

# THE RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT: THE BIG PICTURE AND ITS DETAILS

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## 1. Introduction

The pioneering work of Margaret C. Jacob and Jonathan I. Israel has firmly put the radical Enlightenment, which both of them distinguish from a more conservative, moderate wing in the Enlightenment movement, on the scholarly agenda.<sup>1</sup> Numerous publications illustrate this point, including a volume of *Philosophica* that recently fell from the press.<sup>2</sup> Jacob and Israel have, each in their own way, identified a corpus of texts, ideas, loci, and traditions that are, in their view, central to the Radical Enlightenment. In other words, on the basis of historical details they have established big-picture accounts that set out to systematize and to make sense of the complex and multifarious historical phenomenon that is referred to as the '(Radical) Enlightenment'. It is

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob 2005; Israel 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Acosta 2013.

only by interlacing the big picture and its details that we will be able to successfully characterize and understand the (Radical) Enlightenment. If we focus too narrowly on the details, we will lose sight of the big picture. If we focus too much on the big picture, the details will be lost. This volume of *Philosophica* brings together a series of case studies that critically investigate and refine the big-picture accounts of the Radical Enlightenment that have been proposed by Israel and Jacob.

We would like to thank all contributors to this volume for their hard work. Each of the contributions to this volume were originally delivered as papers at the international conference ‘The Radical Enlightenment: The Big Picture and its Details’ which took place in Brussels on 16 and 17 May 2013. This two-day conference received generous support from the Research Fund – Flanders (Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen) and VISITBRUSSELS. Finally, we are greatly indebted to those whose much appreciated work will remain invisible: those who acted as referees for this journal. Thank you ever so much.

## 2. Contributions to this volume

In her paper ‘Exorcizing Demons: Thomas Hobbes and Balthasar Bekker on Spirits and Religion’ Alissa MacMillan (Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse) compares Hobbes’ treatment of demons and ghosts to Bekker’s. In contrast to Bekker’s *Betoverde weereld* (1691-1694), which in

the words of Jonathan I. Israel, “became integrally linked to the Radical Enlightenment, and down to 1750, was everywhere and always considered a vehicle of Naturalism, atheism and Spinozism,”<sup>3</sup> the place of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* (1651) in Radical Enlightenment is not as clear. In her essay, she makes the case that Hobbes’ project is in fact more ‘radical’ than Bekker’s, especially when we consider the way the former naturalized religion by considering it a human practice like any other, finding its origin in man’s rational, psychological and linguistic faculties. Whereas Hobbes saw belief in demons and ghosts as something that needed to be remedied in order to safeguard political unity, Bekker felt the need to challenge it in order to preserve God’s singular power and to deny more particularly that “the devil can influence worldly events.”<sup>4</sup> In addition, MacMillan argues that while Hobbes called the authority of the Scriptures into question, Bekker still believed in their divine inspiration.

In recent years, the contribution of Dutch thinkers to Radical Enlightenment has received considerable scholarly attention.<sup>5</sup> In ‘Radical Enlightenment, Enlightened Subversion and Spinoza’ Sonja Lavaert (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) argues that Spinoza’s radicalism (and that of his allies) is to be situated against the backdrop of Machiavelli’s political philosophy. From this perspective, she devotes

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<sup>3</sup> Israel 2001, 405.

<sup>4</sup> van Ruler 2000, 389.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Israel 2001; van Bunge 2003.

particular attention to the pivotal role the notion of ‘*multitudo*’ played in both Machiavelli’s and Spinoza’s thought. In doing so, Lavaert attempts to widen our understanding of the origins of the Radical Enlightenment.

In ‘Joining the Radical Enlightenment: Some Thoughts on Intellectual Identity, Precarity, and Sociability in the Eighteenth Century’ Jordy Geerlings (Radboud University) explores, following Martin Mulsow’s lead,<sup>6</sup> the intellectual trajectory of a remarkable figure, Johann Konrad van Hatzfeld (1686-after 1751), who early in his career attempted to stir the interest of Isaac Newton – unsuccessfully for that matter – with an improved version of Johann Bessler’s design for a *perpetuum mobile*. Thereupon, Hatzfeld published the anti-Newtonian *The Case of the Learned* in 1724 which he argued that motion is essential to matter and that Newton’s natural philosophy conflicts with the Scriptures. In 1742 he succeeded in obtaining Christian Wolff’s support for a new book. Under a pseudonym, Hatzfeld’s *La découverte de la vérité et le monde détrompé à l’égard de la philosophie et la religion*, which contained a fierce criticism of religion, church and state, appeared in 1745. Geerlings argues that in order to understand Hatzfeld’s radicalism we need to incorporate his own motivations, ambitions, and failures into the picture.

In ‘Johann Christian Edelmann’s Radicalism: A Synthesis of Enlightenment and Spirituality’ Else Walravens (Vrije Universiteit

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<sup>6</sup> Mulsow 2012.

Brussel) reassesses the contribution of Edelmann (1698-1767) to radical thought. Although, as his writings reveal, Edelmann was highly influenced by Spinoza's *Ethica*, Walravens underscores that in *Moses mit Aufgedeckten Angesichte* (1740) Edelmann thoroughly reinterpreted Spinoza's idea of God along Neoplatonic, hermetic, and mystical lines. As a result of his idiosyncratic reading of *Ethica*, he did not share Spinoza's monism and naturalism. While criticizing the authority of the Scriptures and denying the idea of Jesus as the divine Messiah, he transformed what he considered to be the teaching of Jesus into a secular doctrine. By drawing attention to both his criticism of religion and his mystical understanding of God, Walravens' paper seeks to drive home the point that Edelmann's position cannot easily be subsumed under either the moderate or the radical wing of the Enlightenment.

In the concluding paper 'Esoteric Reason, Occult Science, and Radical Enlightenment: Seamless Pursuits in the Work and Networks of Raimondo di Sangro, The Prince of San Severo' Clorinda Donato (California State University, Long Beach) explores the thought of the not so well known but utterly fascinating radical thinker Raimondo di Sangro (1710-1771). Di Sangro was not only the founder of the first masonic lodge in Naples, in his personal 'Apartment of the Phoenix' he also kept his notorious 'anatomical machines', whose 'veins' were injected with bloodlike substances. Following the work of Leen Spruit,<sup>7</sup> Donato contextualizes di Sangro's ideas and networks. She makes it

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<sup>7</sup> Spruit 2002.

plausible that di Sangro's (al)chemical studies sought to provide a naturalistic explanation of the alleged miraculous liquefaction of the blood of the patron saint of Naples, San Gennaro, as was explained in detail in the entry on di Sangro in the Swiss *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon. In addition, she takes into account the radical significance of di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica* (1750), which was put on the index shortly after its publication, and of the Peruvian quipus which it describes more particularly.

While the current volume will not provide definite answers, we hope that it will stimulate discussion of the matter at hand.

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## EXORCIZING DEMONS: THOMAS HOBBS AND BALTHASAR BEKKER ON SPIRITS AND RELIGION

*Alissa MacMillan*

### ABSTRACT

Thomas Hobbes devotes several chapters of *Leviathan* to a careful critique of belief in, and the uses and abuses of, demons, ghosts, and spirits. But his broader views on religion remain one of the more contested areas of his thought, leaving his role in the 'Radical Enlightenment' unclear. A thoroughgoing opposition to demons and ghosts was also one of the primary objectives of Dutch theologian Balthasar Bekker, a figure whose central role in the historical narrative on atheism is well defended and accounted for in Jonathan Israel's *Radical Enlightenment*. Bekker was loudly declared an atheist of the worst sort, that is, of the Hobbesian or Spinozist sort. This paper engages an analysis and comparison of their respective treatments of demons and ghosts, elucidating several of the real differences in their views, and arguing that Hobbes's critique of religion, one on the surface one quite similar in spirit to that of Bekker, is indeed the more 'radical' when considered in light of their distinctive epistemologies, arguments for God, and the main thrust of their projects. Alongside Bekker, the innovative elements of Hobbes's critique of religion become especially clear.

## 1. Introduction

When Thomas Hobbes talks of demons in *Leviathan*, he confidently refuses to cower in their presence. As he writes: “As if the Dead of whom they Dreamed, were not Inhabitants of their own Brain, but of the Air, or of Heaven, or Hell; not Phantasmes, but Ghosts; with just as much reason, as if one should say; he saw his own Ghost in a Looking-Glasse, or the Ghosts of the Stars in a River; or call the ordinary apparition of the Sun, of the quantity of about a foot, the Daemon, or Ghost of that great Sun that enlighteneth the whole visible world [...]”<sup>1</sup>

Ghosts and demons, Hobbes thinks, are something of a cognitive mistake, rooted in particular features of our psychology – we take a dream for a prophetic vision, or an imaginative fancy for a thinking demon, or the words used to describe these unknown fears take on a significance way beyond their reality. But these are serious mistakes for Hobbes and mistakes that need to be taken seriously because of some of their far-reaching consequences. Hobbes’ account and critique of demons, ghosts, and spirits is woven through several chapters of *Leviathan*, integral to the larger account of religion in his work.

And his work on religion is a much-contested area of his thought, often considered secondary to his political and philosophical views, but in fact taking up a substantial amount of space for him and crucially intertwined with his broader philosophy. But debate persists about just

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<sup>1</sup> Hobbes 1985, 658-659.

what Hobbes is doing with religion in his work, how critical he really is, and whether he is engaging theological debates authentically or with a view to undermining their force.

In seemingly similar spirit, but in a different place and slightly later time, the Dutch theologian Balthasar Bekker offers a critique of spirits, including demons and ghosts, that at first sight, and evidenced by its reception, seems to echo some aspects of Hobbes's view. "[I]f we believe such great and wonderful things of the Devil, it is not because they are contained in the Holy Scripture [...] but because we are persuaded before-hand that it must be explain'd and understood according to the Judgment we have already pass'd, by reason of some expressions that seem to favor the common Belief, that the generality of Men already have of the Devil,"<sup>2</sup> says Bekker in his *The World Bewitched*, a four volume tome written between 1691 and 1694, and devoted primarily to critiquing a popular belief in devils, witches, and evil agents on earth.<sup>3</sup> Ghosts and spirits are a common but mistaken belief, says Bekker, impressed upon us by custom but overcome by reason; biblical references to ghosts and demons and an acknowledgment of a power they have to scare people into religion through a dream or vision are not to be taken seriously. These are "figurative"<sup>4</sup> uses, thinks Bekker, as

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<sup>2</sup> Bekker 1695, 249/325. All page numbers refer to those on the page number specified by the site itself followed by those on the page of the original text.

<sup>3</sup> A good analysis of Bekker's overall project is found in Fix 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm 2002, 485.

Noel Malcolm puts it, and do not serve as real evidence of their power in this world.

So both Hobbes and Bekker critique a particular use of ghosts and demons in religious life and Scripture and both are branded atheists, at least in part, because of this. As Malcolm writes, “[a]n example of how Hobbes’s radical status was enhanced and elevated in this way is furnished by the reaction to Balthasar Bekker’s famous book [...] *The World Bewitched*.”<sup>5</sup> Hobbes and Bekker are explicitly grouped together, although one’s views on religion remain the subject of continued debate, the other a strong Calvinist in his own time, their respective critiques of ghosts and demons, by some, deemed common and mutually reinforcing evidence of their atheisms. In a moment when members of places like the Royal Society were taking renewed interest in the spiritual,<sup>6</sup> Euan Cameron categorizes them as “sceptics”<sup>7</sup> who both “called into question the very existence of ‘spiritual beings’ as traditionally conceived.”<sup>8</sup>

But an analysis of Hobbes’ and Bekker’s treatments of demons and ghosts clarifies several of the real differences in their work, serves as a means of elucidating some of the subtler details of Hobbes’s much-debated account and critique of religion, and provides a different

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<sup>5</sup> Malcolm 2002, 485.

<sup>6</sup> Cameron 2010, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Cameron 2010, 249.

<sup>8</sup> Cameron 2010, 255.

perspective on some broader debates in the period, especially to do with tensions between reason and faith and concerns about knowledge and authority. This paper compares their accounts of the uses and misuses of ghosts and demons in particular, and specifically in parts of *Leviathan* and *The World Bewitched*, arguing that Hobbes's so-called atheism, on the surface one quite similar in spirit to that of Bekker, is indeed the more 'radical' when considered in light of some of his views on the human being, especially his epistemology and its connection to language, and his perspective on religious authority.

More broadly, this comparison draws out details of some more general, formative debates taking place at the time, debates that themselves serve to elucidate some of the complexity of Hobbes's treatment of religion, and the way in which he foreshadows the work of some later materialists. In some sense, theirs is an early, frayed expression of some of the differences between materialist and Cartesian perspectives, played out in the arena of the spirits. Although Hobbes does not engage the sceptical tradition head-on, the differences between Hobbes and Bekker highlight issues central to debates about knowledge, truth, nature, and man's place in nature, also playing out some of the consequences of maintaining a Cartesian dualist versus materialist metaphysics. Both move beyond a medieval treatment of ghosts and religion<sup>9</sup> – but Hobbes goes further than Bekker, anticipating

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<sup>9</sup> For a thorough account of ghosts, including a genealogy of their role and reception, see Schmitt 1998. Also see Cameron 2010.

thinkers like David Hume in both his scepticism and empiricism. His engagement makes him more of an early Enlightenment thinker than is often emphasized.

Their worries about belief and knowledge are of course not unique to the period – from Michel de Montaigne to Pierre Bayle, sceptical debates about truth and religion were an especially complex and lively arena for these concerns. Nor are these questions resolved in this period, as they are debates that will re-emerge often in the history of philosophy.<sup>10</sup> But in their moment, they each, as Cameron describes, “represented different world-views in search of a new set of principles,”<sup>11</sup> and, in doing so, through spirits, take on a challenging topic pertinent to their time. Hobbes and Bekker’s respective approaches to questions pertaining to knowledge and belief, as seen through their treatment of ghosts and spirits, clarify some of the differences in their own conceptions of man and nature. Hobbes’ materialism and empiricism, and the extent to which he is naturalizing the human being, so offering a quite radical, humanizing account of religion, are all emphasized when examined alongside Bekker.

Turning first to Hobbes, then Bekker, and finally engaging in a brief comparison of the two, this paper seeks to highlight some of the real force and implication of Hobbes’s account in particular by comparing

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<sup>10</sup> In, for example, 20<sup>th</sup>-century debates among positivists like A. J. Ayer and Rudolf Carnap.

<sup>11</sup> Cameron 2010, 269.

some of the substance of their views. Alongside Bekker, I argue, the innovative and really radical elements of Hobbes's critique of religion become especially clear, in particular the extent to which he is naturalizing religion, considering it a human practice like any other and folding it into his account of political and social life.

## 2. Hobbes on ghosts and demons

Hobbes devotes several chapters of *Leviathan* to a careful critique of belief in and the uses and abuses of demons, ghosts, and spirits. But his broader views on religion remain one of the more contested areas of his thought. Scholars disagree over whether he engages theology authentically, whether he is concerned about religion only secondarily, or if he is actively or accidentally ushering in atheism through a subtle but significant critique. To take on this question of religion, interpreters appeal to several aspects of his work as evidence for their case. His fundamental law of nature is claimed to be of either divine or human origin;<sup>12</sup> his reading of Scripture is deemed either orthodox, in keeping with tradition,<sup>13</sup> or as entirely subversive,<sup>14</sup> overturning foundational theological claims; or, his materialism becomes a key to his atheism or

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<sup>12</sup> This is much of the focus of, for example, the work of Taylor 1938 and Warrender 1957.

<sup>13</sup> As with a good part of A. P. Martinich's interpretation (Martinich 1992).

<sup>14</sup> For example in Cooke 1996.

is neatly reconciled with theism.<sup>15</sup> These areas of his thought, and others, continue to be investigated as realms for making sense of his perspective.

This account of Hobbes on ghosts, and the comparative work done here, is in defence of what is often called a ‘secular’ reading of Hobbes on religion – that is, he is not engaging in theological debates authentically and earnestly, rather his discussion of religion brings with it a sometimes subtle and sometimes explicit critique of religion, and of Christianity in particular.<sup>16</sup> Looking to the content of his foundational account of religion itself, it is clear that this account is of a piece with his broader philosophy. So, this reading of Hobbes on ghosts is meant to provide more evidence for the so-called secular reading of Hobbes on religion, on this interpretation, religion deemed a social practice like any other, born from psychological,<sup>17</sup> rational, and linguistic features of the human being, so Hobbes really taking from religion any of its bite, so rendering it nothing special, or nothing any more special than any other human social practice. Although later French materialist,

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<sup>15</sup> For a broad and detailed picture of some of the initial reception of Hobbes’s work, especially his materialism, see Mintz 1962.

<sup>16</sup> Edwin Curley and A. P. Martinich, who have engaged in extensive debate on this question, call these readings “theological” and “secular” in, among other places, Curley 1988 and in Martinich 1992.

<sup>17</sup> A strong recent defense of the psychological roots of Hobbes’s account of religion is Stauffer 2010. Also see Chen 2006.



Enlightenment thinkers such as Julien Offray de La Mettrie and Voltaire seem not to have read Hobbes on these matters,<sup>18</sup> this places Hobbes' ideas more centrally into the important and on-going conversation on the 'Radical Enlightenment', his own views echoing the vision of those later materialists.

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes first mentions ghosts in the second chapter,<sup>19</sup> so quite early on, and in the context of his opening account of the senses and imagination. He begins with a discussion of the senses, explaining, "Sense, in all cases, is nothing els but originall fancy, caused [...] by the pressure, that is, by the motion, of externall things, upon our Eyes, Ears, and other organs thereunto ordained."<sup>20</sup> In tune with his materialism and his claim that all is matter in motion, sense experience happens from actual objects in the world pressing on our respective sense organs.<sup>21</sup> Imagination is then what Hobbes calls "decaying sense,"<sup>22</sup> memory itself really being fading imagination. Dreams, too, are "the

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<sup>18</sup> Malcolm 2002, 494.

<sup>19</sup> And God in the first chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Hobbes 1985, 86. With echoes of Lucretius's account.

<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the reigning views of Aristotle and others, where something is sent forth by the object or emitted by the object that is then received by the senses. Hobbes eliminates this extra step to sensory experience. Hobbes 1985, 86-87.

<sup>22</sup> Hobbes 1985, 88.

imaginations of them that sleep,”<sup>23</sup> but are the source of more confusion as, although they are also rooted or based in the sense, the organs of the sense are “benumbed” in sleep, and can sometimes be quite like the imagination when we are awake. As Richard Tuck describes it, it is as if there is some ‘malfunction’ in thought in the dream state, like a computer that is not operating properly.<sup>24</sup> Dreams can also be “caused by the distemper of some of the inward parts of the Body,”<sup>25</sup> but, all of this is rooted in sense, directly or as a fading consequence of sensory organs being pressed upon by an object in the world.

In the very next paragraph, after his discussion of dreams, Hobbes turns to visions and to ghosts. Claims of visions or apparitions, Hobbes finds, are easily explained as dreams. “And this is no very rare Accident,” says Hobbes, “for even if they that be perfectly awake, if they be timorous, and superstitious, possessed with fearfull tales, and alone in the dark, are subject to the like fancies, and believe they see spirits and dead mens Ghosts walking in Churchyards.”<sup>26</sup> To see a ghost, to worry about a demon, is to fall into a common but very human trap, that of mistaking a natural movement of the mind for something else

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<sup>23</sup> Hobbes 1985, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Tuck 1989, 56.

<sup>25</sup> Hobbes 1985, 91.

<sup>26</sup> Hobbes 1985, 92.

entirely. But it is a matter taken seriously by many in Hobbes's own time.<sup>27</sup>

In the second half of *Leviathan*, when he turns more centrally to a discussion of religion and Christianity, demons and ghosts return. There is a very different aim to the discussion in the second half of the book, dealing more with specifics of theological claims, but his analysis is still framed by his epistemological account. His late chapter on demonology (chapter 45) begins with a return to where he began the book – to an account of sight, to the role of sense impressions and the imagination, so explicitly tying his discussion of ghosts and demons to aspects of his epistemology.<sup>28</sup> It is also an account that appeals to Scripture and enquires into the reliability of the Scriptural account.

In chapter 45 he reiterates his view of demons and ghosts, reminding us that when images, gotten through regular sense experience, become fantastical, or become apparitions, these are “Seemings of visible Bodies to the Sight,” he says, “such as are the shew of a man, or other thing in the Water, by Reflexion, or Refraction; or of the Sun, or Stars by Direct vision in the Air; which are nothing reall in the things seen, nor in the

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<sup>27</sup> In, for example, Lavater 1572 (1929).

<sup>28</sup> On perception, Hobbes agrees with Descartes and Gassendi about the limits to our perception of the external world, although Descartes' scepticism of course takes him further than Hobbes. He also took some interest in optics and ballistics in the 1630s. See Tuck 1989, 17-24 and 137-138 for other resources on this topic.

place where they seem to bee.”<sup>29</sup> And from the ideas and images come idols, an image that is soon worshipped, rendered the seeds of various religions.

Not only are apparitions of this kind born in our psychology, they are then harnessed in different ways for the purposes of power. As Hobbes continues: “And by that means have feared them, as things of an unknown, that is, of an unlimited power to doe them good, or harme; and consequently, given occasion to the Governours of the Heathen Common-wealths to regulate this their fear, by establishing that Deamonology [...] to the Publique Peace, and to the Obedience of Subjects necessary thereunto; and to make some of them Good Demons, and others Evill; the one as a Spurre to the Observance, the other, as Reines to withhold them from Violation of the Laws.”<sup>30</sup> Belief in demons and ghosts is a powerful tool for ruling the people and leading them to obedience, a tool Hobbes is especially critical of. Those in power use, abuse, and systematize this fear, to their own ends: “And for Fayries, and walking Ghosts, the opinion of them has I think been on purpose, either taught, or not confuted, to keep in credit the use of Exorcisme, of Crosses, of holy Water, and other such inventions of Ghostly men.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Hobbes 1985, 668.

<sup>30</sup> Hobbes 1985, 659.

<sup>31</sup> Hobbes 1985, 92. In his edited edition to *Leviathan*, Curley makes reference to the irony, cited by Tricaud, in Hobbes’s use of ghostly for spiritual. Hobbes 1994, 554nt.

And, of course, the Church connected to Catholic states was especially prone to wielding this sort of power.

Underlying this account for Hobbes is a very particular view on language and its connection to authority, an account also found in his *De corpore*,<sup>32</sup> and one that overturns some aspects of the Scholastics on language.<sup>33</sup> For Hobbes, language is a primary source or means of knowledge and central to our rationality – we are constituted by language in that it is the form our rationality takes and one of the primary sources of knowledge for us.<sup>34</sup> But the knowledge that we gain from language is conditional (absolute knowledge only comes from sense experience). Although conditional, this kind of knowledge, generated in discourse, is the source of much of what we hold and claim and believe – indeed, it is science itself.<sup>35</sup> But, this form of knowledge is not first person experience and so relies on trust in authorities of all kinds.

Hobbes writes: “From whence we may inferre, that when wee believe any saying whatsoever it be, to be true, from arguments taken, not from the thing it selfe, or from the principles of natural Reason, but from the Authority, and good opinion wee have, of him that hath sayd it; then is

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<sup>32</sup> Hobbes 1981.

<sup>33</sup> See Hungerland and Vick 1981.

<sup>34</sup> For an excellent recent analysis of Hobbes on language, in part making this point, see Pettit 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Hobbes 1985, 131; 149.

the speaker, or person we believe in, or trust in, and whose word we take, the object of our Faith; and the Honour done in Believing, is done to him onely.”<sup>36</sup> Appeal to the saying of another in our own reasoning, so reliance on the saying of another, is primarily a matter of believing in the person speaking, or trusting that person. We may rely on natural reason, “But no one mans Reason, nor the Reason of any one number of men, makes the certaintie; no more than an account is therefore well cast up, because a great many men have unanimously approved it.”<sup>37</sup> Belief in a saying is not often based on a trust in the object itself, natural reason, or arguments made about the claim; belief is primarily rooted in the authority of another.

So matters of belief and faith are based primarily in authority and trust in another and in the word of another. Instead of being based on belief in the thing itself, belief is rooted in our view of the person speaking and the trust we put in the person speaking. Our very means of communicating, one of our primary sources of knowledge, includes decisions about who to trust and whether we might choose to rely on the word of another or not. Trusting in the word of others is part of the process that is built into the very activity of language itself.

And this point is especially critical when it comes to religion. The better part of the claims and events that found and sustain religion can

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<sup>36</sup> Hobbes 1985, 133.

<sup>37</sup> Hobbes 1985, 111. Because of this, Hobbes says, there is need for a judge or arbiter of right reason.

be neither proven nor replicated, and are often not part of one's experience. In this sense, religion is a paradigmatic social practice in which we must trust the word of others. Hobbes continues, "whatsoever we believe, upon no other reason, then what is drawn from authority of men onely, and their writings; whether they be sent from God or not, is Faith in men only."<sup>38</sup> The individual can never know by natural reason if another has a kind of "supernatural" revelation from God.<sup>39</sup> And beliefs can never be commanded, as they are involuntary,<sup>40</sup> so belief in God can neither be commanded or obligatory nor can obedience to authority be assessed on anything but action, as this is the only evidence available. So religion is rendered a social, pragmatic matter, less to do with the internal beliefs of the individual and more to do with belief in the word of another, or the word of an authority, and the decision or turn, based on that belief, to obey that authority. Indeed, authority is then especially vulnerable and relies on the belief of men in its power and word. As the base of religion, belief or faith is in others, or what others say; it is not, in the first instance, about a direct belief in God.

Scriptures themselves are also written documents that, like any other text, we need to believe in – "consequently, when we believe that the Scriptures are the word of God, having no immediate revelation from God himselfe, our Beleeffe, Faith, and Trust is in the Church; whose

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<sup>38</sup> Hobbes 1985, 134.

<sup>39</sup> Hobbes 1985, 332.

