoza, that he ended his Life in Solitude and great Tranquility, without manifesting any external Signs of Uneasiness. This I know seemed strange to some Weak but Pious Men, who had either seen or heard of very different and most dreadful Judgements of God against some that had thus denied him; and the Followers of this same Spinoza, took an occasion from thence to think, that the Opinions of their Master were not so unjustifiable. But for the Satisfaction of the former, they ought to be told, that God working with Freedom, does not always punish Sins so visibly in this Life . . .<sup>46</sup>

Nieuwentijt was only able to grind his axe by speculating on a highly unpleasant afterlife of the philosopher in question.

Meanwhile, opposition to the notion of virtuous atheism remained strong for quite some time both in Holland and in Germany. Rüdiger Otto has demonstrated that both of the German translations of Colerus's biography tried to diminish the portrayal of Spinoza's moral excellence. Leibniz

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<sup>44</sup> Christian Gottlieb Jöcher, *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1750–51), 4:746–48; Johann Albert Trinius, *Freydenker-Lexicon* (Leipzig-Bernburg: Christoph Gottfried Cörner, 1759), 417–44.

<sup>45</sup> Philippe Ariès, *L'homme devant la mort* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), chaps. 7–9. See also, for instance, Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: How the Enlightenment Transformed the Way in Which We See Our Bodies and Souls* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), chap. 12. On Spinoza's death, see also Piet Steenbakkers, "Over de dood van Spinoza, en Spinoza over de dood," *Mededelingen vanwege Het Spinozahuis* 105 (2013).

<sup>46</sup> Wayne I. Boucher, ed., *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*, 6 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1999), 1:127.

and Christian Wolff, on the other hand, supported the idea that atheism did not necessarily entail immoral behavior, although in 1721 the latter still felt that atheism was not to be tolerated in a well-ordered society, since only rational atheists could be expected to act morally, whereas most people simply lack the rationality that virtuous atheism demands.<sup>47</sup> As late as 1750, the Greifswald theologian Jakob Heinrich von Balthasar still believed the entire notion was preposterous to begin with, arguing that Spinoza's example actually confirmed the impossibility of virtuous atheism because his "hauptsächliche Tugendverrichtung" had consisted in "sweating out" a number of blasphemous books.<sup>48</sup> Dutch academics continued to discuss the issue of virtuous atheism in what became known as the "Socratic War" of the late 1760s and '70s, when many dozens of books and pamphlets appeared, following the publication in 1767 of Jean-François Marmontel's *Bélisaire*, which contained little more than a fairly moderate plea in favor of toleration.<sup>49</sup> And yet in particular Marmontel's suggestion that Socrates must surely have been welcome in heaven sufficed to incense scores of orthodox Calvinists. Although Bayle was occasionally mentioned, Spinoza was completely ignored by the chief polemicists in question. From the start of the Socratic War, Dutch polemicists were far more concerned with the moral evaluation of Socrates's sexual preferences and the position of religious minorities in the ailing Dutch Republic.

#### IV. WOLFF TO JACOBI AND STIJL TO COLLOT D'ESCURY

In the meantime, in Germany new standards were in the making to assess the professional competence of philosophers. By the middle of the century, German scholars and philosophers were increasingly prepared to take Spinoza seriously, as evidenced by the appearance of the first German translation of the *Ethics* in 1744, as part of a remarkably mild refutation of its

<sup>47</sup> Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption*, 54–55. See also Czelinski-Uesbeck, *Der tugendhafte Atheist*, 65–68.

<sup>48</sup> Ernst Altkirch, *Maledictus und Benedictus: Spinoza im Urteil des Volkes und der geistigen bis auf Constantin Brunner* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1924), 94–95, quoting from Jakob Heinrich von Balthasar, *Gelegentliche Untersuchung der Frage Ob ein Atheist ein tugendsames Leben führen könne, oder nicht?* (Greifswald, 1750), 17–20. See Martin Pott, *Aufklärung und Aberglaube: Die deutsche Frühaufklärung im Spiegel ihrer Aberglaubenskritik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 166; Czelinski-Uesbeck, *Der tugendhafte Atheist*, 180–90.

<sup>49</sup> Ernestine van der Wall, *Socrates in de hemel? Een achttiende-eeuwse polemieek over deugd, verdraagzaamheid en de vaderlandse kerk* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000).

contents by Wolff, who by this time felt free to discuss Spinoza not as a heretic, but as a proper philosopher.<sup>50</sup> Significantly, Wolff's refutation included a full translation of Jelles's original preface to the *Opera post-huma*, including Jelles's spirited defense against the accusation that Spinoza was an atheist and a fatalist. Almost simultaneously with the publication of the *Bélisaire*, Jacob Brucker had published the six volumes of his final edition of the hugely influential *Historia critica philosophiae* (1766–67). The fourth volume contained a very thorough account of Spinoza's life, based on nearly all the relevant sources available at the time, including Lucas's *La vie*, and Brucker showed a remarkable appreciation for Spinoza's virtuous way of life.<sup>51</sup>

In the Netherlands, the times were rapidly changing as well, and the absence of Spinoza in the Dutch Socratic War should not lead us to conclude that by the second half of the century Spinoza had been forgotten by his countrymen. By this time, even in the ailing Dutch Republic, political developments were beginning to favor the rediscovery of Spinoza. In the Netherlands, the late eighteenth century did not merely witness the gradual collapse of an antiquated political regime; it also heralded a budding political awareness that out of the ashes of this once great republic something new would emerge. Something modern, and whatever it would be, it would require a new sense of nationhood, a new nationalism perhaps, which inspired Dutch intellectuals to redefine what it meant to be Dutch. These intellectuals, in turn, began to produce new histories, new encyclopedias, and new cultural canons. As will only be too familiar, the very notion of a seventeenth-century Dutch "Golden Age" was an eighteenth-century invention.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> B.d.S. *Sittenlehre widerlegt von dem berühmten Weltweisen unserer Zeit Herrn Christian Wolf* (Frankfurt–Leipzig, 1744). See James C. Morrison, "Christian Wolff's Criticisms of Spinoza," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993): 405–29; Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption*, 136–60; Ursula Goldenbaum, "Die erste deutsche Übersetzung der Spinozaschen 'Ethik,'" and Cornelia Buschmann, "Wolffs Widerlegung der 'Ethik' Spinozas," in *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, ed. Hanna Delf, Julius H. Schoeps, and Manfred Walther (Berlin: Edition Heinrich, 1994), 107–25 and 126–41; Manfred Lauermann and Maria-Brigitta Schröder, "Textgrundlagen der deutschen Spinoza-Rezeption im 18. Jahrhundert," in *Spinoza im Deutschland des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Eva Schürmann, Norbert Waszek, and Frank Weinreich (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002), 39–83; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, chaps. 7 and 25.

<sup>51</sup> Jacob Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae*, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Weidemann und Reich, 1766–67), vol. 4, pt. 2, 683ff. See Mario Longo, "A 'Critical' History of Philosophy and the Early Enlightenment: Johann Jacob Brucker," in *Models of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *From the Cartesian Age to Brucker*, ed. Gregorio Piaia and Giovanni Santinello (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 477–577.

<sup>52</sup> See, for instance, Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *1800: Blauwdrukken voor een*

As early as 1775 Simon Stijl, a Frisian physician, historian, and politician of considerable importance, published the second part of a ten-volume project containing a collection of biographies of “prominent Dutchmen,” in which Spinoza was portrayed quite handsomely as an eminently sociable “burger.” The way in which Stijl combined Bayle’s and Colerus’s writings resulted in unadulterated praise:

As far as his daily behavior is concerned, those who have met him, including farmers, all testified that he was talkative, soft hearted, obliging and morally upright. Yes, he was pleasant company. Apart from the discussions he had with intimate friends, in company he was always edifying in the way he talked, and he never swore nor did he ever speak irreverently of the Divine Majesty.<sup>53</sup>

Even in the Netherlands, beyond the theological context in which the Socratic War had been fought, the paradox of the “virtuous atheist” was now starting to evaporate, giving way to the recognition that when all was said and done, Spinoza had been a Dutchman, and a pretty gifted one at that. Just consider the following lines, written by Stijl, still in 1775:

Some people were puzzled by Spinoza’s modesty. Perhaps he understood that the true interest of society demands that its members lead devout, upright and moderate lives. This is why, by setting a good example, he sought to inspire his countrymen, although he was guilty of an apparent contradiction, as he told people to revere a Being he himself denied in his writings so forcefully. . . . Spinoza should have concluded that it would be best should his views not be accepted by the majority of mortal beings.