<sup>40</sup> Hobbes 1985, 527.

word we take, and acquiesce therein.”<sup>41</sup> We trust in the Church as the voice of authority on these texts in the same way that we believe in the word of an individual. And the same holds, Hobbes says, for all of history.<sup>42</sup> Any access we have to historical facts is through the word of the historian, so we believe in or distrust the historian himself, not the facts. Everything we claim to know that is acquired from language and from other people, and not from our own sensory experience or our own direct experience, is “Faith in men onely.”<sup>43</sup>

So, for Hobbes, religion or practices rooted in these forms of authority, have psychological roots and are cultivated and maintained through social linguistic and other behavioral practices. In this sense, religion is very much like other social practices that are based on various forms of authority. Religion is loosely circumscribed by its particular content, responding to worries about things like the future, the unknown, and unknown causes, but implicated in and complexly interwoven with other social practices.

Hobbes defines religion, within his section on the human passions, as rooted in human curiosity, and so rooted in our quest for knowledge, and in anxieties about the future and the unknown, fears of death and a

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<sup>41</sup> Hobbes 1985, 133.

<sup>42</sup> Hobbes 1985, 133.

<sup>43</sup> Hobbes 1985, 134. And the realms of science and common sense could perhaps be seen as a kind of middle ground where one’s experiences might match the experiences of others.



need for an overarching power, and our desire for a secure and contented future. Religion is defined as: “Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publically allowed,”<sup>44</sup> and as emerging from an “Anxiety for the future time,” which, he says, “disposeth men to enquire into the causes of things,”<sup>45</sup> and disposes men to trust the authority of others.

At another moment Hobbes describes the origins of religion as:

And in these foure things, Opinion of Ghosts, Ignorance of second causes, Devotion towards what men fear, and Taking of things Casuall for Prognostiques, consisteth the Naturall seed of *Religion*; which by reason of the different Fancies, Judgments, and Passions of severall men, hath grown up into ceremonies so different, that those which are used by one man, are for the most part ridiculous to another.<sup>46</sup>

Religion is born from a combination of very human psychological characteristics that act as its “seeds.”<sup>47</sup> While curiosity is one of the passions that make us human, the consequences of this curiosity, and

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<sup>44</sup> Hobbes 1985, 124.

<sup>45</sup> Hobbes 1985, 167.

<sup>46</sup> Hobbes 1985, 172-173.

<sup>47</sup> As Winfried Schröder helpfully pointed out to me, reference to the “seeds” of religion has its roots in Calvin, although Hobbes here puts it to purely psychological purposes.

the consequences of our fears lead to religion. Ghosts figure into this account as mistakes in our understanding, and mistakes that lead to the formation of new sets of beliefs that can provide the foundations for religion.

Again, from Hobbes:

By which means it hath come to passe, that from the innumerable variety of Fancy, men have created in the world innumerable sorts of Gods. And this Feare of things invisible, is the natural Seed of that, which every one in himself calleth Religion; ... And this seed of Religion, having been observed by many; some of those that have observed it, have been enclined thereby to nourish, dresse, and forme it into Lawes; and to adde to it of their own invention, any opinion of the causes of future events, by which they thought they should best be able to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their Powers.<sup>48</sup>

Fancies, apparitions, ghosts, these cognitive mistakes, are really at the root of the problem for Hobbes, as, “From this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past.”<sup>49</sup> Religions have their primary root in these mistaken beliefs.

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<sup>48</sup> Hobbes 1985, 168.

<sup>49</sup> Hobbes 1985, 92.

Indeed, Hobbes also holds that ignorance of causes is the root of the very notion of God. Hobbes continues: “Curiosity, or love of the knowledge of causes, draws a man from consideration of the effect, to seek the cause; and again, the cause of that cause; till of necessity he must come to this thought at last, that there is some cause, whereof there is no former cause, but is eternall; which it is men call God.”<sup>50</sup> This argument for God superficially has some of the features of one of the traditional theological arguments for God, one Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas upheld – God as first cause. But, here, Hobbes explicitly embeds this explanation in a psychological and linguistic account. God is the name given to the first cause of which we cannot know. And this purely linguistic and psychological account is the only argument for God that Hobbes offers.

Further to the psychological account, the human being’s perpetual fear, present with the ignorance of causes, also requires an object of some kind and, as he continues – “when there is nothing to be seen, there is nothing to accuse, either of their good, or evill fortune, but some *Power*, or Agent *Invisible*.”<sup>51</sup> This fear, says Hobbes, first created Gods, and the desired for knowledge of cause upon cause led to “one God Eternall, Infinite, Omnipotent,”... “one First Mover; that is, a First, and an Eternall cause of all things; which is that which men mean by the

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<sup>50</sup> Hobbes 1985, 167.

<sup>51</sup> Hobbes 1985, 170.

name of God.”<sup>52</sup> God then, for Hobbes, is given a psychological explanation, both born from fear and made singular and eternal through man’s curiosity, a name given to the first cause of all things, but one that is unknown and unable to be described, and engaging a cognitive mistake in the attribution of invisible powers.

### 3. Bekker on ghosts and demons

A thoroughgoing opposition to demons and ghosts was one of the primary objectives of Dutch theologian Balthasar Bekker, a figure whose central role in the historical narrative on secularization is well defended and accounted for in Jonathan Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment*<sup>53</sup> and in the work of Andrew Fix and Wiep van Bunge, among others. Bekker was loudly declared an atheist of the worst sort by religious enemies like Voetius and others, that is, of the Hobbesian or Spinozist sort.<sup>54</sup>

As Malcolm notes of *The World Bewitched*, there is no reference to Hobbes, “Nevertheless,” he writes, “in the storm of hostile reaction that followed the publication of Bekker’s first volume in 1691—Jonathan Israel has described it as ‘assuredly the biggest intellectual controversy

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<sup>52</sup> Hobbes 1985, 170.

<sup>53</sup> Israel 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Fix 1989. He points out that this name-calling was often propaganda on the part of Clerics and Spiritualists.

of Early Enlightenment Europe’—almost every critic claimed that Hobbes was one of the main sources of Bekker’s ideas.”<sup>55</sup> Both Hobbes and Bekker seem to take on demons and demonology, and other claims of the kind, in a similarly critical way, both earning their reputations, at least in part, because of these engagements.

But some significant and obvious points set them apart. Unlike Hobbes, Bekker was operating from the pulpit, rooted in the Reform tradition and engaging in theological conversations from within that tradition. As Bekker writes, “I aim at nothing else but the Glory of God, and the defense of true Faith.”<sup>56</sup> Bekker’s is an explicitly theological standpoint; as Han van Ruler describes, “it is immediately clear to the reader that the motives for his critique are religious rather than philosophical. *The World Bewitched* is not written as a scientific assault on superstition.”<sup>57</sup> Bekker saw his project as one squarely in service of orthodoxy, and the primary tool for this task was Cartesianism, or using “Cartesian arguments against evil spirits for the purpose of defending and strengthening what he believed to be the true Christian religion.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Malcolm 2002, 485.

<sup>56</sup> Bekker 1695, 340/264.

<sup>57</sup> van Ruler, 2000. Also see Fix 1989, 539: “Bekker’s primary motivation in denying the devil’s and evil spirits’ power over men was thus religious, growing out of his extreme monotheism [...]”

<sup>58</sup> Fix 1989, 540. Van Bunge 1993, 78 also explains, “His rationalism was the outcome of a theological movement – Dutch Cartesian Calvinism – that by now

Whether or not he was successful in his mission, it was indeed a theological one.

Both Bekker and Hobbes saw belief in ghosts and demons as a dominant but problematic common opinion. As for the masses, Bekker writes, “It is because we suffer ourselves to be seduced, and blinded by a false appearance of Piety, without having recourse to the light of the Scripture, that we fall into such Extravagancies, with which we are pleased and love to continue in them.”<sup>59</sup> Remarks like this are littered throughout his text: “The Opinions of most men,” Bekker says, of matters pertaining to the devil, “are only grounded on an unsure and wavering Foundation.”<sup>60</sup> And, “No certain and sufficient proofs may be had of all the others, than by rejecting the Opinion commonly received amongst the Vulgar, concerning the Craft and Power of the Devil.”<sup>61</sup> Belief in spirits is mistaken, perhaps upheld only by having “taken root in us from our tender Youth, and been confirmed by Custom,” and needs to be dealt with in service of true Christianity.<sup>62</sup>

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is recognized as a typically early-Enlightenment expression of the Christian tradition.”

<sup>59</sup> Bekker 1695, 31-32/Abridgement, Preface.

<sup>60</sup> Bekker 1695, 80/2.

<sup>61</sup> Bekker 1695, 81/3.

<sup>62</sup> Bekker 1695, 32/Preface. “I prove that these were thought that never were inspired to the Christians by the Holy Scripture, by reason that those who read it less and understand it less, give more credit to these sort of things, and

While Hobbes saw this as a mistaken belief that needed to be remedied, in great part, because it confuses the unity of political power, Bekker saw it as one that needed to be challenged in order to preserve God's singular power. And, for Bekker, it was reason that led to the view that, "there was only one God, and for that reason belief in demons or demi-gods had to be rejected."<sup>63</sup> With only one God, there can be no other spirits of this kind that act in the world as god does. Belief in ghosts is not only unorthodox, Bekker finds, it is also flies in the face of reason.

The method he employs is Cartesian and, as scholars note, Bekker seems to have had a Cartesian awakening of sorts, thoroughly convinced of the importance of reason.<sup>64</sup> Reason is the means to come to good conclusions about God and is a fixed and ultimately reliable faculty. All that gets in its way is the passions and bad beliefs cultivated and strengthened by habit and custom – like ghosts and demons – superstitions that keep reason from its smooth operation.

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because all the World is already prevented before they read it and meditate upon it. For by these Reasons I endeavor to bring the reader to consider, whether the Scripture give the occasion to believe all those things that are ordinarily said upon that subject, or to believe them so as they are said; or whether such sentiments have not taken root in us from our tender Youth, and been confirmed by Custom."

<sup>63</sup> Fix 1989, 540.

<sup>64</sup> van Bunge 1993, 56. He cites Paul Hazard on this account.

Thanks to the workings of reason, Bekker maintains a split between spirit and matter. As Fix continues, “Reason also taught that God had created a world in which spirit and matter were entirely separate and distinct from one another.”<sup>65</sup> Bekker writes, “a Mind is a thinking substance and a Body an extended one,”<sup>66</sup> and, “Devils are undeniably spirits, and Man is composed of a Body and a Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> This Cartesian dualism is a position central to his perspective on ghosts and evil spirits. In maintaining this split, one that will continue to be the source of much philosophical and theological contestation, Bekker remains vulnerable to questions about the precise relationship between matter and spirit, whether spirits can influence body, and even whether God can influence bodies in the world (a relationship Spinoza takes to its next step).

To resolve this problem, Bekker held that the power of the Devil or of ghosts and spirits of this sort is not a power that can exert force on this world. As van Ruler explains, “Bekker never denied the existence of the devil or of hell. What he denies is that the devil can influence worldly events.”<sup>68</sup> His critique or objection to ghosts and demons is then not based on the claim that they do not exist – that they are, as Hobbes holds, a cognitive mistake – but that they actually have some

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<sup>65</sup> Fix 1989, 540.

<sup>66</sup> From van Ruler 2000, 383, his translation from *De Betoverde Weereld*, II, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Bekker 1695, 83/4.

<sup>68</sup> Van Ruler 2000, 389.



kind of substantive power in this world. The mistaken common opinion is not that of believing in ghosts, but believing in their force in this world, or as he says, believing in “the Craft and Power of the Devil,” not the Devil’s very existence.

God, a spirit of a different sort, does have an influence, and Bekker takes steps to keep distinct the two so as not to threaten God’s singular power.<sup>69</sup> God is singular, true, a special kind of spirit, and something with power in this world, a power that cannot be threatened or undermined by that of devils or demons. And, again, Bekker knows this by way of reason – it is an examination he has taken on “*a priori*, and not *a posteriori*, as they in the Schools.”<sup>70</sup> For Bekker, “Reason tells him that there is a God, that He is incorporeal, that there may be spirits, that spirit and body have nothing in common, and that spirits can exist apart from the body.”<sup>71</sup> As scholars point out, this is a distinction that matters significantly in the narrative of the Radical Enlightenment, taken to its logical and more thoroughly atheistic conclusion in Spinoza.

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<sup>69</sup> Van Ruler 2000, 386.

<sup>70</sup> Bekker 1695, 27/Abridgement.

<sup>71</sup> van Bunge 1993, 61.

## 4. A further comparison

Just beneath the surface of the general claim that Bekker is an atheist of the Hobbesian sort, lie several obvious differences in their respective philosophical programs. Perhaps this is a too easy comparison, but it is one that remains illustrative of important aspects of Hobbes's views. For one, Hobbes is clearly primarily worried about the peace of the commonwealth, through an absolutist politics, and appeals to ghosts and demons are something that gets in the way of the unification of authority in service of that sought-after peace. Based in the Church, as mentioned, Bekker's motivation for his critique is religious, really in service of the church or true religion. So, alongside Bekker, Hobbes's motivations were clearly not religious in the same way. Hobbes is not, like Bekker, seeking to worship and champion one true faith.

Hobbes has very little to say about true faith or true religion apart from its being consistent with the sovereign power – as Hobbes says of true religion: “Feare of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publically allowed, RELIGION; not allowed, SUPERSTITION. And when the power imagined, is truly such as we imagine, TRUE RELIGION.”<sup>72</sup> True religion is the religion endorsed by the sovereign which is the only thing that renders the power one that is

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<sup>72</sup> Hobbes 1985, 124.

truly as we imagine.<sup>73</sup> But Hobbes has already offered a thorough psychological and social account of the roots of religion and its formation, and truth itself is a matter relegated to language use: “For True and False are attributes of Speech, not of Things. And where Speech is not, there is neither Truth nor Falsehood.”<sup>74</sup> A claim is true if our names have been ordered properly, or in a way acceptable to language users and conducive to self-preservation. For something to be true, then, considering his definition of truth as it relates to language, renders it the practice agreed upon by the sovereign.

While Bekker seeks proof of the plain statement that “Jesus is the messiah [...] there is but one God,”<sup>75</sup> and true religion, for him, is in service of this reality, really in defence of true faith and authority, for Hobbes, true religion is not about the pursuit of this kind of certainty, as this kind of certainty is not something we have access to.

It is clear that that Hobbes’s position is not explicitly atheistic in the sense we might think of today – a certain denial of the existence of non-natural beings and forces – rather he recognizes the limits to our knowledge and, as such, the limits to the kinds of religious claims we might be able to make. And, part of the debate surrounding Hobbes’ views on religion exist because of some of the explicit statements he

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<sup>73</sup> As with other aspects of Hobbes on religion, interpretations differ. For another perspective on Hobbes on true religion, see Martinich 1992, 52-54.

<sup>74</sup> Hobbes 1985, 105.

<sup>75</sup> Bekker 1695, 81/3.

makes about God, even as they run up against the very epistemological picture he lays out.<sup>76</sup> On true religion, then, Hobbes seems to be heading in the direction of a Humean scepticism while Bekker's rationalism leans towards deism. As van Bunge argues, "On a larger scale it does not seem too far-fetched to regard Bekker's onslaught on the supernatural as one of the many steps leading up to eighteenth century deism which would on the one hand leave the truly religiously inclined dissatisfied and on the other would eventually culminate in the atheism of Diderot and D'Holbach."<sup>77</sup> Here, more specifically it would seem, Hobbes' perspective rapidly and more easily culminates in atheism, while Bekker's takes a more winding route.

While Hobbes' materialism is another primary reason for his rejection of the view that ghosts or spirits can be immaterial or incorporeal,<sup>78</sup> it becomes an especially radical critique in combination

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<sup>76</sup> As he says in *Leviathan*, "Nevertheless, there is no doubt, but God can make unnaturall Apparitions: But that he does it so often, as men need to feare such things, more than they feare the stay, or change, of the course of Nature, which he also can stay, and change, is no point of the Christian faith." (Hobbes 1985, 92-93). Hobbes here appeals to God in seemingly authentic fashion, but in the same sentence, also reduces the activity and power of God to nature itself, or a power equivalent to that of nature.

<sup>77</sup> van Bunge 1993, 76.

<sup>78</sup> At the time, thinkers associated with the Cambridge Platonists, like Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, saw in Hobbes's denial of spirit a denial of religion

with the way our very psychological profile affects the way that we know, leading to these mistaken notions of ghosts, and all of this confirmed and cultivated by religious authorities seeking power of some kind. In contrast, as discussed above, for Bekker, in Cartesian spirit, reason stands at the fount of all knowledge of God. As Bekker continues, “Why do we not free ourselves from all our prejudices and associate Scripture to Reason, to ground our Reasonings only upon them, and to look upon them as the only pure spring?”<sup>79</sup> Indeed, religion trains our eyes to see things a certain way, and, “the faculty, weakened by want of habit, is no longer able to endure the Light.”<sup>80</sup> A zeal for religion comes before knowledge, and it is knowledge, through this natural light of reason, that leads to true religion, Bekker says.<sup>81</sup> Again, true religion is a very different matter for Hobbes and Bekker. For Hobbes, the sovereign has ultimate authority, and the truth of religion comes both in the sovereign’s endorsement of that religion and in the right ordering of names, as truth is itself a matter for language.

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itself. They thought his materialist view “undermined the foundation of all religious belief,” (Mintz 1962, 81).

<sup>79</sup> Bekker 1695, 259-260/335-336.

<sup>80</sup> Bekker 1695, 324/248.

<sup>81</sup> Bekker 1695, 324/248.

But for Bekker, reason is at the base of true religion, also pushing aside a role for revelation, and again pointing to his tendency to deism.<sup>82</sup>

A misunderstanding of the Holy Scripture on these matters only makes things worse when it comes to the devil, says Bekker. Their respective views on Scriptural authority then also set them apart. Indeed, both engage in Scriptural interpretation in a way that was cause for concern by the orthodox thinkers of their time, and were critical in some similar ways. But with Scripture, the question of authority is at the forefront, and Bekker calls into question the authority of Scripture only partially. We might read some passages figuratively, but as Fix writes, “Unlike Spinoza, Bekker believed the Bible to be in its entirety a divinely inspired and thus infallible document.”<sup>83</sup>

Hobbes meanwhile calls into question the authority of Scripture as part of a deeper critique that extends to the kind of knowledge we can get from language and the trust in others required for securing this kind of knowledge. With Scripture, as with history, we are believing in the authority of others. He finds, just as Spinoza does, that, even down to the prophets, we are trusting the word of those prophets in Scripture.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, on matters of Scriptural authority, Bekker is not nearly as radically critical as Hobbes.

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<sup>82</sup> Thanks to Walter Van Herck for discussion on this point and for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>83</sup> Fix 1995, 29.

<sup>84</sup> For an excellent, secular reading of Hobbes on Scripture, see Cooke 1996.

And in light of this difference in the way we know, how Hobbes and Bekker talk about God, and the kinds of arguments and justifications they make for God, are decidedly different. With Bekker, as with Descartes, God remains an idea found in the mind, reason providing the proof for God's existence. For Bekker, explicitly following Descartes and rooted in his rationalism, "Man has an Idea of God in his Understanding."<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, as we saw with Hobbes, God is the consequence of some of our rational and psychological faculties in action. God is the name given to that first cause, found because of our natural curiosity based in our fears of the future, but only the name given to that first cause – naming itself being a human social activity born from need. His use of the idea of a first mover plays on the traditional argument for the existence of God but appeals to a fully psychological account.

For Hobbes, and consistent with this naturalized account, there is no idea of God found in the mind, prior to our experience of the world: "so also, by the visible things of this world, and their admirable order, a man may conceive there is a cause of them, which men call God; and yet not have an Idea, or Image of him in his mind."<sup>86</sup> As Leo Strauss writes of Hobbes, "he considered any natural knowledge of God which is more than the knowledge that a First Cause exists, completely impossible."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Bekker 1695, 253/329.

<sup>86</sup> Hobbes 1985, 167.

<sup>87</sup> Strauss 1963, 76.

## 5. Hobbes on religion

Debates on Hobbes on religion rage on, but looking to Hobbes's work on ghosts, especially alongside Bekker's, helps to elucidate some of the truly radical elements to Hobbes's views, elements worth reconsidering in the context of his political thought and in light of the narrative of the 'Radical Enlightenment'. Although Hobbes might not have been so actively embraced on these matters by, for example, later atheist, materialist thinkers like LaMettrie, d'Holbach, and others, his own account anticipates aspects of the direction taken by some of these figures.

Looking at Hobbes and Bekker's respective strategies for critique of ghosts and demons elucidates the ways in which Hobbes's own account is in service of a decidedly non-theological project. Hobbes critiques ghosts and demons for philosophical and political reasons – to uphold these beliefs is not only bad philosophy, running against a materialist view and a good epistemology, it's bad for the commonwealth, dividing sources of obedience and undermining the singular power of the sovereign.

This then provides some evidence for the view that Hobbes is a critic of religion, offering a louder echo of some of the claims and turns of the Radical Enlightenment than we might have expected. Hobbes sees religion as a human social practice like any other, born from our psychological, rational, linguistic features. This reading then stands against the view that he is authentically engaging in theological debates of the period. It also highlights the more explicit atheist tendencies of



his materialist metaphysics, although he might not take them to their natural conclusion, but a view that is still more radical than that of his Cartesian-minded contemporaries.

In some sense, Hobbes' treatment and critique begins at its very foundations – he provides a naturalized and humanistic account of religion from its origins, explained by its psychological, rational, linguistic, and social practical roots, Christianity subject to and part of that account. We can talk about Christianity, we can talk about the one true God, but we should know what we mean by true, why God is one, and just what purpose it serves. This is not, as Bekker maintains, a consequence of reason and the result of rational inquiry. For Hobbes, this is an empirical observation, very much a matter of how we know, and of a piece with the task of science, so important for working towards a more secure commonwealth.

As many scholars rightly point out, Bekker's role in the Radical Enlightenment story is central and quite singular. Bekker is engaging religious ideas, and in doing so, as has been often argued, helping to usher in irreligion, very much despite his own aims. It is almost ironic then that Bekker takes such a prominent role in the narrative of Enlightenment secularization, when, of the two on the matter of ghosts and spirits, Hobbes is indeed the more radical. But, Hobbes's radicalism is of a different sort. In some ways, he is already standing outside religion, already seeing it for the social and cultural practice it is, and critiquing things like belief in ghosts and demons with this recognition already in mind.

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## RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT, ENLIGHTENED SUBVERSION, AND SPINOZA

*Sonja Lavaert*

### ABSTRACT

An important philosophical turn that took place in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought was the abandonment of transcendence, the strict separation of religion and philosophy, and the rise of a one-substance immanent ontology. It has been argued that this 'radical' turn brought about the philosophical foundation for democracy.

According to the thesis I will defend in what follows, immanent ontology indeed has a political subversive meaning. Inspired by the texts and ideas of Machiavelli, it entailed a radical change of focus: *from* a theological-hierarchical structure *to* the horizontal structure of the world in which we live and in which all humans are equal. This radical change had consequences at the level of the civil state: e.g., the necessity of free thought and free speech, which may lead to resistance, refusal, and disobedience. I will argue that this Spinozistic radicalism can only be adequately understood if we take into account the radical thought of fellow thinkers from his circle, on the one hand, and the subversive image of Spinoza as constructed by his opponents on the other.

I will illustrate my thesis by referring to subversive texts that were written by allies and friends of Spinoza, to political treatises and pamphlets written by van den Enden, and to dictionaries and grammar books by Meyer and Koerbagh. I compare their work to Spinoza's political texts, the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and *Tractatus politicus*, while paying particular attention to the issue of language. Finally, I confront these texts with two refutations written by two adversaries of Spinoza – Blyenbergh and Verwer – who clarify the political nature of the polemic.

## 1. Introduction

For a long time, Spinoza's thoughts on politics and society were rather neglected in philosophical research. For several reasons this has changed over the last decades. The author of the *Ethics* is now omnipresent in genealogies of contemporary political concepts and in current reflections on democracy. One reason is that from the 1960s onwards a new French school of interpretation emerged that presented Spinoza as a materialist and immanent philosopher who had laid the foundations for democracy in a radical way.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of this materialist interpretation, the number of publications about the

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<sup>1</sup> The French materialist-immanentist interpretation of Spinoza was inspired by Althusser's Marxism, for instance, in the case of Matheron, and by Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. Negri (1981), who also played a role in the political interpretations, always adds Gueroult to his French list.

political significance of the Dutch philosopher multiplied. A second reason for the intensified attention for political themes in Spinoza's thought is the historical enterprise of Jonathan Israel, who ascribes Spinoza and his circle a crucial role in what he calls the 'Radical Enlightenment'. According to Israel, the thought of this Enlightenment avant-garde lies at the basis of the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth century. Israel's theory, presented in *Radical Enlightenment* (2001), *Enlightenment Contested* (2006), and *Democratic Enlightenment* (2011), fits largely with the French materialist interpretations. It differs from those insofar as it underscores the predominance of philosophical ideas over socio-economic factors. Particularly challenging is the fact that Israel not only emphasizes the significance of political ideas, relating them to historical events – revolutions in the first place – but that he also relates these ideas and events to a shift in theoretical philosophy, especially in ontology.

The concept 'Radical Enlightenment' was not coined by Israel, but thanks to his genealogical work in the aforementioned trilogy it is on the forefront in current debates about the Enlightenment.<sup>2</sup> One of the most substantial merits of Israel's work is to have excavated and assembled a huge quantity of sources. What exactly is the 'Radical

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<sup>2</sup> Israel adopts the concept of 'Radical Enlightenment' from Margaret Jacob (1981). Yet, the concept has a history going back to late nineteenth-century Germany. Most prominently, it was used by Leo Strauss in his work on Spinoza's critique of religion (1930); references in Schröder 2014, 188.

Enlightenment'? Israel mentions several essential characteristics throughout his trilogy: its proponents reject the idea of divine intervention; they deny the possibility of miracles and of reward and punishment in an afterlife; they reject ecclesiastical authority; they refuse to accept a social hierarchy determined by god or his ministers/representatives on earth. Opposed to the radical Enlighteners stand the moderate Enlighteners, who also *seem* to presuppose the equality of all human beings, deny religious authority, and have doubts about a transcendent foundation of ethics and political rule. Despite appearances, the moderate Enlighteners try to reconcile their reformist program with political power and they try to make exceptions in order to appease religious authorities. Their moderate thought did not bring about democratic freedom and equality. That honour belongs to the radical thinkers. Thus, according to Israel, the French revolution was the result of a philosophical turn that found its clearest expression in the late-seventeenth century thought of Spinoza and his circle, which abandoned transcendence and the intermixture of religion and philosophy, and endorsed a one-substance, immanent ontology.<sup>3</sup> These features did not allow for a moderate, reconciliatory path.