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*samenleving* (The Hague: SDU, 2001), esp. chap. 18; N. C. F. van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland: Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750–1900* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004), chaps. 3–7; Eveline Koolhaas, *De ontdekking van de Nederlander in boeken en prenten rond 1800* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> [Simon Stijl], *Levensbeschrijving van eenige voorname meest Nederlandsche mannen en vrouwen*, pt. 1 (Amsterdam–Harlingen: Petrus Conradi–F. Van der Plaats, 1775), 295–96: “Wat zynen dagelykschen omgang belangt, zullen, die hem gekend hebben, tot boeren zelfs, getuigen, dat hy spraakzaam, zagtzinnig, gedienschtig en zedig, ja, een aangenaam medegezel was. Indien men de gesprekken uitzondert, welke hy met zyne gemeen-zame vrienden in vertrouwen hieldt, sprak hy nimmer dan stigetelyk in gezelschappen; nooit vloekte hy; nimmer sprak hy oneerbiedig van de Godlyke Majesteit.” See Henri Krop, *Spinoza: Een paradoxale icoon van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2014), 264–65; S. R. E. Klein, *Patriots republikenisme: Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766–1787)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), chap. 1.



In the meantime, Spinoza's moderate life should surprise us no more than the evil ways of those who profess to believe the Gospel.<sup>54</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, this new nationalist perspective on Dutch history inspired even an ardently Orangist and staunchly conservative author such as Hendrik baron Collot d'Escury to present Spinoza as a brilliant example of what the Dutch were capable of, even in such a hazardous endeavor as speculative metaphysics. Far more important than the question of whether Spinoza had been right or wrong, or so the baron felt, was the recognition that Spinoza's exemplary life had shown him to have been a proper Dutchman. Remarkably, Collot was especially impressed with Spinoza's display of moderation.<sup>55</sup>

Indications are that by the end of the eighteenth century in England, too, the notion of a virtuous atheist no longer presented such a problem to authors who held no professional theological obligations. The second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which came out from 1778 to 1783, added a short biographical entry to the article on Spinozism that had been published in the first edition of 1777. It almost reads like a translation of the entry on Spinoza in the *Encyclopédie*, published twelve years earlier: "He is said to have been honest, obliging, and very regular in his morals; which we need not be more surprised at than to see people live an irregular life tho' fully persuaded of the truths of the Gospel."<sup>56</sup> A truly remarkable comment for a general work of reference, echoing as it does David Hume's famous comments to Boswell, as he lay dying in the summer of 1776, that he had known several people who were actually quite decent although they were believing Christians.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> [Stijl], *Levensbeschrijving*, 297: "Sommigen hebben zich verwonderd over dit ingetogen levensgedrag van Spinoza; doch hy begreep veelligt, dat het waare belang der Maatschappye vordert, dat alle haare leden een vroom, opregt, en maatig leven leiden; en hierom tragte hy, door zyn voorbeeld zyne Medeburgers daartoe aante spooren. Hoewel hy tevens zich aan eene in 't oog lopende tegenstrydigheid schuldig maakte, door den menschen aan te moedigen tot het eeren en dienen van dat Weezen, welks bestaan hy, in zyne schriften, zo kragtig zegt te keer te gaan. . . . Ondertusschen verdient het ingetoogen leeven van Spinoza niet meer onze verwondering, dan het leeven der zulken, welke voorgeeven het Evangelie te gelooven."

<sup>55</sup> Hendrik baron Collot d'Escury, *Holland's roem in kunsten en wetenschappen*, 7 vols. (The Hague–Amsterdam: Gebroeders Van Cleef, 1824–44), 5:262–81; Krop, *Spinoza*, 267–68.

<sup>56</sup> Boucher, *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*, 1:228.

<sup>57</sup> E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1954]), 597–98.

During the German *Pantheismusstreit* of the mid-1780s, Spinoza's moral character was no longer in doubt. Even Jacobi could not fail to notice Spinoza's "Weisheit und Frömmigkeit."<sup>58</sup> By this time, the fact that Spinoza was a genuine philosopher was taken for granted. What is more, Brucker's assessment of Spinozism as the product of a bygone age was beginning to make way for a new awareness of its "modernity."<sup>59</sup> As a direct result of the *Pantheismusstreit*, the freemason civil servant Schack Hermann Ewald published a new three-volume anthology of *Spinoza's philosophische Schriften* (1787–93), containing Ewald's message to the reader: "Don't be afraid, dear reader, of Spinoza's name, for he was a sweet, good, noble, and pious, but also an enlightened man"—and the time would come, or so Ewald felt, that he would be hailed as a pillar of true faith.<sup>60</sup> By this time, however, the virtual absence of biographical references appears to indicate the shared agreement that what was at stake here was first and foremost the *validity* of "Spinozismus" as a comprehensive philosophy. As Frederick Beiser has famously argued, by concentrating on Spinoza's thought, Jacobi and Mendelssohn paved the way for an accelerated dissemination of Kant's critical philosophy, which had only been launched a few years earlier.<sup>61</sup>