My thesis is that the immanent ontology present in Spinoza's texts shows its political subversion in its analogy with the texts of Machiavelli. Machiavelli subverted the theological scheme and focussed on the world we actually live in – in which human actions are

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<sup>3</sup> Israel 2001, 3-22.



contingent and people are without any support from the divine. The latter, the world of human affairs, is governed by conflicting perspectives, relativity, and changeability. Machiavelli presupposed that all humans are equal and that they all have particular ideas, which they want to express in different ways. In Machiavelli's, and more consistently in Spinoza's texts, this conception of immanent contingency led to the development of a radical alternative political thought in which language practice was seen as a form of power.

In what follows I will pay attention to the source texts of Spinoza himself and to texts written by his contemporary allies and opponents. With some exceptions, most of current day research on Spinoza's circle is historically and biographically oriented.<sup>4</sup> This is why I will focus on the philosophical content and on theoretical – ontological – questions. I will illustrate my thesis in three ways. First, by referring to subversive texts written by Spinoza's allies van den Enden, Koerbagh, and Meyer. Second, by referring to Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* and *Tractatus politicus*. Third, by referring to refutations written by Spinoza's opponents Blyenbergh and Verwer. This will permit me to argue for my

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<sup>4</sup> For philosophical oriented studies on Dutch Early Enlightenment see van Bunge 2001, 2003, 2012; Jongeneelen 1987, 1991; Klever 1997; Wielema 2004. For studies that focus specifically on Meyer, see Bordoli 1997, 2001; Lagrée 1988; on De la Court see Blom 1995 and Visentin 2001. For historical-biographical oriented research on Koerbagh, see Leeuwenburgh 2013; on De la Court see Weststeijn 2013; and, on van den Enden see Mertens 2012.

sub-thesis that the radicalism of Spinoza can only be understood if we take into account the subversive radicalism of his friends and the subversive image constructed by his opponents.

## 2. Spinoza's allies

Spinoza was not a solitary genius. His thoughts originated in a lively context which influenced him and which he, in turn, also influenced. Around 1656/7 Spinoza took Latin lessons from Franciscus van den Enden, a former Jesuit born in 1602 in Antwerp.<sup>5</sup> Van den Enden was a radical democrat and an activist.<sup>6</sup> He designed a constitution —based on

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<sup>5</sup> On Van den Enden, see Meinsma 1980, Meininger and Van Suchtelen 1980, Bedjai 1994, and Proietti 2010. Also see Klever's introduction in his edition of the *Vrije Politieke Stellingen* (1992) and in his English translation *Free Political Propositions* (2007). The *Kort Verhael* is available online thanks to Mertens: <http://users.telenet.be/fvde/WorksP/KortVerhael.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Mertens and Van Bunge argue, against Klever and Israel, that Van den Enden's and Spinoza's naturalism has a Christian origin by Christian religion. Van Bunge, for instance writes: "Significantly, Plokhoy, who appears to have been a major source of inspiration to Spinoza's teacher Franciscus van den Enden, based his egalitarianism on a strictly biblical basis, which turned him into a close ally of the Puritan cause" (Van Bunge 2012, 196). A peculiarity of the non-normative naturalistic discourses of all these authors is their formal neutrality, which makes the thesis of a religious background equally plausible

equality— for Dutch colonists in North America, which was never used because of obstruction by Dutch authorities. In 1662 he published the constitutional text as a commented black book: the *Kort Verhael van Nieuw Nederlants Geleghentheit*.<sup>7</sup> In his description of North America and its inhabitants, the *Indiaenze Naturellens*, we find the first expression of Van den Enden's political ideas. According to his representation, the Indians consider all people equal. They do not have a separate judiciary authority. Crimes like robbery and murder are not punished, but only admonished verbally. Even though the *Indiaenze* society does not rest upon the fear of punishment, acts of aggression are rare. In matters of love the Indians are libertines. Religion has no role in public life, the Indians do not have a real religion, nor do they have clearly distinguished ideas about what is good or bad.<sup>8</sup> In their world-view, absolute evil – let alone the devil – does not exist. Their language does not even have words for these concepts; their only word related to evil refers to physical pain.

The *Indiaenze* community provides Van den Enden with concrete ideas about a democratic organisation of society. He presents it as a 'paradigmatic example' when addressing the question how the Dutch

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as the thesis of (overt or hidden) atheism that I am inclined to sustain. But in this article I am not engaging in this discussion and atheism.

<sup>7</sup> Klever 1997, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Van den Enden 1662, 18-23.

colonists can act to preserve their society.<sup>9</sup> The Indians are *Naturellens*: they stay close to human nature and do not attempt to overcome it. This means that their society is not founded in a normative system or determined by structuring principles of good and bad. On the contrary, their society is natural, based on natural right or natural power. Corresponding with this naturalism, the interest of the common people has absolute priority in their society. It is therefore necessary to aim at the improvement of their condition. Slavery, for example, is against the interest of the common people. This corresponds to the principle of equality of all (*Evengelijkheid*) from which the necessity of equal justice is deduced: (*Gelijk-matigheid*) between more or less intelligent, more or less wealthy, men and women, governors and governed, etc.<sup>10</sup> The principle of equality does not imply that natural differences should be eliminated; each human being, by his natural essence (*Naturewezenheit*), has particular and different characteristics. A society that takes to heart the Indian example creates laws for the common good in order to preserve the particular and natural equal freedom of everyone (*yders particuliere, en natuurlijcke evengelijke-vryheit*).<sup>11</sup> To summarize: from the principle of universal human equality follows the necessity of human freedom. A concrete example of democratic organisation that Van den Enden derives from the principle of human equality is this:

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<sup>9</sup> Van den Enden 1662, 27-33.

<sup>10</sup> Van den Enden 1662, 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Van den Enden 1662, 30.

Indian authorities take their time to prepare important decisions, they submit such decisions to the community, which they try to convince through deliberation until they ultimately receive its approval. Van den Enden also gives concrete proposals for the Dutch colonists, such as forbidding ministers and preachers to join the new state and forming an army of their own civilians (exactly as Machiavelli proposes: no mercenaries but an army of civilians).<sup>12</sup> The former proposal must be understood in the light of the fact that Van den Enden's constitutional design for Nieuw-Nederlandt is meant for "a society of people with different and internally conflicting feelings and ideas".<sup>13</sup>

In the *Vrije Politijke Stellingen en Consideratien van Staat* (1665), Van den Enden expands these political ideas into a systematic theory of the institution of a commonwealth or state based on human nature. The black book pamphlet, which addressed the Dutch colonists, presents itself as a theoretical treatise addressing a general public and arguing that the question of the commonwealth must be related to the problem of the general interest, which can best be answered by focussing on human nature or the human condition itself. According to Van den Enden, the human condition consists of universal equality and autonomy: all people, men and women, are born free, independent, and

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<sup>12</sup> On several occasions, Machiavelli discusses the harm caused by mercenaries, for instance, in *Il Principe*, XII (Machiavelli 1997, 150-154).

<sup>13</sup> Van den Enden 1662, 28-29.

equal in pursuing their own wellbeing.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, this natural autonomy or freedom is a reason for unsociability, on the other hand, isolated individuals are weak while unified are strong, which implies that the natural condition drives people to sociability.<sup>15</sup>

Van den Enden addresses the question whether people are by nature good or evil, which is a variation on the question whether they are naturally sociable or not. His answer is complex and navigates between the alternatives.<sup>16</sup> If we manage to lose our prejudices inspired by egoism or the betrayal of tradition and scholars, we clearly see that nature does not exclusively drive people to malicious passions.<sup>17</sup> Nature also drives people to sociability. Still, the question how to organize the state remains difficult to answer because of the, equally natural, independency and equal freedom of every person. Precisely because human nature exists primarily in the urges and lusts aimed at survival and is not programmed with positive contents from the moment of

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<sup>14</sup> Van den Enden 1992, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Van den Enden 2007, 139.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Machiavelli who in Chapter XV and XVIII of *Il Principe* considers that people are neither good nor bad by nature, or, that they are both good and bad by nature. According to Machiavelli, people are ambiguous, they are both human and animal, and in their animal aspect they are both the cunning fox and the fierce lion (Machiavelli 1997, 159-160,165-166).

<sup>17</sup> Van den Enden 1992, 139-141.

birth, a political theory has to analyse the passions in order to be able to develop a convincing answer to the question how to organize the state.

Based on this naturalism, partly reminiscent of Hobbes, van den Enden develops a series of political arguments that radically subverts the established order and traditional institutions of politics, religion, and society. His critique of religion, echoing Machiavelli's critique of Christianity, is telling: he argues for religion's political significance, although the actual, institutionalized Christian religion has reduced human beings to slaves that are unable to practice their power.<sup>18</sup> Regarding the stability of the state, he holds that equality and the improvement of the condition of the poor are necessary. Regarding law, he holds that it is the power of the common multitude that makes law, which renders law complex because the multitude wants and thinks many different things. Van den Enden states that the multitude should turn its striving for its own utility to the benefit of the public case. This requires a democracy, he argues, because only democracies accept negation and failure and can continuously improve themselves.<sup>19</sup> This means that freedom of thought and speech are necessary conditions if every individual's wellbeing is to be achieved.<sup>20</sup> Starting from the idea

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<sup>18</sup> For instance in the *Discorsi* I, 15 Machiavelli criticizes the devastating effect of Christianity (and of the governments of the popes) on worldly affairs and human freedom (Machiavelli 1997, 238-239).

<sup>19</sup> Van den Enden 1992, 162.

<sup>20</sup> Van den Enden 1992, 149

of common equality (*even-gelykheit*), Van den Enden opts for a democratic government (*populare regeringe*).

Two important remarks are in order here. Although Van den Enden is rather optimistic about the state of nature – unlike Spinoza, he explicitly criticizes Machiavelli – he is not exactly positive about the common multitude.<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, he underscores how vulnerable people are to superstition, ignorance, gullibility, and blind obeisance, which often bring them to misery and slavery. He also acknowledges the opposite danger: the people's natural autonomy and multiplicity of ideas can lead to antagonism, obstruction, and the incapacity of making decisions. However, Van den Enden argues that ultimately not the different ideas and aims of the common multitude lead to quarrel and harmful decisions, but the interests of the powerful.<sup>22</sup>

In the preface of the *Kort Verhael* Van den Enden mentions Johan and Pieter de la Court as intellectual predecessors who stimulated his frank and outspoken writing. He does not call them by name, but whom else could he have had in mind than the free-writers that published the *Politijke Consideratien, Discoursen and Hollandse Interesten*?<sup>23</sup> Much can be said about this interesting and layered preface, for instance about its analogies with the dedication of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and the ironic wink to De la Court's *Consideratien van staat* (1661) and *Politike Discoursen*

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<sup>21</sup> Van den Enden 1992, 175.

<sup>22</sup> Van den Enden 1992, 171.

<sup>23</sup> Van den Enden 1662, iv.



(1662).<sup>24</sup> Most important is, however, the political republicanism shared by Van den Enden and Spinoza (who had De la Court's two books in his personal library).<sup>25</sup> Not only is the political message conveyed in the texts of Machiavelli, De la Court, and Spinoza nearly identical, we also find that they use nearly identical extracts from earlier philosophers and use analogous argumentative structures. For De la Court and Van den Enden the Italian Renaissance, with its radical enlightened freethinking, functioned as an example. This implied, amongst other things, publishing literary texts with a political message in the common language, the Dutch vernacular, and not in Latin, which could only be read by scholars.

### 3. The friends

Many texts that circulated in Spinoza's circle focus on linguistic matters. The paradoxical idea of human equality not characterized by innate properties, but by a common desire to freely express particular ideas, feelings, and forms of life, appears in most of them. Between 1654 and 1669 for example, Spinoza's friend Lodewijk Meyer published four revised and elaborated versions of Hofman's dictionary, the

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<sup>24</sup> Morfino 2002, 260-261. On De la Court see Visentin 2001; Blom 1981, 1995; Den Boer 2007; and Weststeijn 2013.

<sup>25</sup> For the library (*Boekerij*) of Spinoza, see *Catalogus* 1965, 19-32.

*Nederlandsche Woordenschat* (1650).<sup>26</sup> In the 1669 edition, which is more a remake than a revision, Meyer demonstrates his specific ideas about the philosophical meaning of philological matters and the political importance of translations in the mother tongue.<sup>27</sup> Adriaan Koerbagh, a friend of both Spinoza and Meyer, published a dictionary of legal terminology in 1664, the *Nieuw Woorden-Boek der Regten*, followed by a general dictionary of bastard words in 1668, *Een Bloemhof van allerley lieflijkheyd sonder verdriet*. These dictionaries were subversive, as they, especially the latter, criticized obscurantist language that concealed oppression and propagated a radical immanentist philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Let us

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<sup>26</sup> See also Klever 1997, 61; and the doctoral thesis of Ike van Hardeveld on Meyer as a lexicographer, published in 2000. While Bordoli 2001, focuses on the relation between Meyer as philologist, writer of literature, and his philosophy, Bordoli 1997 contains an extensive study on Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* and its reception.

<sup>27</sup> Bordoli 2001, 71.

<sup>28</sup> For Koerbagh see Vandenbossche 1974, Jongeneelen 1987; 1991, Van Bunge 2011, Wielema 2003, Den Boer 2007. It was Jongeneelen who attributed the political pamphlet published anonymously in 1664 *'t Samen-spraeck Tusschen een Gereformeerde Hollander en een Zeeuw Waer in de Souverainiteyt van Holland ende West-Vriesland klaer ende Naectelijck werd verthoont* to Koerbagh (Jongeneelen 1987, 405-415). Thanks to Wielema 2011 there is a commented edition and English translation of *Een ligt schynende in duystere plaatsen, A light Shining in Dark Places, to Illuminate the Main Questions of Theology and Religion*. For a biographical-

consider a few examples. Koerbagh's *Bloemhof* defines *Atheist* as a denier or ignorant of God – which are most of the people, including the theologians.<sup>29</sup> The word *Bible* (*Bybel*), the *Bloemhof* states, means a book of any sort and concerning any topic. Theologians misuse the term, writes Koerbagh, for a collection of Hebrew texts that deal with the Jewish religion and history, of which we do not know the authors.<sup>30</sup> The *Libertine* (*Libertijn*) is described as a free mind, somebody who has been liberated from slavery and servitude, living independently and without religion.<sup>31</sup> The *Multitude* is defined as a crowd (*meenigte*) and multiplicity (*veelheid*), exactly as in Meyer's *Nederlandsche Woordenschat* in the version of 1663.<sup>32</sup> Some of the lemmas in the *Bloemhof* contain an outspoken political critique, especially those related to ecclesiastical functions.<sup>33</sup> Koerbagh uses the lemma of *Creator* (*Createur*) to posit that the world is not created but is eternal or, which is synonymous,

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historical oriented study on Koerbagh, see Leeuwenburgh 2013. Also see Meinsma 1980, Klever 1997, Israel 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 78.

<sup>30</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 95-96.

<sup>31</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 454.

<sup>32</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 454.

<sup>33</sup> See also Winfried Schröder in his comment to the writings he re-edited of the freethinker and anarchist *avant la lettre* Matthias Knutzen. Both Knutzen and Koerbagh define Christ metaphorically and blasphemously as the 'smeared' or 'Anointed' (Schröder in Knutzen 2010, 60; Koerbagh 1668, 139; Koerbagh 2011, 150-153).

uncreated. He argues for this radically reversed proposition by using a methodological principle that is far ahead of his time, namely the reversal of the burden of proof. He argues that those who believe in the creation of the world should prove the truth of their denial of its eternal existence by deducing its creation from Scripture or through philosophy, and not the other way around. But, Koerbagh knows, this is impossible for two reasons. First, the idea of creation from nothingness is contradictory to philosophical reason. Secondly, there is not a word to be found in Scripture about the creation of the world out of nothing. For this reason we can only speak figuratively (*oneigentlich*) about God as the creator or first cause of everything.<sup>34</sup> The examples of lemmas in which this immanent ontology is further illustrated are legion. A *Devil* (*Duyvel*) is a slanderer, an accuser. Koerbagh describes how the word is derived from the Greek *diabolos* and is sometimes used in Dutch translations of Scripture. Not translating words, Koerbagh argues, is often done on purpose to keep the common people ignorant of certain matters. In doing so, theologians tried to make people believe that a 'devil' is an evil spirit, a malign genius, as if being a slanderer were not bad enough.<sup>35</sup> The same mystifying linguistic procedure is applied to *Angels* (*Engelen*), which is also derived from Greek (*angelos*) and simply means 'messengers'.<sup>36</sup> And then there is the lemma *Metaphysics*

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<sup>34</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 106-107.

<sup>35</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 258-159.

<sup>36</sup> Koerbagh 1668, 268-269.

(*Metaphysica*), which according to Koerbagh ought to be explained as *after*-physics, and certainly not as *above*-physics, as is usually done. If metaphysics would mean *above* or *superior* to the physical word, it would have been called *hyperphysics*.

Koerbagh was the most radical critic and bravest publicist in Spinoza's circle. In 1668, the year he published *Bloemhof*, he delivered another manuscript to the printer, *Een ligt schijnende in duystere plaatsen*. He signed the manuscript with the pseudonym he had also used for the dictionary, *Vreederijk Waarmond* ('peaceful teller of truth'), supplemented with: *researcher of the truth*. In this systematic treatise, Koerbagh presents critical ideas concerning religion, ontology, and language that he had already formulated fragmentarily in the dictionary. The structure of *Een ligt schijnende in duystere plaatsen* is similar to that of Spinoza's *Ethica*. The immanentist view is constructed logically, starting from general principles. Koerbagh starts by arguing that his book is meant for all the Dutch people because the questions concerning religion and theology he addresses are *for the benefit of people and country, and concern the entire people*.<sup>37</sup> In its first chapter, Koerbagh addresses God. 'God' means the *eternal, infinite Being, (...) the essence and being of all things*, about whom the biblical authors wrote in a *very inadequate way* that needs interpretation and translation.<sup>38</sup> Similar to what he did in the *Bloemhof* under the lemma *Creator*, Koerbagh develops

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<sup>37</sup> Koerbagh 2011, 57.

<sup>38</sup> Koerbagh 2011, 57-63.

a radical reversal of the meaning of 'God', thereby completely neutralizing the concept. He argues that the Hebrew word for *Being* is *Jehova*, for which 'God' is the Dutch word. *Being* means the essence of all modes of being, therefore it means *all in all* and must be eternal.<sup>39</sup> This leads Koerbagh to the rhetorical question how God or Being could be prior to all things that exist and to the world in general. If God or Being would be the creator of the world 'from nothing', neither God nor Being would be eternal, which is a ridiculous assumption. Besides this argument, Koerbagh tells us, the text of Genesis does not refer to a beginning, or time, but to main.<sup>40</sup> Koerbagh shows that most confused thoughts are the result of linguistic misunderstandings or wrong translations, purposely sustained by theologians in order to mislead or coerce the common people. He carefully argues that God is in being itself, hence is immanent and one: "For there is only one substance, that is, Being, or all in all".<sup>41</sup>

In *The Light* Koerbagh translates theological, traditional, and religious concepts into their real, i.e. social and ethical meaning. He arrives at radically subversive conclusions: sins are mere errors, evil spirits are mere vices, things without body cannot appear, imagination can mislead people, and ignorant people can easily be deceived. He argues explicitly that religion is irrational and can only maintain itself

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<sup>39</sup> Koerbagh 2011, 65.

<sup>40</sup> Koerbagh 2011, 63; 67.

<sup>41</sup> Koerbagh 2011, 81.

with deceit and violence. Thus, for the sake of the common good, religion must necessarily be constrained or eliminated.

Just after bringing this explosive manuscript to the printer, the “researcher and teller of the truth” was arrested and condemned to the *rasphouse*, where the circumstances were so bad that he died a few months later in 1669.

In 1666, three years before this dark episode for free thought, Lodewijk Meyer published his main and best known work, *Philosophia S. Scriptorum Interpres* (a year later followed by his own Dutch translation, *Philosophie d’Uytlegghster der H. Schrifture*).<sup>42</sup> Although Meyer’s book discusses the interpretation of the *Bible*, it is not in the first place a work of exegesis, but of philosophy.<sup>43</sup> In it, Meyer thoroughly displaces the traditional method of interpreting a text. He argues that researching the real significance of a text consists in revealing its obscure and hidden meanings, thereby bringing to light the true purpose of the author. Meyer engages with the external discourse – the text – to bring to light the internal discourse – the author’s thoughts: he studies words and sentences they compose so as to seek out and reveal the meaning that is in exact agreement and correspondence with the author’s

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<sup>42</sup> In 2005 Samuel Shirley published an English translation: *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture*. The most extensive philosophical study on the *Philosophia S. Scriptorum Interpres* is by Bordoli 1997. See further also Lagrée 1988, Klever 1997, Israel 2001, Krop 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Bordoli 1997, 109.

intention.<sup>44</sup> The linguistic reflections on which Meyer's method is based are so radically subverting the traditional view that they seem to anticipate the linguistic turn of the twentieth century. There can be no speech that is not liable to ambiguity so we need philosophy to shed light on it.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, even the Scripture, which according to Meyer is a book like any other, albeit a bit more ambiguous than most (since it stems from the past, is written in an ancient language, and its authors are unknown), needs philosophy to shed light on it.<sup>46</sup> Meyer argues that texts and books "inspire the reader to think and they urge him towards ideas which he already possesses in his mind in clear and distinct form, to contemplate what is denoted by the words in those books, to compare them and to see whether one is included in or connected with another".<sup>47</sup> This means that contrary to what theologians think, the Scripture, being in accord with other books, cannot explain and teach

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<sup>44</sup> Meyer 2005, 38.

<sup>45</sup> Meyer 2005, 86.

<sup>46</sup> This points to analogies with Spinoza's *TTP*. There is an extensive debate on the similarities and analogies of Spinoza's and Meyer's hermeneutics and of the differences in their view on the role of reason and scripture. Although my brief assertions on the analytical linguistic reflections developed by Meyer in chapter 2 and 3, and in the epilogue (see further), touch this debate, I am not engaging with debate here. See the literature already referred to, especially Bordoli 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer 2005, 238.



truth by itself. It “needs another way to bring this about, that is, by a solemn rejection of all prejudices, a diligent contemplation of the things themselves, and as a result a true knowledge of those same things, which is what philosophy is”.<sup>48</sup> Philosophy, not religion, is the way to come to true knowledge according to Meyer.

The *Philosophie d’Uytlegghster* provoked enormous indignation from the religious and ecclesiastical side. By 1669, the year Koerbagh died and before Spinoza’s *Tractatus theologico-politicus* saw the light, a number of refutations were published. In 1672, when the threatening climate deteriorated and became factual repression, Meyer published – anonymously – the *Italiaansche spraakkonst*, an Italian grammar. This publication was subversive for several reasons. First, the language is not chosen accidentally: the *Italiaansche spraakkonst* allowed people to learn, without mediation, Italian, the language in which many libertine texts are written. Secondly, the *Italiaanse spraakkonst* was subversive from a philosophical perspective. It applied Arnauld’s principles of general grammar, which were until then only applied by Arnauld and Lancelot in their *Grammaire générale et raisonnée*.<sup>49</sup> These principles assumed a generality of logical categories in all different languages, and so, in other words, they assumed the equality of all human beings.

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<sup>48</sup> Meyer 2005, 238, 239-240.

<sup>49</sup> According to Lo Cascio this is the first grammar of a particular concrete language, Italian in the case, wherein Arnauld’s principles were applied (Lo Cascio 1996, 40).

In 1674 the *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* was forbidden, together with the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, the *Leviathan*, and *De Jure Ecclesiasticorum*, which was published in 1665 under the pseudonym Lucius Antistius Constans and was recently attributed to Meyer.<sup>50</sup> The latter text contains all the radical subversive elements together: the aim to “discredit and weaken as much as possible, and in all fields, the sway of the public Church”, the distinction between religion and philosophy, and a political theory on the basis of immanent ontology.<sup>51</sup> The *De Jure* develops an uncompromisingly anticlerical programme aiming to abolish clerical privileges. It offers, literally, a materialistic interpretation of religion and contains many overtly contemptuous remarks about religious cult and worship. The author distinguishes between internal or private religion on the one hand, and external or public religion on the other. Internal or private religion is described as being of no business to other people and institutions. The author argues that religious institutions should not be concerned with the education of the common people. Indeed, education should not be dictated by any power at all, “as the truth, after it has been expressed, should be judged by those who have heard/received her”.<sup>52</sup> External or public religion is

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<sup>50</sup> Bordoli argues for the authorship of Meyer in a cautious way. He leaves room for uncertainty and discusses different hypotheses (Bordoli 1997, 92-97) See also Israel 2001, 201; Lagrée 1988, Blom 1991.

<sup>51</sup> Israel 2001, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Lucius Antistius Constans 1665, 2-3.

*practiced by the body alone*; it consists in “assembling in one place, listening to a teacher, baring one’s head, bending one’s knee, invoking and honouring God or something else (!) with prescribed words and aspiring certain sounds”.<sup>53</sup>

The political consequences of the (immanent) ontological premises of this critique on ecclesiastical institutions and on religion itself are extremely radical and subversive, even though the author describes them in a non-normative way. The point of departure is the principle of natural right that says: all people are equal; all people are free; and this natural right and natural power are inalienable and cannot be derogated.<sup>54</sup> Natural right and power should be transferred because of the *mala* in the natural state, and for that reason the civilian body is brought into existence. The natural equality of all people does not disappear in the civilian state. All inequality that exists in the civilian state is provoked by, and derivable from, political authority. The power transferred to the civilian state is merely corporeal power, leaving the natural freedom of thoughts intact: “The faculties of human mind are not subjected to the power of others and cannot be subjected by their nature itself”.<sup>55</sup>

Several of Koerbagh’s materialistic theses have parallels in *De Jure ecclesiasticorum*. Its affinity with the *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* and

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<sup>53</sup> Lucius Antistius Constans 1665, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Lucius Antistius Constans 1665, 8-10.

<sup>55</sup> Lucius Antistius Constans 1665, 22.

*Tractatus theologico-politicus*, especially qua methodology (deductive argumentation and the logic of ‘external discourses’), is clear.<sup>56</sup> Following Meyer, Spinoza applied the principles of Arnauld and Nicole’s *La logique ou L’Art de penser* (1662) to the genealogical and critical analyses in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*TTP*). Spinoza’s interest in linguistics and his application of the principles of the general grammar is illustrated in several of his works, for example in the *Compendium Grammatices linguae hebraeae*, on which he was still working when he died, and in the *Ethica*. Both works make use of the exact same principles and deductive file as the *Grammaire générale* and the *Italiaansche spraakkonst*. What emerges from this linguistic affiliation is the conviction of fundamental human equality, notwithstanding a multitude of particular differences.

## 4. The radicalism of Spinoza

In 1670, Spinoza anonymously published the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. A Dutch translation was not published until after his death, although translations must have circulated in the form of manuscripts. In 1671, Spinoza stopped the publication of a translation by Glazemaker, one of his close friends, out of concern for his own and his friend’s safety. Two edited translations were brought into circulation after his

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<sup>56</sup> Bordoli 1997, 96.

death. One, *De Rechtzinnige theologant*, dates from 1693, while the other, *Een Rechtsinnige theologant* dates from 1694. Thanks to the so-called Manuscript A, a preserved seventeenth-century copy of Glazemaker's translation entitled *Godgeleerde staatkundige verhandelinge*, we may infer that the 1693 edition is the uncorrected translation made by Glazemaker.<sup>57</sup> We do not know who made the other translation. A comparison of the two translations reveals that the latter is an independent translation, containing more errors – but also beautiful inventions. The book itself is of lesser quality than the 1693 version and without the marginalia it gives a less scholarly, unprofessional impression. The author of the preface, who pretends to be the printer of this alternative translation, mocks the 1693 translation for showing important concepts in the original Latin in its margins (marginalia were a habit of Glazemaker). Why would one print the marginalia in Latin, the author wonders, if the scholars, the only ones who can control the quality of the translation, understand Latin and hence do not need the translation, while the common people, who need the translation,

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<sup>57</sup> The copy of the corrected Glazemaker's translation of the *TTP* is one of the three manuscripts bound in one volume with the *Korte Verhandeling* and the *Adnotationes*, presumably by the eighteenth-century copyist Monnikhoff who used the first manuscript to make his copy known as the Manuscript B. The Manuscripts A and B are both in possession of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in Den Haag, the first with signature 75G15, the latter Monnikhoff-manuscript with signature 75G16 (Spinoza 1986, 13-70).

cannot check its quality?<sup>58</sup> As far as I know, only Duijkerius, in his Spinozist novel *Vervolg van't leven van Philopater*, refers to the 1694 translation and he does so in such detail that he must have had access to the volume or perhaps even was the translator himself.<sup>59</sup> Duijkerius on the one hand, and the two editions and the Manuscript A on the other, together illustrate that the Dutch translations must have started to circulate clandestinely shortly after the *TTP* was published in 1670.

The *Tractatus theologico-politicus* immediately provoked an outcry for being politically subversive and arguing in favour of atheism. Spinoza forcefully denied that the latter was true.<sup>60</sup> The *TTP*'s composition resembles Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. Machiavelli takes the reader from a treatise on autocracy to a plea for the republic, Spinoza takes the reader from a theological explanation of Scripture to a critique on religion and a defence of the republic.<sup>61</sup> Both texts convey the same message: democracy, based on the recognition of human equality and the guarantee of freedom of thought and speech, is a condition for proper politics.

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<sup>58</sup> Spinoza 1694, \*3.

<sup>59</sup> Duijkerius 1697, 234-235. Concerning early translations and the 1693-edition, see: Akkerman 1977; 1980; 2005, and Steenbakkens 1994.

<sup>60</sup> See for instance Letter XLVIII from Lambertus Van Velthuysen to Jacob Ostens (Spinoza 1677, 541-553), and Letter XLIX from Spinoza to Jacob Ostens (Spinoza 1677, 553-557). See also Lavaert 2011, 181-182.

<sup>61</sup> See Lavaert 2011, 181; 214-221.

In the first chapters of the *TTP*, Spinoza dwells upon prophecies and miracles and gradually shows that prophets do not prophecy knowledge, but teach love and moral commands. To understand prophecies and miracles we must look for the *purpose* of the revelation. Systematically, he analyses what the concepts of the Old Testament (OT) signify politically: prophecy is promulgation, the Bible is a book, the election of the Jewish people is their excellence in the formation of a durable political community, and religion deals with conflicts, obedience, and types of regimes. Spinoza argues that there are only two possibilities: either power is common, as it is in a democracy, or it is not, as it is in an oligarchy or autocracy. In the latter cases religion is used to gain and maintain power. Obedience is enforced by the belief in miracles and in a transcendent principle. Having cleared this problem, Spinoza focuses on the meaning of the *OT*, applying discourse analyses and reading methods analogous to those of Meyer. He concludes that the *OT* is a collection of moral dogmas meant to teach obedience.<sup>62</sup> Religious belief and philosophy are described as being completely different: philosophy aims at truth and is based on general principles, while religious belief aims at obedience and is based on language, narrations, and histories. Spinoza abstracts from the particular religious contents of obedience, and in doing so demonstrates their real political significance. In chapter 13 Spinoza deals with obedience to the commandment to love one's neighbour – i.e. with moral conduct, which

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<sup>62</sup> Spinoza 1670, 161; 1694, 199.

can still be read as being related to God. In chapter 14, he continues with the line of argument that the *OT* only condemns inobservance and insubordination and that in this sense, it only teaches obedience as such, not necessarily related to God.<sup>63</sup> This formality or neutrality, literally freethinking, is introduced in order to determine whether a religious content different from what is presented in Scripture can still be considered faith. In other words, this neutrality is required to discern faith from philosophy, which is the most important aim of the *TTP*.<sup>64</sup> Those who fail to make a distinction between the two either argue that the Bible is subservient to reason, as do the dogmatists or teachers, or that reason is subservient to the Bible, as do the sceptics. Spinoza says that this discussion between dogmatism and scepticism is useless because both opinions are foolish, one with reason, the other without.<sup>65</sup>

In the final five chapters of the *TTP* Spinoza writes about politics. His starting point is the neutralized conception of God, detached from his aura, from good and evil, literally reduced to nature, and no longer an entity to fear or obey. The preceding chapters cleared the space for the reversal that Spinoza accomplishes in these final chapters. He argues that people are part of nature, in which there is no good or evil. On this neutral basis, he develops his plea for democracy, in which institutional

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<sup>63</sup> Spinoza 1670, 159-160; 1694, 197-198.

<sup>64</sup> Spinoza 1670, 159-160; 1694, 197.

<sup>65</sup> Spinoza 1670, 166; 1694, 206.



power, in order to maintain itself, aims at the general interest, in which fear for irrational decisions is diminished because it is difficult to find consensus in irrationality, and in which slavery does not exist. Slaves, after all, act in the interests of those who command and live their life in servitude. There is no servitude in democracy, argues Spinoza, because it does not require people to transfer their power to a government to such an extent that they are no longer able to deliberate. Therefore, in a democracy, those in power are always subject to fear. Thoughts and feelings can never be totally controlled, therefore, Spinoza argues, it is useless to try to regulate speech. On the contrary, he argues, the freedom of thought and speech are prerequisites for political stability and a flourishing society.

The *Tractatus politicus*, as it was published in the *Opera posthuma* and in the Dutch translation made by Glazemaker as *Staatkundige verhandeling* in the *Nagelate schriften*, both in 1677, was not finished. Spinoza died in February 1677, just when he was working on the part on democracy. Nevertheless, a number of points are made absolutely clear. A political regime that forces people to be free is as problematic as a regime that oppresses freedom or ‘voluntarily’ slavery. Yet, the expression ‘voluntarily’ needs quotation marks because, Spinoza maintains that human beings are part of nature and that their will is not free. When Spinoza talks about freedom, he neither means liberation from nature nor the elimination of feelings and passions because they would be sins or defects. We should think about human passions just as we think about natural properties like heat and cold, and with the same liberty

and frankness we address mathematical problems, as Spinoza had already explained in the *Ethica*.<sup>66</sup> In the *Tractatus politicus* Spinoza repeats the essential points of his earlier analysis of the passions. In a nutshell: people want others to follow them, and to think like they do; they pity people in distress and envy those who are doing well; the negative paralyzing passions are always stronger than the positive activating ones; and lastly, people always want to be the best or the first. Spinoza argued in the *Ethica* that people are necessarily subject to the passions. Reason can control and moderate the passions, but by no means is this an easy task. It is illusory to think that the common multitude as well as the political authorities will be guided by reason only. For exactly this reason a state that is dependent on the will of one person, i.e. which is ruled by one person, is by definition unstable and weak. If this already resembles Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, so does Spinoza's argument that the inner thoughts of rulers are of no importance in state affairs; what matters is the safety of the state.<sup>67</sup> The foundation of the state should therefore not be deduced from reason,

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<sup>66</sup> Spinoza NS 1677, 304; 306.

<sup>67</sup> Spinoza NS 1677, 305-306. On several occasions in *Il Principe* Machiavelli shows that the inner thoughts and the 'good will' of a ruler are of no importance for the maintenance of his power and for the stability and security of the state, and neither are they for those being ruled, which are merely interested in the result. See for instance *Il Principe* XVIII and XX (Machiavelli 1997, 166; 175-179). See also Lavaert 2011, 220; 223-224.

especially not from the reason of one person, but from the common human nature.

In the second chapter of the *TP*, Spinoza deduces natural right from the principle of all being, or the power (*potentia*) of God.<sup>68</sup> The right of nature consists in the laws of nature, in accordance with which all things come to be. Such is the power (*potentia*) of nature. Therefore, the natural right of nature in its entirety and of every particular natural individual coincides with its power (*potentia*).<sup>69</sup> Consequentially, whatever individual human beings do, they do according to the laws of nature, and they have as much right over nature as far as their power (*potentia*) extends. People are led by desire and passions more than by reason, and so their natural right must be defined not in terms of reason but in terms of desire. Spinoza continues this line of thought to

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<sup>68</sup> Spinoza uses two concepts in a clearly distinguished way, *potentia* and *potestas*. In translations this distinction very often is blurred, which gives good reason to use the Latin source text of the *Opera posthuma*. Where he speaks about natural power, strength or force, power of the common multitude, up until *TP* II, 5 exclusively, he says *potentia* and from the moment he speaks about political relations, institutional authority, power of the state or empire, from *TP* II, 6 on, he uses *potestas*. The change occurs while presenting the (traditional) opinion of others with whom he does not agree (Spinoza 1677: 271-272).

<sup>69</sup> Spinoza 1677, 271.

the ultimate conclusion that all human beings are equal in their aim for self-preservation and that the human will is not free.

What are the implications of Spinoza's arguments in the *TP* for political society and power relations between human beings? One important implication is that a person falls under the right of someone else if he is under his power (*potestas*). Spinoza distinguishes four types of political power, two in which the power is only corporal/physical, two in which the power also extends over the mind. Power over the mind is based upon fear or hope. This means that, when the mind is deceived, the faculty of judgment can be under the right of another, i.e. it can be alienated. Spinoza deduces that the mind is under its own right when people use their own reason. Again, he accomplishes a reversal: people are free insofar they rely on and are guided by their inner reason. Freedom does not eliminate the necessity of action. On the contrary, freedom (understood as Spinoza does) makes action necessary. Spinoza continues with a series of political radical theses, derived from the aforementioned considerations: the more people unite and dispose over common rights, the more rights they have; usually, the right that is determined by the power (*potentia*) of the multitude (*multitudo*) and which is controlled by those who, with common consensus, take care of public affairs is called empire (*imperium*); in the natural state, no one is compelled to obedience; and finally, sins, or good and bad, do not exist in the natural state. The term 'sin' is also commonly used for that which is contrary to the dictates of sound reason, and the term 'obedience' for the constant will to control the appetites as prescribed by reason. If human freedom consisted in giving

free reign to appetite, and human servitude to the rule of reason, writes Spinoza, he could agree with that line of thinking. But since human freedom is the greater as a man is more able to be guided by reason and control his appetites, it would be incorrect to call the life of reason 'obedience', and apply the term 'sin' to that which is in fact a weakness of the mind.<sup>70</sup> Weakness of the mind, which is a rather natural and common state for human beings, cannot be considered as a sin, defect, or lack, just like the life of reason does not consist in obedience. What holds for individuals also holds for states: like individual human beings, a political state can make mistakes.

In the *Tractatus politicus* Spinoza uses the word *imperium* for political rule or dominion, whatever its form, and the word *multitudo* for the political subject, the common people, people insofar they have no institutional authority. In the third chapter, he states that the right of the empire is the right of nature determined by the power (*potentia*), not of each separate person, but of the multitude, which is guided as if by one mind.<sup>71</sup> The civilian state comes into existence by a transfer of natural rights, and so the natural right of the citizens necessarily ceases to exist in the civilian state. It is unconceivable that each citizen be permitted to live according to his own wishes and ideas. So far, there is

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<sup>70</sup> Spinoza 2002, 688.

<sup>71</sup> Spinoza 1677, 278-279.

no difference with the theory put forth by Hobbes.<sup>72</sup> But in the next sentence Spinoza comes to the exact reversal of the thesis of Hobbes: “for every man’s natural right (if we consider the matter correctly) does not cease in a civil order”.<sup>73</sup> This remark is followed by a series of radical subversive political theses: the right of a civilian state guided by reason is the most powerful and autonomous; those things that no one can be induced to do by rewards or threats do not belong to the civilian right; the capacity of judgment cannot be transferred or alienated; as the civilian right is determined by the power of the multitude, the power of the civilian state diminishes with the indignation of the people and the attempts of conspiracy; and, finally, the more authorities have to fear, the lesser they are in proper right, the more power and autonomy they lose.

Spinoza’s lines of reasoning are now clear enough to start tracing them back to the initial proposals of this article. My thesis is that Spinoza carefully expresses a non-normative political theory, adopting consistently and consciously a determined terminology (of *imperium* and *multitudo*), and slowly constructing his radically new path in two movements: his endorsement of Machiavelli and his disagreement with Hobbes. The two movements are intertwined. Machiavelli, whose major issue is the contingency paradigm of *fortuna* and *virtù* and whose

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<sup>72</sup> See Chapter XVIII in the second part of the *Leviathan* where Hobbes presents the rights of the sovereign. (Hobbes 1651, 88-94)

<sup>73</sup> Spinoza 2002, 690.

political message is republican, alternates the concept of the multitude with that of common people (*popolo minuto*, plebeians) and writes about the political affairs from their point of view. Through a narration of the first big republican experiment in the history of Florence, occurring after *The revolt of the wool carders* of 1378, he argues that all humans are equal and that actions should not be motivated by fear for something beyond the world we live in.<sup>74</sup>

In the *TP* Spinoza sees Machiavelli as an example in many respects; particularly his terminology must have suited Spinoza's anti-Hobbesian vision well. He uses the Latin word *multitudo*, forged by the Italian vernacular of Machiavelli and used by the Dutch comments, translations, and dictionaries present in his circle, indicating the many common individuals (*gemeen*, *menigte*), and also the immeasurable amount of different factors (*veelheid*) at stake in worldly human affairs. Spinoza formulates an idea of democracy starting from this pair of concepts, *imperium* and *multitudo*. Empire, he argues, depends on the multitude in the reciprocity, albeit not symmetric but reversible, between the ruling and the ruled. Spinoza accomplishes a reversal of the traditional political thought and of the Hobbesian political thought: the right of the empire is determined by the power, not of each separate

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<sup>74</sup> Machiavelli narrates the events literally in the perspective of the common multitude as a grammatical subject because these ideas are in their interest (Machiavelli 2006, 443-446).

person, but of the multitude, which is guided as if by one mind.<sup>75</sup> The radical democratic ideas of Van den Enden (inspired by the Indian example) are clearly visible in this reversal. The natural state does not end when civil society is enacted, as Hobbes thought.<sup>76</sup> Hobbes wanted the natural multitude to be transformed into one people with a clear identity, which could endorse a single idea and consequently had no reason to keep talking about the social order and was brought to silence. A democratic constitutional design such as Spinoza's is meant for a multitude, a society of people holding different and internally conflicting feelings and ideas.

## 5. The adversaries

In September 1674, hardly two months after the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was officially banned, the Calvinist grain trader Willem van Blyenbergh, with whom Spinoza had exchanged several letters in 1664 and 1665, published a Dutch refutation of the *TTP*, *De waerheyt van de christelijcke godtsdienst en de authoriteyt der H. Schriften*.<sup>77</sup> The book was

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<sup>75</sup> Spinoza 1677, 278-279.

<sup>76</sup> Hobbes 1651, 88-94.

<sup>77</sup> There is not much literature on Blyenbergh, except for the letters he exchanged with Spinoza, to which for instance Deleuze refers in *Spinoza Philosophie pratique* and in his lessons on Spinoza (Deleuze 1981, 44-62; Deleuze



discovered in Spinoza's personal library and was, according to my hypothesis, used to sharpen his arguments in the *Tractatus politicus*. Blyenbergh attempted to inverse Spinoza's reversals, redress the free will and Christian morality, and restore the fear of punishment as a basis for politics. In his preface, Blyenbergh positions the *TTP* next to Koerbagh's dictionary, to the works of Machiavelli, and to the legendary *De tribus impostoribus*.<sup>78</sup>

Blyenbergh follows the text of the *TTP* very carefully; he refers to the pages of the Latin edition of 1670 and quotes extensively in what is probably his own Dutch translation, so extensively that it might be suspected that his confutation was a hidden diffusion. In fact, it was not. Blyenbergh's thoughts are actually coherent, from the letters he exchanged with Spinoza up until this confutation of the *TTP* and his refutation of the *Ethica* published in 1682.<sup>79</sup> Still, even if Blyenbergh intended to refute the *TTP*, his methods amounted to a factual diffusion of Spinoza's text. The effect of this 'hidden' diffusion is increased by the fact that Blyenbergh's text was structured using the chapters of the *TTP* instead of using chapters of its own, causing readers to only recognize

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2007, 101-132). On Blyenbergh's refutation of the *TTP*, see also Krop 2014, 151-153. For biographical-historical information see Van Dalen 1908, 1-28.

<sup>78</sup> Blyenbergh 1674, i-ii.

<sup>79</sup> Blyenbergh published in 1682 the *Wederlegging Van de Ethica of Zede-Kunst Van Benedictus de Spinoza*. Also see also Israel 2001; 2010, Meinsma 1980 (1898).

the structure of the criticized text and get confused or lost in the labyrinth of the confutation.

On the other hand, the major point of critique that motivates Blyenbergh's refutation is immediately and sincerely expressed in the first lines of its preface: "It is well known how deep in human minds is rooted the atheism: not only from its actions and works, but also from its studies and texts".<sup>80</sup> For Blyenbergh the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is a prime example of an atheist text, and he has other reasons to aim his critique precisely at this text as well. For one, it is a recently published text that mires at the destruction of Christian religion and proposes a natural religion. It also is an exemplary text, as it resumes all profane and blasphemous assertions made against God in earlier times. And, lastly, it is the most radical and dangerous text because it disguises its boisterous theses by flattering and elegant proves.<sup>81</sup> Its radical reversal of the *TTP* not only consists in its attempts to exterminate the Christian religion, but also, and even more, in its political consequences. Spinoza had four aims in mind with his *TTP*. First, he wanted to deny the prophecies of the prophets. Second, he wanted to invalidate the respectability of the Bible. Third, he wanted to elevate reason to such height that those who strive for a supernatural light seem ridiculous. And fourth, he wanted to spread the opinion that in a free political community everyone should be permitted to "feel what one wants and

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<sup>80</sup> Blyenberg 1674, i.

<sup>81</sup> Blyenbergh 1674, ii.

to say what one feels”.<sup>82</sup> Blyenbergh discusses the first three points corresponding to the first fifteen chapters of the *TTP* in order to restore the truth of Christian religion. This restoration is necessary, Blyenbergh thought, because allowing the Spinozist criticism of religion would mean the ruin of the state. He points his attention to the political theme and Spinoza’s fourth most important aim in the last two chapters of his book, where he focuses on the *TTP*’s chapter 16, and summarizes the last three chapters of the *TTP* in chapter 17 as a brief conclusion.

The focal point of Spinoza’s and Blyenbergh’s disagreement, the question of human nature, is a first-order problem; it surfaces in different forms and structures the entire refutation. According to Blyenbergh, human nature is determined by reason. Thus, while a natural man living outside the civil state is well conceivable, a man living beyond reason is not conceivable at all. The first law of human nature consists in the foundation of human actions on innate reason. The second law is based on the first and prescribes negatively not to do to another what you would not want to be done to you, and positively to do what you would want that others did for you in times of need.<sup>83</sup> There is nothing to be found in Hobbes’s *Leviathan* or Grotius’s *De jure belli* that contradicts this natural law. Yet, but Spinoza denies the

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<sup>82</sup> Blyenbergh 1674, vi.

<sup>83</sup> Blyenbergh repeats the same first two natural laws in exactly the same words as written by Hobbes in chapter XIV in the first part of the *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1651, 64-65).

natural truth of innate reason on which it depends, as he also denies the verity of Scripture. These denials are coherent because the Bible is not in conflict with reason.<sup>84</sup> Although Blyenbergh tries to refute the *TTP* in a rational deductive way, discovering contradictions or the evident falsity of premises, he also admires its logical strength and power. Spinoza's idea of natural right, the principle of human equality and freedom, is directly and severely followed in the entire argumentative construction of the *TTP*. Blyenbergh sees its dangerous power exactly in the consistency and the radicalism of the subversive reversal. Spinoza relates natural right to lust and power. Human beings are part of nature, where no good and bad exist, no aim, no plan, no hierarchy, and no God who punishes or gives rewards. Spinoza places human beings on the same level as animals and abolishes the belief in a punishing God. By doing that, Spinoza opens the door to lawlessness and depraved life. Is he not reducing "reason to being a slave of lust and violence", asks Blyenbergh rhetorically, and is, by doing that, nature not "put upside down"?<sup>85</sup> Spinoza does not subject the body to the service of the will and the will to the service of reason. On the contrary, by relating the natural right to lust and power he dissolves all ties of justice. When reading the *TTP* and its refutation next to one another, the severe non-

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<sup>84</sup> See also Krop who underlines that Blyenbergh links Spinoza to Meyer on this question (Krop 2014, 152; Blyenbergh 1674, 387).

<sup>85</sup> Blyenbergh 1674, 428.

normative character of the first contrasts strikingly with the normative character of the latter.

In its latter parts the refutation gets more and more characteristics of a *political* dispute. Depending on the topic under discussion – reason and the natural sociability, nature and the content of human freedom – Blyenbergh uses Hobbes and Grotius as counterweights to Spinoza’s claims. He questions concrete proposals, such as Spinoza’s argument that one should not necessarily keep promises. He argues that it is entirely against reason to claim that the right of a democracy consists in a common assembly of people, which has power that extend exactly as far as its capacities. In the end, the real problem is what Spinoza is aiming at, the *result* of his deductions. Hobbes, who also took the natural right as his starting point, came to conclusions directly opposite to those of Spinoza. Hobbes states that it is the sovereign “who shall examine the Doctrines of all books before they be published. For the Actions of men proceed from their Opinions; and in the wel governing of Opinions, consisteth the well governing of mens Actions, in order to their Peace, and Concord”.<sup>86</sup> Thus, more along the lines of Hobbes, Blyenbergh ends his refutation with the following questions: who cannot see that if freedom of thought and philosophy were admitted, this would be the end of the state? Who cannot see that this opinion and the book in which it is written should be forbidden? By claiming the freedom to think what one wants and to say what one thinks, Spinoza

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<sup>86</sup> Hobbes 1651, 91.

reverses the foundations and pillars of the state, like he did before with the introduction of natural religion.<sup>87</sup>

Six years after the publication of the *Ethica*, in 1683, the trader, linguist, and jurist Adrian Verwer published a refutation of the *Ethica*, ‘*t Mom-aensicht der Atheistery Afgerukt (The mask of atheism torn off)*’.<sup>88</sup> It is an interesting work that corroborates the thesis of radical immanence from the completely opposite perspective. Verwer distinguishes two radically opposed perspectives in the history of thought. According to one perspective, human beings depend on a higher, divine principle that is separate from them; according to the other, there is no such higher principle outside of human beings and people are independent. The ‘dependents’ consider the ‘independents’ as atheists or deniers of God. Verwer himself defends the cause of the ‘dependents’, together with the “Jews, Christians, Moslems and the well-mannered part of the pagans”, and more particularly the theologians, Erasmus, Calvin, Grotius, and political treatises that refer to the Bible or the Justinian Codex.<sup>89</sup> The ‘dependents’ think that particular things happening or being perceptible in the world are determined in their relation to God. Good is what maintains this relation. The supporters of independency claim that there is no innate good or evil: in nature good and evil simply do not exist. We find this thesis in the treatises of Machiavelli, Vanini,

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<sup>87</sup> Blyenbergh 1674, 466-477.

<sup>88</sup> For Verwer, see Israel 2001 and Jongeneelen 1996.

<sup>89</sup> Verwer 1683, 6, 15-16.

Hobbes, and Spinoza.<sup>90</sup> As Spinoza gave the most radical expression of this view, Verwer wants to shatter the independency theory by a refutation of the *Ethica*. What fuels his anger the most is the fact that Spinoza conceals his radical theses with words and language that seem moderate and belong to the 'orthodox' tradition. That is why he first makes a translation of the *Ethica* in order to discover and lay bare its real shape, which can be summarized like this: in the state of nature people strive for their own utility; they determine good and bad on the basis of their own benefit only. They do not have to obey anyone except themselves and their own feelings and ideas. Therefore, in the state of nature sin does not exist and people are independent from any force that is discerned from and superior to them. This means that according to Spinoza dependency only occurs in political – non-natural – society.

In the formulations of Verwer the real face of Spinoza is, as it were, an 'Indian' face, such as described by Van den Enden in the *Kort Verhael*. Relating a thesis to atheism was a proven and also threatening method of confutation in the apologetic literature of the seventeenth century, a method that went far beyond the theoretical discussion. It damaged the adversaries personally and was meant to silence and eliminate them. Atheism was indeed conceived of as leading to immoral practices and political disobedience, from the perspective of the political authorities. It was regarded as being politically subversive. And because of the fact it was perceived this way, it effectively was. In this sense, Verwer is

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<sup>90</sup> Verwer 1683, 6.

offering an adequate description of the theses, especially when he sustains, critically, that Spinoza presupposes the hypothesis of independency, but does not prove it and only looks at its consequences. I think this is indeed exactly what Spinoza does. He examines what the consequences of a given thesis are, and who benefits from the thesis at stake. This is what ethics and political thinking are about.