Prior to the *Pantheismusstreit*, several late eighteenth-century Dutch philosophers had already started reconsidering Spinozism, and the German-born Hermann Friedrich Hennert showed the way by questioning the dominant materialist interpretation of Spinozism. Hennert was appointed to a Utrecht chair in philosophy in 1764 and is generally regarded as a quintessential *Popularphilosoph*. A few years before the *Pantheismusstreit* erupted, he more or less singlehandedly rediscovered Spinoza, publishing several hundreds of pages on the *Ethics* in particular,

<sup>58</sup> Heinrich Scholz, ed., *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn* (Berlin: Reuther und Reichard, 1916), 338.

<sup>59</sup> Detlev Pätzold, *Spinoza—Aufklärung—Idealismus: Die Substanz der Moderne* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2002); Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing and Heine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment*, chap. 25; John H. Zammito, "'The Most Hidden Conditions of Men of the First Rank': The Pantheist Current in Eighteenth-Century Germany 'Uncovered' by the Spinoza Controversy," *Eighteenth-Century Thought* 1 (2003): 335–68.

<sup>60</sup> *Spinoza's philosophische Schriften*, 3 vols. (Gera: Beckmann, 1787–93), 1:3–4: "Erschrück nicht, lieber Leser, über den Namen Spinoza. Er war ein lieber, guter, edler, und frommer—aber auch ein aufgeklärter Mann." See Altkirch, *Maledictus und Benedictus*, 125; Lauermaun and Schröder, "Textgrundlagen," 39–44.

<sup>61</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), chap. 2.

which to his mind presented the logical outcome of philosophical idealism.<sup>62</sup> By the very end of the eighteenth century, Hennert's plea to take Spinozism seriously was finally heeded by Bernard Nieuhoff, professor of philosophy at the University of Harderwijk—the official University of Gelderland, established in 1648 and shut down in 1811. Nieuhoff's interest in Spinoza also preceded the *Pantheismusstreit* and appears to have dated from the early 1780s.<sup>63</sup>

In his 1799 *Over spinozisme*, however, Nieuhoff inevitably fell victim to all sorts of dubious rumors that had been starting to cloud Spinoza's biography from the early eighteenth century onwards, including a no doubt false story according to which Spinoza had gone through a deathbed conversion: apparently, Bayle's account of Spinoza's measures *not* to be disturbed by any minister while he was dying had been simply turned on its head.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, several other odd stories were told and retold again and again: in Jöcher, there is talk of French professorial chairs having been offered to Spinoza, who was repeatedly said to have been a Christian for some time after the *herem*, and by the end of the century he was erroneously supposed to have been banned not just from the Jewish community, but even from the city of Amsterdam—as Nieuhoff also duly reported.<sup>65</sup> But far more striking in Nieuhoff's account is his overt admiration for Spinoza's obvious genius, for the magnanimity evident from Spinoza's refusal to react to his critics, and for the deliberate sobriety of his lifestyle.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the fate of “Spinozism” and its many detractors finally appears to have become not only the source of strictly philosophical reflection on the merits of speculative monism in particular, but also a subject of historical analysis. Speculation about the sources of Spinoza's philosophy had started much earlier, of course, but in particular Nieuhoff's detached assessment of the way in which all sorts of philosophers and scientists, including the celebrated Leiden professor of medicine Herman Boerhaave, had been falsely accused of secretly adhering to Spinozism illustrated a new awareness of the need to approach Spinoza's life and work objectively.<sup>66</sup> Much the same can be said for Nieuhoff's

<sup>62</sup> Krop, *Spinoza*, 275–87. Joh. Fred. Hennert, *Uitgeleezene verhandelingen over de wysgeerte en fraaje letteren*, pt. 2 (Utrecht: A. Van Paddenburg–J.M. van Vloten, 1780).

<sup>63</sup> Krop, *Spinoza*, 290–91.

<sup>64</sup> Bayle, *Ecrits sur Spinoza*, 24; Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption*, 46–48.