## 6. Epilogue

The revolutionary consequences of the philosophical reversal of the early-Enlightenment thought of the seventeenth century cannot be understood if the focus is exclusively on the texts and ideas of Spinoza. Equally, the radical reversal of Spinoza's ontology itself cannot be perceived adequately if it is considered as freestanding. Spinoza's reversals must be related to the radical thought of the fellow thinkers in his circle. These fellow thinkers applied similarly subversive reversals that were sometimes far more radical than Spinoza's. Radicalism consists in abandoning traditional views, subverting their foundations, and replacing them by newly adopted principles and premises. There is no moderate path in this itinerary. As for principles, they are new, or they are not. Human kind is considered as one and free, or it is not. The abandonment of transcendence is radical, or it is not. Taking knowledge of the radicalism in the texts of Spinoza's friends and allies, deepens, refines, and effectuates the philosophical understanding of the Radical Enlightenment.



In the texts of Van den Enden we find all the characteristics of the Radical Enlightenment from Israel's list, related explicitly to the principles of equality and freedom. In Van den Enden we find the most explicit radical enlightened ideas on democracy, all emphasizing that there is one human principle, one common mankind, but with a multitude of particular differences, conflicting ideas and aims, and the conviction that freedom follows from human equality. The texts of Meyer and Koerbagh furnish us with the critical instruments to translate, interpret, and truly understand the meaning of the ontological principle of immanence, its radical rupture, and its enlightening significance for democracy. Only reading Spinoza's text combined with the arguments explicitly brought forward by Meyer and Koerbagh, and translating/interpreting his conceptual edifice using the critique of language and religion developed by them, brings his reversal into the light.

In the same way it is necessary to pay attention to the radical subversive image constructed by Spinoza's adversaries. This image seems to be more radical than the theories formulated by Spinoza himself, and, which is not the same, surely more explicit. His opponents produced a radical image of Spinoza's thoughts, demonstrating their politically subversive consequences. Reading Spinoza's *Tractatus politicus* one will find an immanent naturalist ontology as the basis for a political science, which is hardly discernable from the formulations of Hobbes. But it is Blyenbergh who points out the radical differences in their assumptions concerning natural human freedom, in their aims, and ultimately in their political deductions. Spinoza attempted to

spread the opinion that every person is free to think what he wants and to express what he thinks. This is an opinion that reverses the pillars of the state.

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## JOINING THE RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT: SOME THOUGHTS ON INTELLECTUAL IDENTITY, PRECARIETY AND SOCIABILITY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*Jordy Geerlings*

### ABSTRACT

Historians have for some time asked themselves whether the Radical Enlightenment refers to a cohesive radical wing of the Enlightenment, or whether it merely groups together a number of highly diverse strands of heterodox thought. At the same time, little attention is being given to the ways in which radical thinkers experienced and helped shape the intellectual contexts within which they operated. Although often viewed as isolated individuals, many heterodox, radical, and marginalized thinkers exhibited a keen concern to formulate their intellectual identities and define their place within intellectual landscape. However, the self-perception and self-styling this involved could take on many forms and meanings. In an effort to address these areas, this paper explores how various methods developed to express new intellectual identities and adherence to doctrines, schools of thought, or even concrete groups of thinkers gathered in sociable circles. Considering and applying ideas recently published by Martin Mulsow, and using the radical

thinker Johann Conrad Franz von Hatzfeld as a case study, will explore these subjects through the concepts of intellectual identity, the 'knowledge precariat', and sociability.

## 1. Introduction

If there is a holy grail in Enlightenment studies, it is this: to capture the full intellectual diversity of Enlightenment in a stable grid of concepts, and to explain its development through all of its many social, cultural and geographical dimensions, while avoiding the pitfalls of balkanization and reification. As the solution to this challenge continues to elude historians, responses to this problem have been varied, sometimes increasingly extreme. Some historians have doggedly continued attempts to capture the essence of the Enlightenment using present-day criteria, whereas others have suggested pragmatically abandoning the concept altogether, to focus on more rewarding research questions instead.

These problems recur in the discussions on the historiographical concept of the 'Radical Enlightenment', which, in the eyes of many historians, has encouraged idealist perceptions of an intellectual tradition that never had the degree of coherence or self-awareness often attributed to it.<sup>1</sup> Some historians now believe that there was no Radical Enlightenment as such, only various shades of heterodox

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob 2007, 29-35.

thought contributing to the slow, non-linear development of modernity. Although liberating, this view also has its problems, as the emphasis on diversity tends to reduce radical thinkers to more or less unique historical peculiarities, or to loosely associate them under metaphors of limited explanatory power, such as the 'crise de la conscience Européenne', or the 'diverse roots of intellectual modernity'.

As the debate on the unity and diversity the Radical Enlightenment continues, the matter may appear to be undecidable to many historians, but this need not paralyze further research, especially not when other approaches are available. Historians of science, for example, are increasingly turning towards a renewed history of concepts that investigates the changing meanings attributed in early modern times to labels such as 'rationalism' and 'scepticism'. These can be studied as markers qualifying various intellectual projects, and as markers indicating the meanings individual scholars' attached to what they were doing.<sup>2</sup> These historians thus hope to avoid not only the imposition of categories contemporaries would not have recognized, but also the dangers of an overly abstract, Whiggish account of the Scientific Revolution.

Similar approaches removing present day historiographical constructs in favour of 'actor categories' might be usefully applied to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual ferment

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<sup>2</sup> One example is the recently launched NWO-funded 'Thinking classified: structuring the world of ideas around 1800'.

known today as the Radical Enlightenment. How did thinkers we would qualify as radical or heterodox conceive of themselves? Did they have any sense of belonging to a larger, cohesive movement or school of thought, and how did membership of any societies or clubs influence these perceptions? What ways of ‘belonging’ were there, and what factors influenced individual’s decisions to adopt or reject the ideas we associate with the Radical Enlightenment? In what follows, I will develop some thoughts on the possibilities these lines of inquiry have to offer, in critical interaction with ideas recently put forward by Martin Mulso, and using the natural philosopher Johann Konrad Franz von Hatzfeld (1686-after 1751) as an historical test-case.

## 2. Introducing Hatzfeld

Widely categorized in his own time as a deist or even “*cerveau brulée*”, Johann Konrad Franz von Hatzfeld’s outlook on the scholarly world in which he operated has been described by present-day historians as a strong but highly peculiar expression of Radical Enlightenment thought.<sup>3</sup> The same is true of many similar thinkers of this period, who have been viewed as unique, isolated individuals, who can be loosely associated with the Radical Enlightenment. The lack of intellectual coherence amongst these thinkers has often been perceived as an

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<sup>3</sup> Tortarolo 2005, 239; Wielema, 239.

indication that irreducible diversity existed across the board, that little or no sense of a shared project or identity could be found amidst the significant number of marginal thinkers active in Europe from the late seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth. At the same time, the stories of men such as Hatzfeld seem to challenge this view. For them, intellectual identity and belonging were particularly pressing issues in the struggle for recognition and patronage. However, before moving on to a more detailed discussion of the lines of inquiry that can be elaborated based on the elements mentioned above, some biographical details might be helpful.

Born around 1686 in the Nassau territory of Dillenburg, Hatzfeld revealed little about his youth and social background. Although details on his formal education remain unknown, Hatzfeld was by no means uneducated: he acquired French, English, and some knowledge of history and the natural sciences. His earliest known career was that of a lackey, serving several noble households in the Dutch Republic and Britain. This career brought him to London, where, in the early 1720s, he decided to dedicate himself exclusively to the sciences. At this point, he revealed a strong passion for the perpetual motion project conceived by Johann Ernst Elias Bessler, which had caused some controversy in the preceding decades. In the face of rising scepticism about this project at the Royal Society, Hatzfeld decided to develop a machine of his own, believing that success was very near: “For according to what Account we have of the Model, that Illustrious Prince [the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel], and excellent Encourager of all Arts and Sciences has in his possession of Dr Orfireus’s [Bessler] making, I am very well satisfied of

its being a real perpetual motion, as well as I am satisfied to be capable of making one my self.”<sup>4</sup>

Just as strong as his passion for the perpetual motion project was Hatzfeld’s distaste of Isaac Newton (1642-1727). Hatzfeld accused the latter of developing a worldview in which God was responsible for maintaining the operations of the natural world by defining motion as external to matter. Newton stood accused of other flaws as well, including the indefensible notion of the ether, the misinterpretation of the Bible and the execution of deeply flawed experiments. Finding it impossible to get a hearing at the Royal Society about his perpetual motion machine and other ideas, Hatzfeld wrote *The Case of the Learned*, which was published in 1724. In this treatise, Hatzfeld expounded his ideas on natural philosophy, restated his opposition to Newton’s worldview, but also sided with Leibniz on the issue of providence, paying special attention to the need to see the natural world as a creation functioning without direct divine intervention. To define it otherwise would be to deny human freedom and engage in “predestinism”, one of Newton’s main blasphemies in Hatzfeld’s eyes.<sup>5</sup>

In 1726, Hatzfeld left London. There is very little evidence about his activities after this point, although Hatzfeld later revealed that he had supported himself through his technical inventions and by taking jobs as an English tutor for the children of aristocrats. Only in 1741 did Hatzfeld

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<sup>4</sup> Hatzfeld 1724, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Hatzfeld 1724, 20-24.



turn up again, still carrying many of the same convictions. Travelling between Halle, Leipzig, Gotha and Berlin, he tried to secure subscriptions for a new treatise against Newton. Surprisingly, he managed to gain the support of Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and Johan Christoph Gottsched (1700-1760), spending over a year in the Leipzig area before moving on to the court at Gotha.<sup>6</sup> According to Johannes Bronisch, Wolff's decision to support Hatzfeld's new project stemmed from his own desire to generate opposition to the rising popularity of Newtonianism. Hatzfeld, who had already declared his support for Leibniz, must have appeared as a useful ally, although he would prove to be more susceptible to radical appropriations of Wolffian thought than Wolff and Gottsched had foreseen.<sup>7</sup>

After quarrelling with his supporters, Hatzfeld travelled to The Hague, where he arrived in 1745. There, to Wolff's surprise and horror, he published one thousand copies of his new treatise, which carried the title of *La Decouverte de la Verité et le monde detrompé a l'égard de la philosophie et la religion*.<sup>8</sup> The book, which purported to have Wolff's personal approval, restated Hatzfeld's earlier criticisms of Newton, but added a radical critique of organized religion, the Bible and the European political elites. Hatzfeld was especially scathing about the clergy, which he believed, had deliberately or through ignorance

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<sup>6</sup> Bronisch 2010, 237.

<sup>7</sup> Bronisch 2010, 319, 325-326.

<sup>8</sup> Hatzfeld 1745.

misinterpreted the Bible on a gigantic scale: “Et les ministres de l’Eglise sont d’autant plus mal avisés, qu’ils croient la Philosophie une Destruction à leur Profession pendant qu’en Effet elle est l’unique Moyen de la leur conserver, pourvu, qu’ils expliquassent la Bible comme il faut, sans quoy la Philosophie sera effectivement une Destruction à leur Profession, parce que de la manière qu’ils expliquent la Bible, il n’y a ni Rime, ni Raison, mais au contraire, elle en est remplie de Chimères, Absurdités, Contradictions et Blasphémies, qui [sic] sans doute la Philosophie les condamnera jusqu’au Fond de l’Enfer [...]”<sup>9</sup> So severe was his critique that Hatzfeld was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment in The Hague. After displaying signs of madness, however, his sentence was reduced to banishment and the public burning of his book. He reappeared in 1751, was briefly imprisoned again, and seems to have definitively disappeared from view afterwards.

Hatzfeld’s intellectual trajectory from a relatively moderate anti-Newtonian deism to a full blown critique of religion, church and state presents a challenge to historians of the Radical Enlightenment. On the one hand, Hatzfeld developed a unique worldview that put him well beyond both the respectable scientific world and his intellectually more coherent freethinking counterparts. Very much aware of his isolation, he sometimes portrayed himself as a lone enlightener, selflessly acting for the good of society. On the other hand, Hatzfeld very openly declared his ideological and intellectual preferences, expressing a clear

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<sup>9</sup> Hatzfeld 1745, 20-21.

sense of belonging to radical Wolffianism. In addition, he showed a high degree of discernment and ability in seeking out and dealing with influential men of science, courtiers and Walloon church clergymen whom he saw as his main audience. In spite of the incoherent nature of his writings, the impatient anger with which he greeted many interlocutors and even some signs of madness, time and again he managed to gain access to social environments not easily available to men of his standing. Hatzfeld thus oscillated between isolation - to some extent self-imposed - and inclusion. Gaining insight into how Hatzfeld related to his environment and explaining his motivations and interactions with the world as well as the origins of his radicalization is a challenge that cannot be met within the bounds of traditional intellectual history. To this end different lines of inquiry should be explored. In the following sections, precarious knowledge, intellectual identity and radicalization will be explored as possible avenues for further research, applying both to Hatzfeld and more generally to what is described as the radical wing of the Enlightenment.

### 3. Precarious knowledge

In his recent work, *Prekäres Wissen: Eine andere Ideengeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* Martin Mulsow proposes an interdisciplinary investigation of *precarious knowledge* during the early modern period. Distancing himself from earlier approaches, which have relied on a more traditional dichotomy of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, Mulsow claims that knowledge was precarious in three ways. First of all, the carriers of

knowledge, be they documents or oral tradition, were precarious in that they could be destroyed, lost or forgotten. In addition, knowledge had a precarious social status: heterodox or otherwise non-established knowledge carried the risk of marginalization, loss of social standing, and prosecution. Finally, knowledge claims were precarious because authors operating under conditions of censorship were forced to invent ways to mask the meaning of their statements and prevent their identification as authors, thus complicating the interpretation and reception of their ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Mulsow's approach focuses both on marginalization itself and the varying degrees of success individuals achieved through various strategies designed to counteract it. Thus, instead of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, he sees various forms of more or less precarious 'knowledges'. In order to explain the complexities of how marginalization worked, Mulsow proposes an interdisciplinary approach using visual evidence, the reconstruction of social networks, book history and the traditional tools of textual interpretation to explain the gaps between the author's intentions, the (strategic) way they were published, and the ways they were received by various audiences.

Exploring these gaps is a crucial step in determining how the *knowledge precariat* differed from what Mulsow defines as the *Wissensbourgeoisie*. Both groups were in principle subjected to the same

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<sup>10</sup> Mulsow 2012, 14-18.

risks, the main difference being that the knowledge bourgeoisie managed to secure protection from institutions and potentates while also operating more successfully within the conventions of the scholarly world. Thus, the difference between the two groups was not merely a matter of the orthodox or heterodox content of their respective convictions, but a complex interplay of contingent factors and choices that marginalized certain thinkers, forcing them to adopt various strategies to protect themselves and their knowledge. By keeping their more radical ideas strictly private, some heterodox thinkers managed to retain their respectability. Another, riskier strategy, was followed by writers who unabashedly published their heterodox ideas while insisting that there was an essential distinction between their public intellectual persona on the one hand, and the pious private moral person on the other. Still another strategy was that of the eclectics, who buried their own convictions beneath compilations of various heterodox ideas.

The history of the knowledge *precariat* is thus not simply a tale of how an intellectual underclass came into being as a result of the adherence to controversial ideas. Mulsow's work shows various individuals' trajectories toward precarity, each determined by different constellations of social and intellectual factors. Mulsow also emphasizes that the marginalized thinkers of whom he speaks were not a sociologically homogenous group. Instead, they were individuals from various backgrounds who were faced with great difficulties when disseminating their knowledge, and the isolating effects of precarity were such that few schools of thought or otherwise organized groups

can meaningfully be said to have existed. After all, marginalized thinkers had few ways of building up a public profile, or of creating a community of like-minded individuals.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it is precisely among marginal thinkers that one finds the most unique individual projects, whose sheer peculiarity often made infertile ground for the formation of schools of thought. Lastly, the complexities of the circulation and reception of marginal documents further inhibited the interpretation of the ideological message of marginal texts for contemporary readers.

Therefore, according to Mulsow, only scholars and publishers engaged in gathering and preserving rare or prohibited books were in a position to survey the development of marginal thought beyond the strictly local level. Their efforts enabled the production of reference works such as Johann Anton Trinius' *Freydencker-lexikon*,<sup>12</sup> which by compiling and categorizing large quantities of marginalia, created the impression that entire schools of heterodox thought were emerging across Europe. Mulsow maintains that most radical thinkers were themselves unaware of such larger structures, which were the result of reconstruction after the fact by far less isolated individuals, and never reflected the experience of marginal thinkers themselves.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mulsow 2012, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Trinius 1759.

<sup>13</sup> Mulsow 2012, 41.

However, Mulsow's approach can be elaborated in a number of ways, including a closer examination of the role played by sociability in the diffusion and marginalization of precarious knowledge. Another is to review the continued problem of the marginal, heterodox thinker's intellectual identity and self-perception. If many marginal thinkers from the early modern period and early eighteenth century did not labour under the impression that they were part of an identifiable school, structure or ideological block, did this apply to all marginal, radical and heterodox thinkers throughout the Enlightenment period? And, even if this claim applies universally, how did radical thinkers conceive of the intellectual landscape, what structures did they see, and what sense or desire for inclusion did they exhibit? What changes can be observed in the ways adherence to certain doctrines and movements was expressed? Thirdly, there is the problem of radicalization: a much more sustained, systematic approach is needed to explain what drove thinkers deemed heterodox by their contemporaries to embrace ideas and doctrines that entailed marginalization, ridicule and even the risk of prosecution.

## 4. Intellectual identity

A considerable body of research exists today on intellectual friendships, correspondence networks, sociability, literary devices permitting

authors to hide behind various authorial personae, the formation of new intellectual movements, currents or disciplines, and even the “body of the scholar”.<sup>14</sup> Each of these approaches relies on different conceptions of the scholar’s identity, ranging from the abstract and textual to the sociological and even physical, and tries to trace how these aspects of the scholar’s identity developed over time.

Within Radical Enlightenment studies, however, the search for overarching structures and developments in intellectual identity and self-perception among radical thinkers is shied away from. Many historians agree with Mulsow that the variety, peculiarity and isolation of radical or heterodox thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries defies categorization. Moreover, there is a keen awareness of the slipperiness of labels such as ‘atheism’ and ‘Spinozism’, which were applied as polemical terms in order to discredit opponents, and therefore do not reliably indicate the presence of what they supposedly identified. Just as importantly, it has become clear that the atheists, Spinozists, deists, freethinkers and other heterodox writers who were active over the course of the eighteenth century were in many ways a motley bunch, which differed to an important degree from the radical coteries of the late seventeenth century. Thus, they frustrate attempts to construct taxonomies of intellectual identity and even efforts to define continuous lines of development, or a shared intellectual heritage.

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<sup>14</sup> Vila 2012; Smith 2004; Mori 1999.



Any proposal to reconstruct intellectual identities of marginal thinkers therefore faces the possibility that it will merely confirm the claim that there were no clearly identifiable schools of radical thought in the eighteenth century. But this is not necessarily the case. I wish to focus on a somewhat different kind of identity: the ideological, intellectual identities of the marginal thinker insofar as they were actively shaped by each thinker personally, and insofar as they translated into an attitude toward and awareness of the various ideological dividing lines structuring the intellectual landscape. Precisely for marginalized intellectuals, self-definition and the awareness of ideological dividing lines were essential when trying to influence the reception of their ideas and their social standing. As Ann Thomson maintains, the writers of “anonymous irreligious works were keen to show that they were part of both a long tradition and an international fraternity doubting Church doctrine, rather than being a few isolated individuals”.<sup>15</sup> While she also emphasizes the dangers of assuming clear intellectual dividing lines within irreligious thought, which was appropriated in complex ways throughout Europe, Thomson makes clear that freethinkers were keenly concerned to construct a well-defined intellectual identity – a concern that may not have been limited to freethinkers, especially within a polemical context.

Given this polemical context, an important part of self-definition was done negatively, by contrasting oneself with certain enemies.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomson 2013, 170.

Hatzfeld, for example, was very much concerned not to be perceived as an atheist, pantheist or Newtonian. For other thinkers too, rejecting certain labels and the intellectual and ideological agendas associated therewith was essential to the formulation of their own. Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) fought extensively to refute accusations of atheism leveled against him, not merely because of the opprobrium attached to atheism, but also because it clashed with his perceptions of his own project as a much more subtle, eclectic approach to philosophical and religious questions – an intellectual attitude for which he wished to be recognized. Thus, not all marginal and heterodox authors' attempts to distance themselves from the more controversial markers of intellectual identity can be read exclusively as strategies to protect themselves from precarity in Mulsow's sense. In many cases, they were stating their opposition to the convictions of others to make their own stand out more clearly.

Positive self-definition and even the naming of allies or like minded men also occurred implicitly or through explicit declarations of adherence ideas, doctrines or schools of thought. Adherence to an ideological group or body of thought was often expressed through such words as 'sectateur', 'partisan' or 'disciple', or through larger texts directly positing the existence of groups of ideological allies. For example, in the preface to his *Système de la Nature*, the Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach (1723-1789) addresses himself to what he calls "le petit nombre de partisans de la vérité, & des âmes honnêtes qui la cherchent

sincèrement”.<sup>16</sup> Further along in his book, in a chapter that explicitly asks “existe-t-il des athées”, he articulated what he understood atheism to mean and what positions had been wrongly labeled as such. He maintained that a small elite had in fact embraced true atheism, compared to the large numbers of the vulgar, superstitious and clerical.<sup>17</sup> Scholars tended to use terms such as “partisan” pejoratively to refer to adherents of wrongheaded ideas, but in d’Holbach we see them used in a positive sense, affirming the author’s adherence to a body of ideas that had a deeply precarious and controversial status.

One fruitful line of research would be to trace the evolution of the use of these (and comparable) markers, to determine whether and why they became more explicit over the course of the eighteenth century. This would yield insights into the evolution of the basic conceptual tools with which marginal thinkers perceived the intellectual landscape and positioned themselves within it. Part of this research could focus on the performative influence of such works as the *Freydencker-lexikon* and other genres of texts that wittingly or unwittingly drew the lines and categories structuring the intellectual landscape. Charles Alan Kors has already detailed the influence of religious training which aimed to reinforce young Catholic minds against atheist thinking, but inadvertently created well defined positions of atheism which were

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<sup>16</sup> d’Holbach 1770, preface.

<sup>17</sup> d’Holbach 1770, 321, 332-335.

later embraced wholesale by highly radical thinkers.<sup>18</sup> The tools of categorization and identification, initially employed by those who wished to distance themselves from radical thinkers, may very well have created the categories which were embraced by the very same people they were suppose to describe.

The baron d'Holbach, and as we shall later see, Hatzfeld, were both unusually explicit in expressing their adherence to definite ideological positions, but the self-perception of those heterodox thinkers who did not explicitly position themselves within the intellectual landscape is an equally legitimate subject, if more challenging. The degree and manner in which individual thinkers expressed their intellectual identity was moreover influenced by changing contexts. Explicit statements of adherence, for example, usually occurred in directly polemical contexts, beyond which presenting an explicit intellectual identity did not always logically follow from the situation. Even those thinkers who explicitly expressed adherence to certain ideas were not always telling the full story. Thus, it is necessary to use the full range of means available to the historian, including sociability, correspondence networks, possession of books, and various forms of biographical information.

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<sup>18</sup> Kors, 1990.

## 5. Sociability

If both the mechanisms making knowledge precarious and the strategies designed to cope with this precarity were inevitable features of the world of letters and scholarship, it makes sense to study them in conjunction with another feature of that world: sociability. As has been widely recognized, organized sociability played a major role in the dissemination and publication of knowledge, and also determined the value and status accorded to both texts and their authors.<sup>19</sup> The many forms of sociability in which the learned engaged therefore constituted another arena in which precarious knowledge was shaped, disseminated, protected or even exposed. Moreover, sociability deeply influenced marginal thinkers' self-perception and perception of the world by confronting them with a variety of worldviews with which to engage, inviting them to articulate their own views with greater clarity.

Some sociable circles were deliberately constituted as open spaces for sharing and shaping precarious knowledge. The *Chevaliers de la Jubilation*, operating in The Hague in the early eighteenth century, the informal group around Franciscus van den Enden in Amsterdam, the Collegiant gatherings in Rijnsburg and many others are all examples of sociable circles offering various semi-institutionalized platforms to knowledge and knowledge-carriers that would not have been acceptable elsewhere. Although these circles themselves were

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<sup>19</sup> Mijnhardt 1987; Goodman 1994; Lilti 2005.

confronted with the issue of precarity – many of them were forced to operate clandestinely – they offered a more or less secure environment, providing opportunities to exchange knowledge with like-minded individuals. These societies were no ideological monoliths and often were not concerned primarily with ideological coherence. But it was precisely because they had managed to create an internal culture open to ideological diversity that they could continually accept the presence, loyalty and even personal investment of individuals whose ideas would not have been welcomed outside.

But in what ways did belonging to circles of this kind contribute to the formation of individual thinkers self-perception and self-positioning vis-à-vis their intellectual context? No societies came with fully prepared identities, but some encouraged a high degree of personal commitment as well as the adherence to specific ideologies or bodies of ideas. As recent scholarship has shown, some Masonic lodges acquired a very specific ideological signature and social base.<sup>20</sup> Others did not, and proved permeable to individuals from widely differing backgrounds who joined for widely differing reasons. Important differences have also been found in the ways societies managed ideological and religious differences internally.<sup>21</sup> Given these varied, even contradictory findings, it seems likely that encounters in sociable contexts impacted self-perception and self-positioning in a variety of

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<sup>20</sup> Porset 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Porset 2006; Beaurepaire 2013.

ways, some of which were highly intensive and informative for the present day historian, and some of which were certainly not. For some heterodox thinkers, however, encountering groups of likeminded men, or even just men of various convictions willing to discuss ideas openly were deeply formative, sometimes loyalty-inspiring events.

Hatzfeld, for example, was deeply influenced by the *Aletophilenkreis* in Leipzig. Founded in 1736 by Ernst Christian Graff von Mantteuffel and Johan Gustav Reinbeck, the *Aletophilen* provided a platform of discussion and exchange in which ample space was given to thinkers who had moved well beyond the accepted boundaries of Lutheran orthodoxy. After spending its first few years in Berlin, the society moved to Leipzig in 1740, where Johann Christoph Gottsched was one of its core members. Predicated on the appropriation of Christian Wolff's oeuvre as a basis for the formulation of a more liberal frame of mind against Lutheran orthodoxy and pietism, it successfully gathered both moderate Wolffians and their more radical counterparts. In fact, as Gunther Mühlphordt, Martin Mulsow and others have found, some of the most significant radicals of the early German Enlightenment were present in this circle.<sup>22</sup> These "left-Wolffians" loosely based themselves on Christian Wolff's philosophy when developing their critiques of the Bible, Pietist and Lutheran orthodoxy and even authoritarian government.

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<sup>22</sup> Mulsow 2007, 20; Mühlphordt 1979, 237-253.

Having been introduced to this society and the surrounding network through the good offices of Christian Wolff, Hatzfeld gained access to a wider network that included Gottsched. For several years, Hatzfeld stayed in the Leipzig area, supported by both Gottsched and Manteuffel in an effort to counter the influence of Newtonianism.<sup>23</sup> To Hatzfeld, being part of this network offered not merely material support and patronage, but also considerable intellectual stimulus as well as a sense of belonging. This he expressed most strongly in the resulting book, which contains numerous references to the *Aletophilenkreis*' vocabulary on the love of truth (*Aletheia*). He gave it the title *La Decouverte de la Vérité*, chose the pseudonym Chevalier Veridicus Nassaviensis, and augmented his original anti-Newtonian argument from the 1720's with a radical deism that was very much in line with some of the more radical Left-Wolffians of Leipzig. The title page of the book, moreover, claimed to carry the approval of Christian Wolff himself. Thus, through his book, Hatzfeld very loudly proclaimed his adherence to the *Aletophilen* and to Christian Wolff, against the Newtonian worldview. He could hardly have given a clearer and more explicit expression of ideological awareness and intellectual identity.

The list of subscribers is another important feature of the book, which shows how Hatzfeld conceived of the intellectual landscape in which he functioned.<sup>24</sup> Although it is most unlikely that many of the

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<sup>23</sup> Bronisch 2010, 325-333.

<sup>24</sup> Hatzfeld 1745, cviii-cxx.



individuals listed had in fact subscribed to the book, or were ever even made aware of the possibility of doing so, the list can be seen as an enumeration of all those individuals whom Hatzfeld regarded as an important audience for his ideas. Thus, the it shows his orientation towards the international diplomatic community, the Walloon churches, the academic world and various heterodox groups in a limited number of urban centres. Alongside Mantteuffel, Gottsched, Wolff, Reinbeck and a various court officials, the list moreover contained many names Hatzfeld could only have known about by being thoroughly acquainted with the clandestine scenes of various cities on an axis from London to Berlin. Lambert Ignace Doux fils, postmaster and colporteur of clandestine books for the circle around Rousset de Missy in The Hague, was among those mentioned.<sup>25</sup> Lesser known individuals also appeared, including Jean Dubordieu, a London-based minister and author of a controversial treatise attempting to prove truth of the legend of the Theban legion. Another significant name was that of Francesco d'Algarotti, who had published *Newtonianismo per le dame* in 1737, and Francois Moreau de Maupertuis, president of the Berlin Academy of Sciences.

Hatzfeld's primary purpose in adding this list to the book was no doubt to boost the international stature of his work, but in including kindred spirits from radical circles, high profile personalities from various courts in Europe, and likely enemies such as Maupertuis, he also

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<sup>25</sup> Jacob 2006, 172.

revealed a keen awareness of the intellectual and political landscape in which he operated. If Hatzfeld positioned himself within this landscape as an anti-newtonian radical who was highly sympathetic to Wolffianism and very much enthralled by the sense of mission offered by the *Aletophilen*-ideology, he nevertheless desired the attention of the full community of the learned and the powerful. He tried to accomplish this not just through sociability and the list of subscribers, but by actively seeking out courtiers, professors and other men of note, with some degree of success.

Another aspect to consider in sociability is the larger category of (intellectual) friendship. Many marginal thinkers actively sought out friends and interlocutors whom they could trust. Hatzfeld, for example, singled out Johann Jacob Mascou as particularly good friend, alongside various other personalities of “cette charmante ville” Leipzig, including a Dr. Richter who became “un second Mascou”.<sup>26</sup> Other thinkers also became extremely attached to the social circles they frequented. Themiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe, for example, expressed his sentiments about the circle of friends surrounding the *Knights of Jubilation* by telling a friend “you know that this has been my purpose during my entire life”.<sup>27</sup> Although it should be recognized that often, “dans ces réunions, la philosophie échappe a la taxinomie et a la typologie”,<sup>28</sup> marginal

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<sup>26</sup> Hatzfeld 1745, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Jacob 2006, 156.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob 2007, 32.

thinkers valued the safety and interest of discussing their ideas with others, and some were clearly as committed to maintain these avenues of discussion as they were to pursuing their own projects.

Hatzfeld, then, could perhaps be described as a member of the knowledge precariat who was well aware of the ideological dividing lines structuring the intellectual context in which he operated, and concerned to clearly express his intellectual identity. Although Hatzfeld was unique in the vehemence with which he expressed his opposition to the “Newtoniens” as a clearly defined group and the explicitness with which he declared his support for Christian Wolff, he resembled other marginal thinkers in his desire to seek out allies while also continuing to interact with men of completely different convictions. Isolated and precarious though their situation may have been, heterodox and marginalized thinkers were not without an awareness of the intellectual landscape, and indeed were keen to belong to communities of like-minded thinkers.

Rather than persuading them to adopt less precarious convictions, these forms of sociability seemed to encourage marginal thinkers to develop their ideas further, and fostered a sense of connection to other thinkers, sometimes transcending ideological differences in the process. It is essential to learn more about how the experience of these discussions in social circles drove the formation of ideological self-awareness and self-identification. Hatzfeld’s case shows that many insights can be gained into the ideological awareness and self-definition of radical authors through the investigation of their attachment to circles of fellow heterodox thinkers, as revealed both in their writing

and in their sociable activities. While Hatzfeld's self-positioning was unusually explicit, studying other marginal intellectuals in this manner would greatly improve our knowledge of the evolution of intellectual identity among marginal thinkers, from the vaguest expressions of adherence to the formation of full-blown schools.

## 6. Reconsidering radicalization

Radicalization can be understood as the process by which certain thinkers increasingly distanced themselves from accepted or 'mainstream' positions to embrace radical ideas with ever greater vehemence, in spite of the dangers of persecution and ridicule. As I have touched upon in earlier work, the investigation of radicalization processes might generate some useful insights into how and why individual thinkers decided to embrace the subversive and dangerous ideas we today associate with the Radical Enlightenment.<sup>29</sup> If pursued in an interdisciplinary manner that takes into account not merely the individual thinkers' engagements with subversive texts, but also their correspondence, ties to sociable circles, as well as their social and economic background, this approach would show at an individual level how subversive, heterodox ideas became influential as a convincing frame of mind.

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<sup>29</sup> Geerlings 2012, 207-226, 222.

Admittedly, even though the concept of radicalization has been applied successfully by present day sociologists of religion to explain how individuals become susceptible to religious extremism,<sup>30</sup> the concept becomes problematic when applied to heterodox thinkers in the eighteenth century. By no means the least of these problems is the dependence on an underlying definition of what constitutes a radical thinker, which in turn is dependent on how we define what is radical or heterodox. In short, it amounts to repeating the above-mentioned tendency to impose structures on historical reality that were never perceived by contemporaries. Especially now that recent research has emphasized to what extent spinozist ideas developed in conjunction with various forms of dissenting Protestantism, the concept of radicalization seems to be too narrow an instrument if understood exclusively as an intellectual trajectory towards doctrines associated with the Radical Enlightenment. Radicalization thus described would exclude a variety of heterodox currents surrounding the late seventeenth-century Rijnsburger Collegiant movement, in which dissenting Protestant ideas such as Socinianism intersected with spinozist thought to create a fascinating intellectual ferment.<sup>31</sup>

At this point, too, the greater flexibility that is achieved by studying the early modern period from the perspective of the precarity of knowledge could prove useful. Instead of limiting itself to radicalization

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<sup>30</sup> Gielen 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Israel 2012, 181-203.

in the traditional sense, this approach would emphasize the complex of socio-economic, intellectual and personal factors leading intellectuals to embrace ideas and doctrines, which under the prevailing conditions of the time inevitably entailed varying degrees of precarity. Using this as a point of departure, the investigation can be turned toward a more general investigation of how and why certain thinkers accepted the commitment to precarity associated with ideas and agenda's not accepted by contemporary society, while others did not. This would reframe our understanding of the factors motivating individual heterodox thinkers' decisions either to use the various strategies to protect themselves, or to state publicly their adherence to these doctrines. Also, the overreliance on such explanations as the supposed persuasiveness of radical rhetoric or the sheer intellectual strength of one-substance doctrines as the most comprehensive solution to the *ancien régime*,<sup>32</sup> would be replaced by a more thoroughgoing examination of the motives behind the intellectual and ideological growth/change of individual thinkers.

Hatzfeld's journey to intellectual and social precarity was motivated to a large extent by his indignation at his failure to gain acceptance for his ideas and inventions at the Royal Society in the 1720's, as well as the patronage system within the London scientific community in general. Although it is unclear what motivated his choice to become a natural philosopher in the first place, it is evident that the difficulties he

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<sup>32</sup> Israel 2011, 7, 20-30.

experienced in London set him on a path that cemented his anti-newtonian stance. The inability to find any form of employment that fitted his perception of his intellectual abilities subsequently increased his susceptibility to subversive, oppositional ideas. Through his contacts with members of the *Aletophilenkreis*, the moderate deism of his first book turned into a full blown critique of the Bible, the idea of the afterlife, organized religion, non-meritocratic government and the arrogance of established scientists. The decision to distribute copies of this work personally to significant members of the magistrate and church communities in The Hague was another significant step. Such was Hatzfeld's confidence in the validity of his arguments, that the very real danger of persecution did not hold him back. Precarity had engendered the courage of despair. And yet, this despair never drove Hatzfeld as far as some other radicals, who embraced atheism, democratic government, and the equality of the sexes. Clearly, resentment and despair were factors that could help produce a variety of intellectual trajectories, not all of which ended in proposals to overthrow all structures of the *ancien régime*.

## 7. Conclusion

Some of suggestions for further inquiry offered above will remind readers of Robert Darnton's approach to the rise of Grub-Street. Darnton related the furious pamphleteering campaigns of late eighteenth-century Paris to a disaffected underclass of literary men who had been unable to gain access to the *philosophe* establishment. As a

result, these men bitterly radicalized Enlightenment ideas into a full blown assault on the *ancien régime*.<sup>33</sup> The elements outlined in this article differ from Darnton's approach in that they extend the subject matter from the Parisian intellectual underground to a much wider group of marginal thinkers, and also place a greater emphasis on the impact of self-labeling, the awareness of ideological dividing lines, the ways in which adherence to bodies of ideas or groups of like-minded men was expressed, and how these various aspects changed over the course of the century. The underlying assumption is that radical thinkers were not mere members of a more or less amorphous knowledge precariat, nor were they isolated individuals carrying radically unique convictions. Instead, they can be seen as individuals concerned to position themselves within an intellectual landscape that they helped shape rather than just being resigned to the margins. A further deviation from Darnton is the attention paid here to the choices made by radicals in adopting certain labels and other markers of identity in accordance with their self-perception as thinkers, while rejecting others.

In sum, the suggestions offered above are intended to build on existing work by Darnton, Mulsow, Jacob and others for a specific purpose. Studying the radical and marginal thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century through the interrelated aspects of precarity, intellectual identity and sociability will not restore the unity of the

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<sup>33</sup> Darnton 1982.



Radical Enlightenment, nor should it merely reaffirm the irreducible diversity of Enlightenment-era thought. Rather, it should tell us more about whether and how intellectual movements, alliances and friendships acquired the cohesion that many contemporaries - both insiders and outsiders - attributed to them. In addition, it will yield further insights regarding what it meant to be involved in these structures, i.e., what personal experiences and motivations were hidden behind the adherence to highly controversial, marginalized ideas, as well as insights into the use of the various markers of identity discussed above. It is perhaps inevitable that the large, amorphous mass of isolated radical, marginal and heterodox thinkers of the Enlightenment period will continue to defy attempts to be captured in concepts such as the 'Radical Enlightenment' or unifying narratives about the rise of intellectual modernity. Nevertheless, it might at least be possible to discover the ways individual thinkers defined their relationship to larger intellectual movements, how these movements acquired shared meanings for those involved, and how they subsequently became significant factors in the intellectual developments of the period.

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## JOHANN CHRISTIAN EDELMANN'S RADICALISM: A SYNTHESIS OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND SPIRITUALITY

*Else Walravens*

### ABSTRACT

In this paper Johann Christian Edelmann's radicalism is studied from two points of view. First, the reasons why he unanimously is labeled as a radical thinker are considered and evaluated: his vehement style and language, his affinity with radical pietism, his turn to rationalism, his Spinozism, his massive internal and external criticism of the Bible and of the Christian faith. Second, the threefold progressive message Edelmann wanted to transmit to us through his dynamic and unstructured works is revealed and discussed: his plea for peace and justice based on a secularization of Jesus' gospel of love, his promotion of a non-dogmatic freethinking which combines freedom of thought and of speech with pluralism and open-mindedness, his defence of a pan(en)theistic, philosophical religiosity by which he extends the scope of religiosity beyond the limits of any established creed.

The extreme rational nature of his external criticism of religion and his humanistic messages prove that Edelmann joined after a long journey the Enlightenment movement. Simultaneously, he remained a *homo religiosus*. His

mature thought is thus a successful synthesis of Enlightenment and – secular – spirituality.

## 1. Introduction

In November 1749 the then fifty-one-year-old Johann Christian Edelmann begins to compose his *Selbstbiographie*.<sup>1</sup> This undertaking is provoked by the appearance of an anonymous pamphlet *Des berechtigten Johann Christian Edelmanns Leben und Schriften, dessen Geburth und Familiae, welcher in Weissenfels gebohren und in Jena Theologiam studiret, solche aber verlassen; dargegen die Spötterey der Christlichen Religion, der heiligen Schrift und der Geistlichkeit ergriffen* which was published in Frankfurt in 1750 – in fact 1749.<sup>2</sup> In order to correct this and other unreliable and defamatory biographies Edelmann decides to write his version of the story of his life. The resulting witty autobiography is both a proud self-justification and a severe self-reflection in which Edelmann is disposed to self-criticism and self-mockery.

There is a central thread in the autobiography, which is also suggested by the title of the denounced pamphlet: it describes an intellectual development of a man whose life and thinking are dominated by the theological-philosophical discussion of the time. It

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<sup>1</sup> For the abbreviations of the writings of Edelmann see References, Works of Edelmann.

<sup>2</sup> SB, 2-3.

depicts a laborious journey from Lutheran orthodoxy, over radical spiritualism, to Enlightenment rationalism. The work is indeed uncompleted: in the middle of the description of his move in 1744 to Neuwied, Edelmann breaks off his autobiography. Nevertheless, the work deals partially with the last phase since *Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunft* (written in 1739, published in 1743) and *Moses mit aufgedeckten Angesicht* (1740) who introduce this final phase, have then already been treated of. It is also from that last perspective that Edelmann surveys and interprets his life history. Moreover, Edelmann gives the topic of his intellectual progress a prominent place in most of his writings. Edelmann's educational journey also occurs in the title of many academic studies. For example, *From Orthodoxy to Enlightenment* is the subtitle of Walter Grossmann's monograph (1976) and Annegret Schaper's work on Edelmann is entitled *Ein langer Abschied vom Christentum* (1996).

Concerning the meaning of the latest stage, scholarly interpretations diverge. Is Edelmann's worldview in his final stage that of an adherent of the Enlightenment, or is it still situated in the heterodox spiritualistic tradition? Quite recently, documents were detected that could clarify this question. In the city library of Hamburg, Schaper discovered four texts of lectures for masonic lodges. One of them is dated 21 February 1759, the three others were written about the middle of the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Schaper's hypothesis is that these masonic texts, which she

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<sup>3</sup> Schaper 1996, 218-227.

reproduces in an appendix of her monograph,<sup>4</sup> “höchswahrscheinlich aus seiner [Edelmann’s] Feder stammen”.<sup>5</sup>

The second document is discovered by Miguel Benítez in the university library of Breslau: the manuscript of a German translation of the anonymous work *De imposturis religionum (De tribus impostoribus)* along with a copious commentary, both finished in 1761. Under the synonym Evander, translator and commentator appear to be Edelmann. A transcription of the manuscript is included in the annotated and amply commented edition by Winfried Schröder of *De imposturis religionem* in the series *Philosophische Clandestina der deutschen Aufklärung*.<sup>6</sup>

The two discoveries seem to lead to opposite results. For Schaper Edelmann’s – as far as I see, conjectural – connections with the freemasonry in Hamburg and Berlin, and the four masonic lectures attributed to him, prove that he has joined the German deistic movement and confirm that he finally became an advocate of a deistic natural religion.<sup>7</sup> Schröder, on the contrary, judges that the Edelmann of the commentary seems rather to be a “*homo religiosus*”<sup>8</sup> who has moderated his criticism of religion.

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<sup>4</sup> Schaper 1996, 229-262.

<sup>5</sup> Schaper 1996, 220.

<sup>6</sup> Anon. 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Schaper 1996, 219-220.

<sup>8</sup> Anon. 1999, 74; Schröder 2010, 261.



Besides its stirring development, Edelmann's thinking has another, unanimously stressed particularity: its radicalism. For opposite reasons, both supporters and opponents consider Edelmann to be a radical thinker. His enemies range him among the notorious and dangerous mockers of religion and faith.<sup>9</sup> His sympathizers stress and admire his courage and his uncompromising militancy.<sup>10</sup> Scholars like Fritz Mauthner (1922), Paul Hazard (1946), Emanuel Hirsch (1951) and of course Grossmann and Schaper also locate him in the camp of the radicals. And Jonathan Israel, who devotes a section of his standard work *Radical Enlightenment* to Edelmann, characterizes him as "the most notable spokesman of radical thought of the generation following that of Stosch and Lau".<sup>11</sup>

In the first part of this contribution, I will consider the reasons why Edelmann is labelled a radical. To do this I will discuss five features of his attitude and thought: 1. the frank, often coarse and even insulting, tone of many of his writings, 2. his affinity with radical spiritualism, 3. his later turn to rationalism, 4. his Spinozism, and 5. his drastic criticism of the Christian dogmatism and the Lutheran church (internal criticism) and of the Scriptures (external criticism of the Christian faith).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pratje 1755; Trinius 1759, 244-252, 255-279.

<sup>10</sup> Bauer 1927, 88.

<sup>11</sup> Israel 2001, 659.

<sup>12</sup> I shall not discuss the political facets of Edelmann's thinking, because politics is not one of his central themes and because what he writes about it is complex,

In the second part of my paper, I will turn to a systematic approach of Edelman's thought and focus on what I consider to be his central progressive message.

## 2. Edelman's radicalism

### 2.1 Edelman's vehement style and language.

From his first publications, namely the fifteen issues of his *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* (especially from the sixth to the fifteenth) on, Edelman treats the targets of his criticism in a harsh and disrespectful way. The representatives of the Lutheran church are depicted as liars, power-mad persons and hypocrites. The priests are regularly called "Pfaffen" and about the Holy Communion, one of the sacraments Edelman rejects, he writes that the clergymen "Christum mit Haut und Haar zu fressen und zu verschlingen [gäben]"<sup>13</sup>. In the three "Anblicke" of *Moses mit Aufgedeckten Angesicht* the language is just as polemical and rough.

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contradictory and is in need of thorough scholarship. The Marxist interpretation of Edelman's political significance by Wolfgang Heise (1954), which has been reiterated by Eva Scheweleit (1989), is no longer satisfactory.

<sup>13</sup> *UW*, XIII, 28.

The theologians and the priests are called “gelehrte Ochsen-Köpffen unsrer Zeit”<sup>14</sup>, “Liebe Schwartz-Röcken”<sup>15</sup> and “unverschämte Huren-Knechte”<sup>16</sup>. Edelmann designates the Wolffian philosophers as “unsere heutige Zärtlinge” (Moses III, 103) or “Winckel-Professores”<sup>17</sup>, and Voltaire as “Teller-Lecker”<sup>18</sup>. Towards temporary allies in the spiritualistic-pietistic movement from whom he dissociates himself or with whom he broke up, Edelmann’s attitude is equally hard and injurious. In the writing *Bereitete Schläge auf der Narren Rücken* Johann Friedrich Rock (1687-1749), the leader of the sect of the Inspired, is named “Maul-Affen”<sup>19</sup> and in the pamphlet *Christus und Belial* Edelmann unmasks count Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), the charismatic head of the Herrnhuter, as a false prophet and calls him a “Wind-Beutel”<sup>20</sup> and “Affter-Heyland”<sup>21</sup>. He also sharply reproaches his former sponsor, publisher and friend, Andreas Gross his alleged cowardice. Gross and his circle of separatist spiritualists had compelled Edelmann to remove coarse passages concerning the Holy Communion from the

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<sup>14</sup> Mo, I, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Mo, I, 64.

<sup>16</sup> Mo, I, 67.

<sup>17</sup> Mo, III, 105.

<sup>18</sup> Mo, III, 149.

<sup>19</sup> B, 28.

<sup>20</sup> CB, 55.

<sup>21</sup> CB, 45, 56.

eleventh and the twelfth part of the *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* because they feared these would harm their case. In an ample justification at the beginning of the thirteenth part, published by another editor, Edelmann ruthlessly denounces their half-heartedness and their lack of courage.<sup>22</sup>

A lack of education is not the explanation of this polemical and aggressive style. Edelmann was born in a middle class family– his father was a musician and tutor to the pages in service of the count of Sachsen-Weissenfels – and he received, in spite of the precarious financial situation of his parents, a profoundly schoolish and academic education. This means that he was familiar with professional and learned speech and writing. Edelmann’s option for the described style has thus nothing to do with ignorance of a more appropriate method. The reasons are rather a. the nature of his writings, his aim and the public he addressed, and b. the controversial nature of the religious-theological literature at the time.

a. Edelmann, who is an inquisitive and ambitious pupil and student, wants to escape the extreme poverty his parents landed in through the mismanagement of the dissipated duke Christian of Saksen-Weissenfels. He studied theology at the university of Jena in the hope to find a theological profession that would fulfill this ardent wish. However, the career Edelmann is aiming at, has a particular nature: it is committed to the orthodox Lutheran faith. At first, this causes no problem: Edelmann

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<sup>22</sup> UW, XIII, 5-224.

is a believer and he is prepared to continue the Lutheran tradition of his family and to become a pastor. But as time goes by, (suppressed) doubts arise concerning the Lutheran creed and the infallibility of the Bible. This rising scepticism renders Edelmänn's search for a ministry upon his return to Germany after his six-year stay in Austria as a tutor not only unsuccessful due to an external cause – the scarcity of the position<sup>23</sup> – but also to an inner one. Mentally, Edelmänn is in the position of the clergyman Kant is talking about in his essay *Was ist Aufklärung*, who finds that what he has to preach and to teach in his catechism is no longer in accordance with his personal conviction.<sup>24</sup> During this twofold crisis – the struggling with his religious convictions and the uncertainty concerning his living – Edelmänn gets acquainted with the spiritualistic-pietistic movement through encounters with religious dissenters and foremost through intensive reading of works belonging to that rich and complex religious movement. The immersion in the spiritualistic range reveals him his real vocation, the vocation to become a critical religious writer.<sup>25</sup> So, his works (especially his early ones) join the tradition of the edifying and reformatory literary genre. This implies that they have a specific nature which differs from the nature of academic treatises and writings of secular philosophers. They also aim at and reach a specific public. As he explains in the thirteenth

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<sup>23</sup> Schaper 1996, 68, 118-121.

<sup>24</sup> Kant 1968, 38.

<sup>25</sup> SB, 157-158.

part of the *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* he addresses “sonderlich einfältigen, (dann den Gelehrten zu gefallen schreibe ich nicht)”.<sup>26</sup> His actual readers are not unlettered, but they are no scholars, theologians or learned philosophers. They are in majority representatives of the middle class. Among them we find many independent artisans, merchants and academic trained representatives of practical professions (physicians and jurists). Like Edelmann, these people are religious seekers and with them he enters in conversation. That is one of the reasons why he uses the dialogical form in many of his writings, a method which objective is to achieve a gradual emancipation of his readers from blind faith. Further, Edelmann publishes his correspondence with his sympathizers or answers their questions in a special work. I refer here to the *Sendschreiben* from which some are published (*Die Begierde Nach der Vernünfftigen Lautern Milch*, 1744 and *Send-Schreiben an seine Freunde den Vorzug eines Freygeistes vor einem armen Sünder zeigend*, 1749), while others circulate as manuscripts (e.g. *Drittes Sendschreiben an seine Freunde, Darinnen Er seine Gedancken von der Unsterblichkeit der Seelen eröffnet*, 1749-1754). The tone of these writings addressed to like-minded persons and friends is mild and benevolent. In his *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* and his *Streitschriften* his opponents are of course vehemently attacked and refuted in the first place. Nevertheless he also tries to convince them and even here he pretends (ironically?)

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<sup>26</sup> *UW*, XII, 29.

that he hopes to emancipate them too, although he is aware of the fact that the possibility of success is very slight.

For Edelmann, his authorship is a mission. His writings document his personal search for truth and he considers it as his task to communicate to his fellow men his new religious insights and to free them from the oppression first of the Lutheran church, later also from the threatening oppression of the new so called spiritual leaders and finally from any faith based on the authority of the Bible.

b. The second explanation of Edelmann's vehemence is that an offensive style is prevailing in both the interreligious and the religion-critical debate. Edelmann frequently refers to polemical passages in the Scriptures and he draws the attention to the fact that the early Luther speaks plainly when he criticizes the papacy or the Catholic church.<sup>27</sup> Edelmann considers himself to be a reformer who continues the critical project of Luther or even more of Jesus Christ and his apostles. He stresses that Jesus and the early Christians also ruthlessly attacked the heathen superstition.<sup>28</sup> By this he justifies his own radical attitude and he derives from it the right to scorn the in his eyes declined Lutheran clergy.