<sup>65</sup> Boucher, *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*, 1:28; Bernardus Nieuhoff, *Over spinozisme* (Harderwijk: J. van Kasteel, 1799), 5–6.

<sup>66</sup> Nieuhoff, *Over spinozisme*, 44–48.

awareness of the many, completely different ways in which Spinoza had been read over the previous century or so, and for the frankness with which he admitted to finding the *Ethics* a tough nut to crack.<sup>67</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Nieuhoff's book appeared in 1799. Only three years later, the first modern edition of Spinoza's *Opera* would appear in Jena. Significantly, the editor, Heinrich Paulus, an accomplished theologian, philosopher, and Orientalist who held chairs in Jena, Würzburg, and Heidelberg, added a collection of testimonies regarding Spinoza's life, including a French version of Colerus's biography.<sup>68</sup> Paulus's close personal friend Hegel was one of the many nineteenth-century philosophers to use this text, which finally came to replace the 1677 edition, which by the early 1800s had become pretty rare. So Paulus's edition was to mark the start of modern Spinoza scholarship and a fundamental reassessment of Spinoza's philosophical legacy. Although it would take another century before the Dutch teacher Koenraad Oege Meinsma and the German professor of philosophy Jacob Freudenthal were to publish the results of their own research into the details of Spinoza's biography, it would seem that around 1800, at last, Spinoza's legacy had turned into an object of philosophical reflection and scholarly inquiry rather than being a banner carried by "radicals" or a source of revulsion to "moderates" and conservatives alike.

This renaissance could only take place, however, once some sort of agreement had emerged concerning the moral character of this seventeenth-century lens grinder who had lived a life becoming to a genuine philosopher. Only after agreement had been reached that Spinoza was a true philosopher could the truth of his philosophy become a serious issue. Hegel's continuing fascination with Spinoza appears to echo this particular history. In his lectures on the history of philosophy, he famously characterized Spinoza's thought as the "pinnacle of modern philosophy."<sup>69</sup> The first time,

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–54.

<sup>68</sup> Spinoza, *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 2 vols., ed. H. E. G. Paulus (Jena, 1802–3), 2:591–680. See Piet Steenbakkens, "Les éditions de Spinoza en Allemagne au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle," in *Spinoza au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. André Tosel, Pierre-François Moreau, and Jean Salem (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2007), 21–32; Jelle Kingma, "Spinoza Editions in the Nineteenth Century," in *Spinoza to the Letter: Studies in Words, Texts, and Books*, ed. Fokke Akkerman and Piet Steenbakkens (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 273–81.

<sup>69</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 20:163–64: "Spinoza ist Hauptpunkt der modernen Philosophie: entweder Spinozismus oder keine Philosophie."

however, that Hegel mentioned Spinoza, in his 1793–94 sketch on “Volksreligion und Christentum,” he pointed to the Dutchman’s life, counting him among those whose virtuous souls were filled with “moral greatness.”<sup>70</sup>

Over the past few decades, again much has been made of Spinoza’s alleged modernity. In a sense, the simple fact that this philosopher’s life was construed and perceived as relevant in the first place testified to his modernity: the philosophy of the “Schools” was practiced by virtually anonymous professors whose personalities never entered the equation.<sup>71</sup> Yet the tendency to accentuate the modernity of Spinozism could easily hide from view the affinity Spinoza’s example shows with classical notions of philosophy as a way of life, as they have convincingly been developed by the French classicist Pierre Hadot.<sup>72</sup> In one of his last lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault, inspired by Hadot, remarked that “subject to much more precise analysis, we might say that with Spinoza we have, as it were, the last great figure for whom philosophical practice was inspired by the fundamental and essential project of leading a philosophical life.”<sup>73</sup> Spinoza’s *Vita* not only helped to stimulate interest in his *Opera*, its eighteenth-century reception also draws attention to the hazards involved in proclaiming the “modernity” of any philosopher.

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<sup>70</sup> Hegel, *Werke*, 1:74: “deren Seele von Hochachtung für Tugend und moralische Grösse am vollsten war.”

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, Ian Hunter, “The University Professor in Early Modern Germany,” in Condren, Gaukroger, and Hunter, *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe*, 35–65. More in general: Marc Fumaroli, “From ‘Lives’ to Biography: The Twilight of Parnassus,” *Diogenes* 139 (1987): 1–27.

<sup>72</sup> See, for instance, Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>73</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 236.

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