Besides, it is well-known that the tone of the pamphlets of the defenders of orthodoxy, is mainly defamatory. Finally, it is evident that the language the freethinkers use in their criticism of religion or rather

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<sup>27</sup> *UW*, VIII, 634.

<sup>28</sup> *UW*, XIII, 209-224.

of what they call superstition and enthusiasm, is not always sophisticated. Edelmann's writing is thus situated in a global polemical climate. Stimulated by his ardent and combative temperament that is averse of shallowness, he is carried away by it. The abuses he detects arouse his indignation and provoke his anger. In his view, controversy is a mark of courage. Moreover, writing polemically is according to him the most efficient means to realize his destructive and his emancipatory objectives. He is convinced that Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649-1727) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) did not attain their goals by their moderate criticism of the orthodox church and the gentle way they advocated their reforms and he judges that it was necessary to paint harshly the abomination of the Communion, as he did, so that his readers would be disgusted and distance from it.<sup>29</sup>

However, there is in Edelmann's writings a slow evolution in the direction of a more polished tone. As we saw, Edelmann was already internally attacked by his separatist brothers and we know how he reacted to that. Later, some of Edelmann's friends, among which one of his most important protectors, the Berlin merchant Pinell, also pointed out to him that improper phrases marred his *Moses*. Edelmann first neither accepted Pinell's well-intended reprimand, but in his autobiography he admits that Pinell was right.<sup>30</sup> He now equally

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<sup>29</sup> *UW*, VIII, 653-654, XIII, 29-30.

<sup>30</sup> *SB*, 357.



understands Gross' caution and recognizes that he wronged his separatist friends.<sup>31</sup> In another previous passage of his autobiography, he writes "Seit der Ausgabe meines Glaubensbekenntnißes, wird man einen andern Geist an mir erblicken", although he ironically adds "und ob ich schon weiß, daß er den Liebhabern verjährter Vorurtheile eben so wenig, und vielleicht noch weniger, als der erste anstehen werde, so werden sie doch, wieder willen auch gestehen müssen, daß er sanfter, als der ihre sei"<sup>32</sup>. He ascribes his former lack of clemency towards the clergy to the arrogance of his Lutheran education. He writes "dass ich besser gethan haben würde, wenn ich gleich anfangs sanfter und leutseeliger geschrieben hätte"<sup>33</sup>, but confesses that he formerly was not able to be more charitable because he was too outraged by the deceit of which he had so long been the victim. He nevertheless concludes drastically: "Es mißfällt mir diese damalige Gestalt an mir so sehr, daß ich wünschte, daß keine von meinen ersten Schriften mehr in der Welt seyn möchten. Was aber geschehen ist, daß ist geschehen, und wird nicht mehr geschehen"<sup>34</sup>. Finally, Edelmann distances himself likewise from his former impetuosity in his *Schuldigstes Dancksagungs-Schreiben an Herrn Probst Süßmilch vor Dessen, Ihm unbewust erzeugte Dienste*, his subtle and all but servile answer to Probst Johann Peter

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<sup>31</sup> SB, 231.

<sup>32</sup> SB, 202.

<sup>33</sup> SB, 204.

<sup>34</sup> SB, 203.

Süssmilchs pamphlet, *Die Unvernunft und Bosheit des berühmten Edelman*.<sup>35</sup> Edelmann thus firmly renounces his harsh style and tone, but as to the content he does not take back anything from his criticism of religion. At the most he admits that some of his positions and insights were incomplete and improvable.

## 2.2 Affinity with radical spiritualism.

As I already indicated, it is not through philosophy that Edelmann was stimulated to become a radical writer but through his acquaintance with the spiritualistic-pietistic movement in German Lutheranism. Edelmann gets for the first time in touch with pietism thanks to Johann Franz Buddeus (1667-1729), his admired professor at the university of Jena who sympathizes with the pietistic religiosity. Edelmann is equally attracted by it which becomes manifest in increased virtuousness and a great religious seriousness but doesn't yet result in criticism of the Lutheran church and faith. During the period he spends in Vienna as a tutor in the house of the merchant Mühl, Edelmann gets acquainted with the melancholy, self-tormenting and pessimistic pietism of the version of Halle. In spite of his awakened sympathy for the pietistic movement, Edelmann experiences an intuitive aversion for this oppressive side of pietism. Many years later, he expresses again his

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<sup>35</sup> *SD*, 278-282, 286.

aversion for the gloominess and the hypocrisy of the adherents of Francke, which he ascribes to their pessimistic view of man.<sup>36</sup>

The third encounter with pietism causes a revolution in Edelmann's life and attitude. From 1731 to 1739 Edelmann familiarizes himself in different ways with the spiritualistic-pietistic movement: by the intensive reading of mystical-spiritualistic works (among which those of Johann Arndt, Jacob Böhme, Joachim Betke, Philipp Jacob Spener and Gottfried Arnold); by personal encounters with representatives of the movement (adherents of Antoinette Bourignon and Madame Guyon, Mennonites, Gichtelians); by his reception into the network of Gross and his participation to the translation of the 'mystical' Berleburger Bible; and by his acquaintance with the community of the Herrnhuter and of the Inspired.

The three radical spiritualists, Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), Joachim Betke (1601-1666) and Johann Konrad Dippel (1673-1734) make a deep impression on Edelmann and they play a decisive role in his own radicalization. The reading of Arnolds *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, von Anfang des Neuen Testaments biss auf das Jahr 1688* in the winter of 1731/32 occasions a spiritual awakening in Edelmann's life. From Arnold Edelmann learns that Christian truth is not found in the official church but rather among the supposed heretics who aim to restore the original, pure Christianity. Not the orthodox persecutors but those who are persecuted appear to be the true Christians. The

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<sup>36</sup> BM, 358-360.

church history is the history of a decline: the plain faith of the early Christians was gradually substituted by an extinct, exteriorized, rigid and oppressive doctrine. The *Kirchen- und Ketzergeschichte* becomes the main source of Edelmann's *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* and has also an influence on his transition to rationalism.<sup>37</sup>

Edelmann further welcomes the church critical approach of Betke's *Antichristentum*. Edelmann quotes extensively from Betke's attacks on the Lutheran clergy, which the latter holds responsible for the decline of Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Edelmann gets acquainted with the writings of Dippel when five parts of the *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* are already completed.<sup>39</sup> He feels a very strong affinity with this combative theologian, physician and alchemist,<sup>40</sup> who is famous due to his fearless charges against the abuses in the Lutheran church and to his devastating criticism of Lutheran articles of faith, among which the doctrine of Reconciliation. Edelmann's endorsement of Dippel's criticism of orthodox religion accelerates his dissociation from the Lutheran orthodoxy and sharpens his own criticism. Edelmann thus becomes the last link in a process of radicalisation within the German spiritualism.

Alongside the continuation of its criticism of the orthodox church and religion, Edelmann's contacts with pietism and radical spiritualism

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<sup>37</sup> Schaper 1996, 152.

<sup>38</sup> *UW*, III, 176, 271-305.

<sup>39</sup> *UW*, VI, 423-427.

<sup>40</sup> *UW*, VIII, 675.

have some additional consequences. In the first place, he assimilates the spiritualistic-pietistic view that faith is an inner, personal experience and he also approves the requirement that the Christian message of love should be put into practice. Secondly, he is influenced by the mystical tendency of radical spiritualism and he begins to thoroughly study its intellectual basis, namely the complex mystical-hermetic-gnostic-neo-platonic-esoteric tradition.<sup>41</sup> Thirdly, he absorbs the dualistic worldview and anthropology that is characteristic for the movement. This results in a series of questions and problems with which Edelmann will struggle during the rest of his life: the notion of the Divine; the relation between the Creator and his Creation (the visible world and humanity); the origin of evil; the attitude towards sensuality, the body, sexuality; ethics and moral consciousness; immortality of the soul.

### 2.3 Turn to rationalism.

In contrast to his vast knowledge of the spiritualistic literature, Edelmann's knowledge in the field of philosophy is very small at the start of his career as a writer. In the index at the end of the eleventh issue of the *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* names of non-Christian

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<sup>41</sup> For more information concerning this cultural tradition see Stockinger (2004) and Neugebauer-Wölke (1999) and (2011).

philosophical authors are seldom and when philosophers such as Plato or Seneca are discussed in the text, it is always very summarily and exclusively on the basis of second-hand information. This remark holds for the last three parts, although more names of philosophers appear in the index in the fifteenth issue that covers them. From the publication of *Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunfft* and *Moses* on, this situation changes: from now on Edelmann also includes ideas and arguments of philosophers, deists and other freethinking authors in his reasoning. What could be the reason for this turn?

*Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunfft* is the result of Edelmann's new understanding of the value of reason that arose from his conflict with the community of the Inspired and their leader Rock. One of the characteristics of this sect was its belief in ecstatic prophetism and its – in separatist circles not unusual – rejection of reason in religious life. One could say that Edelmann experienced among the 'Inspired' in a personal and extremely dramatic way the famous tension between irrational faith and reason.<sup>42</sup> The argument that permits Edelmann to distance himself from the according to him intolerable and tormenting condemnation and oppression of reason, is the sudden inspiration – which of course has many sources – that the initial verse of the gospel of John "Theos ein ho Logos" is to be translated and understood as "God is Reason". To clarify his identification of God with reason, Edelmann uses spiritualistic-religious expressions: reason is the voice of the living

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<sup>42</sup> SB, 273-275.

God in us and Christ who speaks to us internally. But in spite of this religious terminology, it is clear that by the logos he means the *lumen naturale* and also moral conscience.<sup>43</sup> Reason and common sense, Edelmann argues, are suppressed by the Christian sects and confessions because they fear their critical potential. They condemn those who value reason as heretics, rationalists, freethinkers and libertines.<sup>44</sup> These thinkers, who “durch einen vernünftigen Gottesdienst immer näher zu Gott einzudringen suchen” are Edelmann’s new allies.<sup>45</sup>

Edelmann finds arguments in support of his logos-interpretation in the works of the Church Fathers Justin and Clement of Alexandria,<sup>46</sup> who record striking similarities between true Christianity and aspects of Pythagorism, Platonism and Stoicism. Their religion is a reasonable religion. Edelmann becomes receptive for this idea of a reasonable, natural religion, so characteristic for the deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The *Anhang to Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunft* in which he defends John Locke’s *Reasonableness of Christianity* against the attacks of John Edwards, a British opponent of Locke, reflects that mood.

But whereas the Church Fathers of the second century wanted to promote the Christian doctrine by harmonizing it with the ancient Greek philosophy, Edelmann’s undertaking goes in the opposite

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<sup>43</sup> GV, 14-15, 198.

<sup>44</sup> GV, 4, 11.

<sup>45</sup> GV, 10.

<sup>46</sup> GV, 25-26, 92-107.

direction: through philosophy and its rationalism he gradually moves away from Christianity. Under the influence of philosophy he indeed switches from an internal, reformatory criticism of Christianity to an external one. *Moses* is the work in which this passage has taken place: The divine inspiration of the Scriptures is now contested which is the starting point of Edelman's definitive dismissal of the Christian faith.

In *Moses* a large number of enlightened and freethinking philosophers and authors appear: Balthasar Bekker, Adriaan Koerbagh, Antonius van Dale, Hermann von der Hardt, Mattias Knutzen, Friedrich Stosch, Benedictus Spinoza, Anthony Collins and Matthew Tindal. Edelman integrates their criticism of religion and decides to continue their emancipatory mission. He will surpass many of them in radicalism.

There is a philosopher, who could have become an additional source of inspiration for Edelman, but who he is on the contrary attacking in *Moses*: the famous German rationalist Christian Wolff (1679-1754). The target of his criticism of Wolff's philosophy is twofold: its worldliness and its ensuing lack of freedom/independence and its defence of the Leibnizean idea of the best of possible worlds.<sup>47</sup>

According to Edelman, Wolff's philosophy is too much directed towards earthly happiness and social success which make it dependant. Whereas true philosophy is rebellious and combative, Wolff's philosophy is subordinate. Edelman rejects the idea of the best of

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<sup>47</sup> *Mo*, III, 139-141, 112-138.



possible worlds chiefly because this view presupposes that God is an architect who created a world which is external to him and that he moreover had the choice between many possible worlds. Edelmann conversely argues that God and his creation are closely linked, that the world is as old as God and that God could not make a choice before producing the actualized world. These pantheistic considerations ripened under the combined influence of the Christian theosophy and of the philosophy of Spinoza.

## 2.4 Edemann's Spinozism.

Benedictus Spinoza (1632-1677) is for many reasons a radical philosopher, from which the two main are his naturalistic, pantheistic conception of God and his critical reinterpretation of the Bible. Edelmann adheres to both facets of Spinoza's thought. In *Moses* he utters his agreement with many of Spinoza's pantheistic propositions of the *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*<sup>48</sup> and in his *Selbstbiographie* he describes the enormous impact on him of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*.<sup>49</sup> Edelmann reads the text eagerly and consults many other works concerning the status of the Bible. The results of this intensive

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<sup>48</sup> *Mo*, II, 120-121, 149.

<sup>49</sup> *SB*, 350-351.

study find a first expression in *Moses* in which Edelmann comes to the conclusion that the Bible is based on totally unreliable grounds.

From now on, Edelmann is closely associated with Spinoza and often labelled as an outspoken representative of his philosophy. In the meanwhile, Edelmann's Spinozism has been the subject of intensive scholarly investigation and the conviction that he would have been a genuine Spinozist has been abandoned. Especially since the publication of Edelmann's collected works by Grossmann and Grossmann's profound analysis of his understanding of Spinoza's idea of God,<sup>50</sup> the meaning of Edelmann's pantheism has been revised. The most important conclusion of this revision is that Edelmann in *Moses* interprets Spinoza's pantheistic idea of God and the subsequent new relation between God and his creation, from a neo-platonistic, hermetic, esoteric, mystical point of view. Because of this approach, Edelmann's pantheism still has a too dualistic orientation. Edelmann considers matter to be a necessary emanation of God, and in this sense he is a materialist, but his relation towards matter and body remains ambiguous. This becomes manifest in the fact that he identifies matter with the shadow of God and that his view of man is definitely dualistic. Concerning Edelmann's reception of Spinoza's criticism of the Bible, Rüdiger Otto's realistic assessment of this issue has also shown how selective and unscientific it is.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Grossmann 1976, 127-136.

<sup>51</sup> Otto 1996.

It is clear that there is a gap between Spinoza's scholarly criticism of religion and that of Edelmann and also between Spinoza's monistic, naturalistic and anti-teleological concept of God, the world and men and the one Edelmann tries to express in *Moses*. However, the indispensable revision of the meaning of Edelmann's Spinozism, does not imply that his defence of Spinoza and his discussion with aspects of his thought, do no longer deserve our attention. On the contrary.

First, to express publicly one's agreement with the pantheistic worldview of a thinker who was considered as an atheist and as a threat by orthodox theologians and clergymen and who was equally rejected by moderate deistic philosophers among which Hermann Samuel Reimarus,<sup>52</sup> is undoubtedly a mark of courage. Once more, Edelmann observes that a persecuted person comes closer to truth than the persecutors who belong to the establishment and he overtly sides him. To agree with Spinoza, Edelmann knows and experiences, implies that one is accused of atheism. Edelmann parries the imputation of atheism by pointing out that the pantheistic notion of the Divine is much more elevated than the anthropomorphic, Lutheran view of God,<sup>53</sup> and he absolves himself and Spinoza resolutely from the charge of atheism.<sup>54</sup>

Second, it is obvious that Edelmann was deeply moved by the sentence of the *Ethica* "I believe that God is the immanent, not the

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<sup>52</sup> Reimarus 1985, 188-191.

<sup>53</sup> *EH*, 39-40; *EEH*, 64-65.

<sup>54</sup> *Mo*, II, 120; *GV*, 360-361.

transitive cause of all things” (Part 1, Proposition 18). This sentence stimulated him to read and study Spinoza’s works. Both in *Moses* and in different later writings, Edelmann discusses the pantheistic view of God and the world and integrates it in his own thought. And in his commentary to his translation of *De imposturis religionum* he still refers to Spinoza as the one who together with Seneca gives the “würdigste Beschreibung von Gott”.<sup>55</sup> But in contrast with Spinoza, Edelmann does not start his reflection from a scientific point of view, such a view is alien to him. And the systematic, geometrical method of the rational Spinoza differs completely from his rhapsodic argumentation. Moreover, Edelmann only picks a few themes out of Spinoza’s intricate system and so neglects many important lines of reasoning. However, it is equally obvious that Edelmann’s discussion with Spinoza’s pantheism provokes a dynamic that results in a further articulation and refinement of his idea of God. In this new view of God every form of anthropomorphism has disappeared and this non-personal Creator has an intimate relation with its creation. The idea of alliance between God and his creatures, will be used by Edelmann to free himself and his fellow men from an overstrained ascetic morality and will help him to develop a more positive attitude towards the body.

Third, Spinoza’s works play a decisive role in Edelmann’s further intellectual progress. In contrast to the unbelieving philosopher Spinoza, Edelmann is at the moment when he discovers the *Tractatus*, a

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<sup>55</sup> Anon. 1999, 157.

dissident believer who only recently made the passage to reason. The reading of the *Tractatus* gives him the final impulse to unmask Moses, i.e. to develop his criticism of the Bible and of the Judeo-Christian religion.

## 2.5 Radical internal and external criticism of Christianity.

In his *Unschuldige Wahrheiten* Edelmann reproduces and spreads in his typical long-winded way the different aspects of the radical spiritualistic criticism of religion. The criteria for this reformatory criticism are the idealized early Christianity, the spiritual, internally experienced and ethical Christian faith, and love, the essence of this faith. The main lines of this criticism are:

a. The idea of one sanctifying sect or confession is rejected because of the unchristian exclusion of the greatest part of humanity it entails and of the bitter interreligious conflicts which result from it. In contrast to it, the indifferentist and universalist thesis is defended that there are true Christians not only in every Christian confession or sect, but also in any non-Christian religion and in heathen philosophy.

b. The clergymen of the institutionalized Lutheran church are severely attacked. They are accused of materialism, corruption and neglect of their spiritual and existential mission. They are considered to

be clerks without divine vocation who exclusively defend the doctrine of their own party.

c. The rigid dogmas and the externalized sacraments of the Lutheran church are disputed. The church is accused of eroding basic truths such as the New Birth and of introducing unchristian dogmas. The Justification is criticized because the belief in the idea of the satisfaction by Jesus Christ implies moral laxity and is based on the absurd conception of a vindictive God who reconciles himself with the fallen humanity by the death of his innocent Son. Other dogmas like original sin, the Last Judgment, the traditional conception of heaven and hell and eternal damnation are dismissed because of their inhumanity. The Lutheran sacraments of Baptism and Communion are said to pervert the original meaning of these Acts. Their content is distorted and they are abusively considered as necessary external signs of faith, which again leads to intolerable exclusion. The orthodox dogmas and sacraments only serve the interests of the church and its clergy.

By this massive criticism, the authority of the Lutheran church is undermined and an important part of the Christian doctrine dismantled. As we already saw, Edelmann is not satisfied with that result. With Christian criterions the internal criticism unmasked the orthodox dogmas and sacraments as the work of men. Using the standards of reason Edelmann now does the same with the Bible. The Scriptures – and especially the Old Testament – are equally examined and finally exposed as the effect of human deceit.

The external criticism breaks through in the three “Anblicke” of Moses, is continued in the *Glaubens-Bekentniß*, *Das Evangelium St.*

*Harenbergs, Die erste Epistel St. Harenbergs*, it culminates in the further “Anblicke” of *Moses*, which were definitively elaborated between 1753 and 1755, and is repeated in a slightly more moderate form in the commentary of 1761. The chief points of this criticism are:

a. On the basis of text-critical and historical arguments and of arguments concerning content, the infallibility and the direct divine inspiration of the Old Testament are denied: the original texts are not preserved; the text contains chronological incongruities; it bears striking resemblances with other, older religious texts; the conduct of many biblical figures is immoral; the Pentateuch cannot be written by Moses; and its authorship is attributed to Ezra instead.

b. The origin of the Bible and of the superstition that is built on it, is explained by the thesis of “the deceit of the priests”. The first deceit goes back to Moses who invented a direct contact with God to delude the credulous people and to install a theocracy. Ezra is the second impostor. Equally for political reasons – the manipulation of the Jewish people – he 1200 years later invented the biblical mosaic story that does not agree with the historical events. Out of self-interest the deceit is continued by the later priests and supported by political leaders.

c. The Christian religion is likewise affected by critical objections: the original text of the New Testament is not preserved; the Gospels are written down many years after Jesus' death; Christianity is founded on the false basis of the Old Testament; and the Christian religion is an invention of Paul. Paul is thus the third impostor.

d. Large superstitious systems – the Jewish and the Christian religion – are brought about by the deceiving priests. Since these superstitions

are imposed from childhood, it is extremely difficult to free oneself from it.

e. The mosaic story of the Creation *ex nihilo* is abandoned in favour of the idea of the eternity of the world and followed by the defence of a panentheistic notion of God.

As a result of this external criticism the authority of the Bible is destructed and Christian religion definitely demolished. The idea of Jesus as the Messiah, the godhood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity are now also denied. Consequently, Edelmann is able to further deliver himself and his readers from a religion based on guilt, repentance and fear. Thanks to its divine origin the world can be considered as intrinsic good and the view of a human being capable of natural cognitive and ethical capacities can fully break through.

### 3. Edelmann's threefold message

Edelmann is not a great, innovating philosopher like Descartes, Spinoza or Kant. He is neither a German "Popular Philosoph" (popular philosopher) but a religious-philosophical eclectic thinker. Edelmann would have accepted this characterisation. In many places he indeed explicitly advocates his own eclectic method against the rigid method of the systematists.<sup>56</sup> According to him, thinking systems are fictive

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<sup>56</sup> *Mo*, II, 88-89; *BM*, 198-199; *SF*, 101; *DSF*, 63-74; and, *SB*, 393-394.



constructs which press limited views upon reality. The eclectic searcher, on the contrary, is flexible and able to grasp or come closer to the complex truth.

Edelmann's eclecticism does not mean that he is just a compiler. He transforms and sometimes radicalizes the thoughts of others, combines them and incorporates them in his own moving body of thought. Most of all, there is a coherence in his dynamic, unstructured, contradictory and often repetitive writings. To demonstrate this, I will consider three recurrent topics: 1. love and charity; 2. freethinking; 3. religiosity or spirituality. My purpose is to reveal by their discussion the 'progressive' – a more gentle synonym of the term 'radical' – message Edelmann wanted to transmit us through his numerous works.

### 3.1 Love and charity.

To introduce the first issue, I will highlight the result of Edelmann's internal and external criticism of religion: the total destruction of the Christian faith. In spite of this devastating result, something is left of Christianity thanks to the distinction Edelmann makes between the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Christian teaching.<sup>57</sup> The second is eliminated, the first persists. According to Edelmann, Jesus did not write down nor formulate a doctrine, but exemplified his message

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<sup>57</sup> *GB*, 251; *BM*, 94-95.

through his life and actions. The very core of his thus revealed message is that he “die allgemeine Liebe unter den Menschen wieder herzustellen suchte”,<sup>58</sup> or, as he puts it in his confession of faith, that he wished to nurture among men mutual love and charity, and to eliminate all cruelty and inhumanity.<sup>59</sup> In accordance with the anti-trinitarian Socinians and Spinoza, Edelmann holds that Jesus is not the Son of God but a true human being who more than any other was endowed by God with extraordinary gifts and virtues.<sup>60</sup> Above all, he is the messenger of the gospel of love, which entails the natural obligations of benevolence, altruism, the pursue of peace and the advancement of social justice.

The imitation of Jesus Christ remains Edelmann’s ideal, but this ideal has lost the self-denying character it had during his spiritualistic phase. Indeed, Edelmann now recognizes that Jesus wanted us to be happy not only in the future, but also in this life.<sup>61</sup> And the true earthly happiness consists of “den Vernunftgemäßen und ungestörten Genuß der mannichfaltigen Güte des Schöpfers in seinen Wercken”<sup>62</sup>. And he

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<sup>58</sup> *BM*, 95.

<sup>59</sup> *GB*, 255-256.

<sup>60</sup> *GB*, 93, 101.

<sup>61</sup> *GB*, 252, 256.

<sup>62</sup> *GB*, 252.

specifies that lasting happiness is only guaranteed when the pleasure is moderated by reason and combined with virtuousness and solidarity.<sup>63</sup> Since Edelmänn destroyed the Christian teaching by his radical criticism, his distinction makes it possible for him to save the teaching of Jesus. Separated from the Christian economy of salvation, the gospel of love becomes a secular message of intersubjective and political peace and of social justice. For the mature Edelmänn the Christian religion cannot be reconciled with reason, but the spirit of Christianity is in perfect accordance with it. The humanism of the teaching of Jesus and the secular humanism appear to have the same finality.

### 3.2 Free-thinking and pluralism.

The second central part of Jesus' teaching is "dass er dem Aberglauben und der falschen Religion seiner Lands-Leute die Larve abzohe".<sup>64</sup> Jesus did not intend to introduce a new religion,<sup>65</sup> his aim was rather to emancipate his contemporaries from the spiritual dominance of the clergy and from the Jewish superstition.<sup>66</sup> This undertaking points to a free-thinking attitude.

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<sup>63</sup> *GB*, 253-255.

<sup>64</sup> *BM*, 95.

<sup>65</sup> *GB*, 147.

<sup>66</sup> *GB*, 213, 220.

As early as in the first part of the *Unschuldige Wahrheiten*, Edelmann supports “das Freigeisterische Wesen”, the true freedom of thinking sanctioned by Jesus Christ<sup>67</sup> by virtue of which “wir nicht der Menschen Knechte werden, noch eines jeden tyrannischer Meinung uns unterwerffen sollen I Cor. 7, 23”<sup>68</sup>. Edelmann deduces from it the justification of his own reformatory religious criticism.

Next, he gradually builds a bridge between this Christian freethinking and the rational freethinking of the Enlightenment. This bridging is achieved in his confession of faith, where he approvingly quotes his translation of Anthony Collins definition of freethinking “daß sie ein Recht *involviret*, (gebe,) seine Vernunft in allen Stücken zu gebrauchen, damit man in allen Fällen eine *proposition* (Satz) gegen die andre richtig halten könne”<sup>69</sup>, asserting simultaneously “daß der Herr Jesus der Freyheit zu denken gar nachdrücklich das Wort geredet”<sup>70</sup>. Freethinking is definitely Edelmann’s leitmotiv. I will explain this in three steps.

a. Edelmann argues that truth is evolving. From the perspective of God, truth is one and immovable, but it is only gradually unveiled by him to the human beings. According to Edelmann, the emergence of truth is realized through the voice of God in each of us, voice of God

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<sup>67</sup> *UW*, I, 13-14.

<sup>68</sup> *UW*, I, 14.

<sup>69</sup> *GB*, 171.

<sup>70</sup> *GB*, 170.

that he identifies with reason and with moral conscience. Since truth is emerging through the human subjects, Edelmann moves the focus from God to the human, historical level: truth develops throughout the entire history of mankind. This enables Edelmann to assert that truth - partially - emerges as well in the writings of the ancient Greek philosophers, as in the Bible, the Koran or any other religious or philosophical text.

b. Since truth evolves, it is not possible to catch it in a definitive system. Dogmatic rigidity is unacceptable. For the individual truth-seeker this means that he never may pretend to have the monopoly of wisdom. Absolute wisdom is a purpose that will never be reached. The freethinker who is aware of this, will never try or want to become an authority. He will know that his insights are partial and not definitive. Consequently, he will never impose his knowledge to others because he respects their freedom and understands that truth is something one has to accept freely.

c. Hence the task of the freethinker is the following: to learn to think free and to incite his/her fellow men to do so equally, to criticise and unmask superstition and deceit, to formulate and to communicate his/her new insights, to be open-minded, and to be prepared to reconsider and to correct his/her convictions.

Edelmann's plea for freedom of thinking and of speech is thus completed by a plea for pluralism, openness, curiosity, dialogue and self-criticism.

### 3.3 Religiosity.

In her analysis of his Lutheran stage, Annegret Schaper suggests that Edelmann basically was out of touch with the Christian religiosity.<sup>71</sup> Since the question what the Christian religion precisely means is the very subject of discussion, I am not inclined to call Edelmann unchristian, but I am in agreement with Schapers' other judgment that the Lutheran piety was alien to him.<sup>72</sup> In Edelmann's autobiography – the only source concerning this period – I indeed find evidence of his initial adherence to the Lutheran doctrine, of his wish to promote it himself as a pastor and to defend it against believers of other confessions, but no signs of a warm, existential belief.

The first manifestation of a lively religiosity has nothing to do with the Lutheran orthodoxy. On his way back to Germany after his stay in Austria, Edelmann is overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape and he experiences a deep emotion and a kind of mystical unification with nature. He indicates that the previous reading of Bartold Brockes *Irdisches Vergnügen in Gott* opened his mind for the experience that he links with a direct experience of God.<sup>73</sup> To work one's way to God by the contemplation of the beauty of the created world is what Edelmann learns from Brockes and in a letter he thanks him for that: "was du so

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<sup>71</sup> Schaper 1996, 32-33, 67, 75-76.

<sup>72</sup> Schaper 1996, 75-76.

<sup>73</sup> SB, 62-63.

oft gesagt: Mann soll durchs Geschöpf, den Weg zum Schöpfer bahnen”<sup>74</sup>. This optimistic attitude towards nature matches with Edelman’s fundamental cheerful character.

Edelman’s sensitivity for a lively and mystical religiosity is further activated by his affiliation with the spiritualistic-pietistic practice. He adopts the idea that the living God is speaking in each of us and aspires to the mystical communion with God. He interprets the inspiration to write ‘innocent truths’ as a divine calling and is persuaded that his slow intellectual progress is directed by a higher power. The Christian faith he stands for at that moment is delivered from the pessimistic ballast of the orthodox Lutheran doctrine. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James gives a description of an optimistic version of Christianity which bears a great resemblance to it<sup>75</sup>:

The advance of liberalism, so-called, in Christianity, during the past fifty years, may fairly be called a victory of healthy-mindedness within the church over the morbidity with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related. We have now hale congregations whose preachers, far from magnifying our consciousness of sin, seem devoted rather to making little of it. They ignore, or even deny, eternal

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<sup>74</sup> SB, 114.

<sup>75</sup> I discovered this parallel thanks to Wim Van Moer’s study of atheistic religiosity (Van Moer 2012). I am convinced that James’ overall view of the religious experience could be an appropriate key to understand and explain the diverse stages of Edelman’s religiosity.

punishment, and insist on the dignity rather than on the depravity of man. They look at the continual preoccupation of the old-fashioned Christian with the salvation of the soul as something sickly and reprehensible rather than admirable; and a sanguine and “muscular” attitude, which to our forefathers would have seemed purely heathen, has become in their eyes an ideal element of Christian character.<sup>76</sup>

Yet, the spiritualistic-pietistic culture Edelman than participates in, has a tendency which thwarts such a conciliatory and human view of Christianity: the tendency to make a sharp distinction between (bad) matter and (noble) spirit, to identify ‘the flesh’ with evil, to promote asceticism and condemn sensuous pleasure and worldly life. Edelman assimilates this tendency too, which makes that his religiosity in this period is still tormented and ambiguous. Edelman’s ensuing insight into the identity of God and reason, and his mental break-through thanks to his discovery of Spinoza’s metaphysics and criticism of religion, finally initiate his passage to a cheerful and ethical pantheistic religiosity. This philosophical religiosity is both rational and emotional. Because it is no longer linked to any creed, I call it a secular spirituality. Edelman proves by his example that unbelief and rationalism are compatible with this kind of religiosity.

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<sup>76</sup> James 1952, p. 89.



## 4. Conclusion

A first feature of Edelmann's thought is that both its destructive and its constructive part have a religious-Christian origin. Edelmann's criticism of religion indeed originates from the critical arsenal of radical spiritualism which already destroys a large part of the – not only Lutheran – Christian doctrine. Under the influence of diverse rational influences, this criticism later develops in Edelmann's drastic dismissal of the entire Christian faith. As I showed, the constructive part of Edelmann's thought is equally an elaboration of religious issues. The three progressive messages – the plea for peace and social justice; the promotion of a non-dogmatic freethinking which combines freedom of thought and speech with pluralism and open-mindedness; the extension of the scope of religiosity beyond the limits of any established creed – are transformations of Christian-religious themes. So, a continuity is established between Christianity and Enlightenment. The in the first stage merely reformatory criticism ends, to be sure, in the entire denial of the Christian faith and therefore one could say that the passage results in a break. But through his constructive messages, Edelmann joins the non-superstitious core of Christianity with secular humanism. He achieves this connection by transforming the teaching of Jesus into his secular enlightened message.

A second feature of Edelmann is that he reached another public with his works than the traditional authors of the Enlightenment. This means that emancipatory and enlightened ideas were spread among other sections of the population than those to which the Enlightenment

philosophers and publicists penetrated with their writings. Edelmann's readers from *Moses* on are indeed still religious dissenters, but only those among them who are prepared to continue, together with Edelmann himself, the radical emancipatory process.

Finally, I want to return to the question I raised in the introduction: did Edelmann in his last phase effectively become a representative of the Enlightenment, or did he remain a *homo religiosus*? On the basis of my investigation in this paper my conclusion is that he was both. The extreme rational nature of his external criticism and his humanistic progressive messages prove that he joined the Enlightenment movement. Simultaneously, he may be called a religious man because he succeeds to combine this Enlightenment position with a pantheistic, philosophical religiosity. Edelmann's mature thought is thus a successful synthesis of rationalism and spirituality.

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*B*: *Bereitete Schläge auf der Narren Rücken*, 1738, in *Streitschriften*, *SSE* vol. XI.

- CB: *Christus und Belial*, in: *Streitschriften*, SSE vol. XI.
- DSF: *Drittes Sendschreiben an seine Freunde, Darinnen Er seine Gedancken von der Unsterblichkeit der Seelen eröffnet*, 1749-1754, in: *Sendschreiben*, SSE vol. X.
- EEH: *Die erste Epistel St. Harenbergs an Johann Christian Edelmann, Ihrem vornehmsten Inhalt nach von demselben beantwortet, Und Vernünfftigen Lesern zu freymüthiger Prüfung vorgelegt Von dem Verfasser*, 1747, in: *Streitschriften*, SSE vol. XI.
- EH: *Das Evangelium St. Harenbergs*, 1748, in: *Streitschriften*, SSE vol. XI.
- BM: *Die Begierde Nach der Vernünfftigen Lautern Milch*, 1744, in: *Sendschreiben*, SSE vol. X.
- GB: *Abgenöthigtes Jedoch Andern nicht wieder aufgenöthigtes Glaubens-Bekentniß*, 1746, SSE vol. IX.
- GV: *Die Göttlichkeit der Vernunfft*, 1742, SSE vol. VIII.
- Mo, I-III: *Moses mit Aufgedeckten Angesichte. Erster, zweyter und dritter Anblick*, 1740, SSE vol. VII,1.
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**ESOTERIC REASON, OCCULT SCIENCE,  
AND RADICAL ENLIGHTENMENT:  
SEAMLESS PURSUITS IN THE WORK AND  
NETWORKS OF RAIMONDO DI SANGRO,  
THE PRINCE OF SAN SEVERO**

*Clorinda Donato*

ABSTRACT

This article argues for the inclusion of the Neapolitan Raimondo di Sangro, il Principe di San Severo (1710-1771) among those thinkers whose ideas, lifestyle, writings, networks and intellectual pursuits have been defined as radical. It explores the ways in which a little known Italian Radical Enlightenment thinker formed his ideas both through contact with the writings of proponents of Radical Enlightenment thought not only in England and Holland, but also in Italy and Switzerland where radical networks have been less visible to scholars. By charting the strategies for the spread and exchange of radical thought from Naples to Lausanne through heretofore unknown paths, new avenues for research are opened while the breadth and depth of the Radical Enlightenment are strengthened.

“[...] the Honourable Prince’s banned book is full of sentiments and expressions at the very least seriously suspicious of error in Catholic dogma, and too

favourable to the perverse and detestable systems of strong spirits, deists, Materialists, Cabbalists, etc.”

(Letter from Benedict XIV to Agostino Ricchini, Secretary of the Congregation of the Index, Rome, 12 February 1754<sup>1</sup>)

## 1. Introduction

Benedict XIV’s indictment of the ‘Honourable Prince’ referenced in the letter cited above constitutes a defining moment in the standoff between the Catholic Church and philosophical thinking in Italy, and more precisely, Naples, at the halfway point in the eighteenth century. Following a more than decade-long pushing of the delicate boundary separating the youthful bonds of friendship and the burdensome, public expectations of papal jurisdiction, “Enlightened Pope” Benedict XIV could turn neither a blind eye nor a deaf ear to the escalating visibility and public charisma of his former classmate and friend Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, who from 1743 to 1753 seemed an unstoppable force in the defiant tradition of Neapolitan philosophical inquiry. In *Radical Enlightenment, Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Jonathan Israel has assembled a portion of that history in

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<sup>1</sup> The original reads: “[...] il Libro proscritto del Signor Principe è pieno di sentimenti ed espressioni per lo meno gravemente sospette d’errore nel dogma Cattolico, e troppo favorevoli ai perversi e detestabili sistemi de’ spiriti forti, deisti, Materialisti, Cabbalisti etc.” (Spruit 2002, 258).



'Reaction of the Italian States', a subsection of the chapter 'Government and Philosophy'. However, the Neapolitan history of Radical Enlightenment thinkers is far more intricate and provocative when we examine the ideas, work, persona and reach of one of the least understood and misrepresented exponents of the Radical Enlightenment in Naples, Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo.

It is our intention in this article to not only expand upon the arguments made for considering Di Sangro a pivotal purveyor of radical thought in Italy, but also to trace the far-reaching influence of his ideas and the publishing projects they spawned both at home and abroad. Each of the three areas of his activity considered here – anatomical inquiry, the dissemination of philosophical inquiry through encyclopaedism, and the writing of the *Lettera apologetica* to promote ancient Incan writing, together with all of his philosophical intuitions, combine to form what we argue to be a veritable radical manifesto. Di Sangro sought to disseminate his views, which supposed a thoroughly conflicting origin, purpose and future for mankind from the ones promoted by Catholicism.

As foremost Di Sangro scholar Leen Spruit has pointed out in his insightfully annotated and edited edition of Raimondo Di Sangro's 1750 *Lettera apologetica dell'esercitato accademico della Crusca contenente la Difesa del Libro Intitolato Lettere d'una Peruana per rispetto alla supposizione de' Quipu scritta alla duchessa di S\*\*\*\** (*Apologetic letter by the cultivated member of the Crusca Academy containing the Defence of the Book Entitled Letter of a Peruvian Woman with respect to her assumption about the Quipus, written to the Duchess S\*\*\*\**), the words "strong spirits" used to describe those of

the Prince's ilk in the citation that opens this article could mean only one thing: that the person in question was a follower of Spinoza.<sup>2</sup> We fully concur with Spruit's placement of Di Sangro among the proponents of Radical Enlightenment and share his purpose in establishing for the Prince of San Severo his rightful place in the historiography of the Neapolitan and European Radical Enlightenment. While Spruit presents a good deal of evidence for locating Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, among those persons of action and ideas whose profiles align them with proponents of the Radical Enlightenment, in this article it is my intention to reinforce Spruit's claims and to add to them by considering San Severo's reach, both in terms of the network of his influence and his erudite and scientific pursuits beyond the *Lettera Apologetica* that further serve to elucidate not only the radical purpose to which he subscribed, but also the far more intellectually and scientifically savvy milieu that was the Kingdom of Naples during the first half of the eighteenth century. Spruit has discussed Israel's tendency to exclude lesser-known areas of eighteenth-century Europe from agency in the practice and promotion of Radical Enlightenment, with particular focus on the short shrift given to Naples. Today, however, in the midst of a plethora of studies re-examining Naples' status in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century

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<sup>2</sup> Spruit 2002, 259.

Europe, renewed scholarly attention is warranted.<sup>3</sup> In light of the rapid and on-going deepening of our understanding about the Kingdom of Naples and its intellectual and political inventiveness, it is important to revisit Di Sangro as a proponent of the Radical Enlightenment in a collection of essays such as this whose goal is that of pushing our understanding of the people, places, and writings of the Radical Enlightenment, the connections among them and how the ideas of the Radical Enlightenment spread and were adapted to new contexts.

This expanded inquiry into the Radical Enlightenment, its roots and its reach, offers answers and continuity to the questions of idea transmission and knowledge transfer as practiced by any number of thinkers who have heretofore existed on the periphery of the traditional enlightenment as outliers. Instead, when studied from the perspective of the Radical Enlightenment, suddenly their ideas, activities, and the modes of dissemination they utilized point to bigger goals that are revealed only upon close examination of their networks and the ideas that connected them, including fundamental notions about the purpose of mankind, the value of society, and the institutions that served them. Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo (1710-1771), founder of the first masonic lodge in Naples, is precisely the kind of pivotal figure whose ideas and activities may best be understood from the vantage point of the Radical Enlightenment. Indeed, Di Sangro

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<sup>3</sup> Among others, see Calaresu and Hills 2013, Naddeo 2012, Marino 2011, and Imbruglia 2000.

was highly successful at living the dialectic of enlightenment as both the social and intellectual phenomenon that Jonathan Israel has underscored as the hallmark of the Radical Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup>

Long considered a “quirky” “on-off” sort of thinker about whom an entire mythology has been created, with a growing bibliography on esoteric readings of his experiments, goals and interests, a systematic study has yet to be undertaken of his many publications and the connections among them. The Radical Enlightenment offers the ideal vantage point from which to engage in this research. The importance of the book that garnered the most visibility and notoriety for the Prince, the *Lettera Apologetica* (1750), discussed in the last part of this essay, was first analysed as a significant work of the Italian Enlightenment by Franco Venturi in *Settecento riformatore*, followed by Vincenzo Ferrone’s probing exploration of the text’s unique structure and baroque underpinnings in *I Profeti dell’illuminismo*, followed by Spruit’s treatment, which sheds new light on the matter thanks to its consideration of ancillary documents, as well as the precious library inventory, truly encyclopaedic in nature. It is also our intent to shed light on his vast reaching circles and to point out the radical thinking and practices of one of his most famous disciples, Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, whose own career, it is fair to say, would have never launched without the mentorship of San Severo. De Felice picks up the encyclopaedic mantle from Di Sangro, producing the *Encyclopédie* d’Yverdon in

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<sup>4</sup> Israel 2006, v.

Switzerland, where the Prince will send him when the politics of remaining in Naples as an openly Radical Enlightenment proponent were no longer favourable and it had become necessary to operate covertly. We will explore the extension of Severo's radical thought into Switzerland through his masonic friendship with the Baron Tschoudy who lived in Naples 1748-1769 and was a member of Severo's masonic lodge, his publishing business relationship with Vincenz Bernard von Tscharner, the Bernese patrician and freemason who orchestrated his escape from Italy on the Swiss end, and the founding of the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*, managed by Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, Di Sangro's protégé. The work of Gabriel Mingard, Vaudois pastor who had spent time in Naples and contributed controversial articles to the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* should also be mentioned in this regard and will be examined as well.

Evidence for San Severo's galvanizing abilities as a social and scientific firebrand can be found primarily Di Sangro's *Lettera Apologetica*, edited by Dutch scholar Leen Spruit. Spruit has suggested that Di Sangro's interest in origins, the life force, the preservation of life and hermetic traditions and practices that provide access to this wisdom can be traced to his ties with the radical branches of the Dutch and British Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> In this article we will show the greater implications of these ties and their expansion.

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<sup>5</sup> Spruit 2002, 16-8.

Di Sangro possessed the vision, charisma, and means to lead and promote radical thinking, as well as radical practice, which is more difficult to achieve. The tendency to downplay the Prince's role has much to do with his profound desire to act, by producing in his laboratory experiments that would make manifest the many ideas that circulated. No savant was more bent on tackling the historical dimensions of revelation and religious practice, not through words alone, but through myriad philosophical, scientific, literary, linguistic and medical experimentation that would provide concrete proof of the feebleness of religious claims and religious practices, while charting a new path of inspiration that sought strength in the dignity of mankind and its potential.<sup>6</sup> The Prince of San Severo had the means to launch scientific inquiry in a number of fields, which he did by building a private cabinet and personal museum where he displayed the findings of his experiments, results that he achieved by successfully recruiting some of the best minds of the Kingdom of Naples. Di Sangro was the quintessential enlightened nobleman who sought the erudition of learned men whom he welcomed into *palazzi* equipped with extensive libraries, laboratories, and cabinets of curiosities. Such individual spaces were increasingly placed at the service of the State as sites of intellectual exchange and advancement in kingdoms where the university system struggled to keep pace of developments in Northern Italy, England, France and Holland. Indeed, conditions in the Kingdom

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<sup>6</sup> Mortimer and Robertson 2012.

of Naples fostered numerous private/public exchanges. As we will see, Di Sangro believed that his findings were so self-evident, that the move from private to public would automatically win over the powers that be, whether ecclesiastical, monarchical, or intellectual. His almost childlike wonder before his findings and his joy in sharing them ultimately thwarted the public side of his program. Others would carry out some of his wishes.

## **2. Di Sangro's research activity: Masonic ambition, masonic inspiration**

Raimondo di Sangro embodied the salon model of sociability in his day-to-day life in Naples. His home became the locus for exchange of ideas in the 1740s, at a moment when reform of Neapolitan institutions, in particular the University, informed the discussions of an emerging elite of citizenry since Charles of Bourbon had become “the resident monarch of an autonomous kingdom.”<sup>7</sup> He founded the first Neapolitan lodge of Freemasons from the ranks of his friends and followers. Freemasons in eighteenth-century Europe sought new forms of knowledge through the exploration of innovative pathways about energy, life and the life force. They also believed that primitive peoples

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<sup>7</sup> Calaresu 2009, 66.

had at one time possessed much of this knowledge, but that it had either not been successfully transmitted or, even more likely, had been purposefully blocked by the Church (Spruit 40). The graphic, architectural and artistic signs and symbols of ancient and primitive cultures, a universal code that could decipher the secrets of the universe, fueled their desire to visit Italy's newly discovered archaeological sites. From the 1740s on, enlightened nobles in Rome and Naples who cultivated antiquarian interests entered into ever-greater contact with a cross-section of travellers who consulted with them for their antiquarian expertise. One of the most erudite and eclectic among them was Raimondo di Sangro, Prince of San Severo. Di Sangro was sent to Rome by his grandfather to acquire the best education available at the same Jesuit school attended by Pope Benedict XIV, who became his classmate and friend. In 1730 Raimondo returned to Naples where he jointly pursued intense study and experimentation in natural and scientific phenomena, political work, and military bravery. During this same time he became attracted to freemasonry. The confluence of these pursuits is documented in a rich collection of publications, printed in his cellar on the press that he himself invented for the impression of multi-coloured characters and images. Noteworthy are the books of a masonic-occultist bent,<sup>8</sup> not to mention

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<sup>8</sup> The most important of these works is *Dissertation sur une lampe antique trouvé à Munich en l'année 1753*.



the commissioning and printing of the Italian translation in 1753 of Chevalier Ramsay's masonic treatise *Voyages de Cyrus* 1727.

While we might tend to think of masonic activity as conducted secretly and underground, Di Sangro, instead sought to render public masonry's doctrines of fraternity and knowledge pursuit in an effort to galvanize Neapolitan society and to recruit as many interested parties as possible to take up the mantle with him.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Di Sangro's conduct matches perfectly the masonic ideal of the eighteenth century as described by Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire. These freemasons cross borders with ease, placing a high value on sociability and fraternal networks of exchange.<sup>10</sup>

Di Sangro's efforts were very successful. By 1749 he had recruited an impressive cross-section of Neapolitan nobility, clergy, artisans, and merchants into the burgeoning ranks of Italian Freemasons; among these ranks were to be found the Freemason from Metz of Swiss origin, Théodore Henri de Tschoudy, who had travelled to Naples to work in his Swiss uncle's regiment, where he entered Di Sangro's lodge. Raimondo Di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo believed that concentrated, sustained activity organized by the proponents of every

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<sup>9</sup> See di Castiglione 1988 for a description of Di Sangro's lodge and full biographies of its members, who represent an impressive cross-section of the most productive and innovative members of Neapolitan society from every privileged and professional walk of life.

<sup>10</sup> Beaurepaire 1998.

sector of society in Naples, including the many foreigners who lived there, was the only viable means for revitalizing the kingdom. Di Sangro fully embraced the notion of broad-based knowledge creation and the importance of engaging people locally to practice, disseminate, and innovate upon globally acquired knowledge. Di Sangro had access to much of this work as his library shows. His own hands on meshing of material culture with philosophy is very much in keeping with the kind of entrepreneurial spirit that H. J. Cook describes as emerging from the Dutch seventeenth century, “the new philosophy arose not from disembodied minds but from the passions and interests of mind and body united.”<sup>11</sup> Counting hundreds of new members from the moment he had assumed the rank of “Grande maestro” a few years before, the Prince began to envision a role for himself at the helm of Freemasonry in all of Europe as well as Naples and its kingdom. He sought the coordination of sites where new forms of knowledge could be transferred through masonic networks that were open, not clandestine as had been the practice due to ecclesiastical interference. Indeed, this ideal of openness in the fostering of masonic activity would ultimately bring about his downfall as a masonic leader, but during the heady years of the late 1740s and early 1750s, the potential for such problems was barely visible to him. Such was his exuberant character and network of protectors, which included King Charles III and Pope

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<sup>11</sup> Cook 2007, 42.

Benedict XIV, that he failed to see how the plans to put an end to his public, masonic persona, were slowly hatching.

Nevertheless, the quest for universal life through alchemical and scientific practices, prompted the Prince of San Severo to actively seek all sources of knowledge that might advance these goals. His acute mind, entrepreneurial spirit, and network of influential friends and collaborators all played a role in the creation of the ‘anatomical machines’ that constitute one of the most tangible product of his legacy from the time they first occupied a coveted place in the private laboratory that he named ‘La Fenice’, which he had built under the family chapel, where they are still on view today. Our research has revealed that far from being the science-fictionesque markers of a suspect criminal and cyborg-seeking individual, the anatomical machines were considered tangible results of the Prince’s lifelong pursuits in physiology to understand life and the life force. Considering the scrutiny he and his work underwent at the hands of the Pope and papal censors, it is surprising to discover that he had even garnered the accolades of Pope Clement XIV for precisely this work, as will be discussed in the following section of this article.

### **3. The anatomical machines and San Gennaro’s blood**

‘Anatomical machines’ is the term used to refer to the Raimondo di Sangro’s most notorious experiment, alleged for centuries to be the

skeletal remains of two of his servants, a male and a female, with all of their organs and vessels preserved through the technique of injection. Today, as we have mentioned, these anatomical machines are in full view in twin niches carved into plaster at the Cappella di San Severo, an oft-visited tourist spot, where the cadavers constitute one of the venue's main attractions. Recent analysis of these physiological artefacts has revealed them instead to indeed be the skeletons of a man and a woman; under scientific scrutiny, the heretofore believed to be embalmed and "living" organs and vessels are instead facsimiles fashioned with wire and wax. The research conducted by Renata Peters, conservationist of archaeological artefacts, and historian of medicine, Lucia Dacome, has settled one of the accounts related to this enigma, namely the true material make-up of the machines. This is important, as it finally clears the Prince of the macabre accusations of Mengele-like experimentation, making possible the more serious study of his ideal and work, with the potential of changing his legacy. Following upon this significant, game-changing research, then, let us move forward to answer the question that Peters and Dacome's research begets, which is why such suspicions arose in the first place. It behoves us to investigate the premises for the mythology surrounding the Prince, for these very premises document both the depth of his knowledge and the breadth of his networks, offering a nexus for his entire world view and the ideas that he shared internationally in what we deem to be Radical Enlightenment connections.

As we have stated, the two preserved cadavers known as the 'anatomical machines', flaunt a network of vessels carrying what appear

to be human bodily fluids, believed to have been chemical substances that were injected into the cadavers' venous, arterial and lymphatic systems to preserve a lifelike appearance. The cadavers were purportedly realized by Domenico Giuseppe Salerno, an anatomist from Palermo who had studied under Giuseppe Mastiani (1715-1756). Mastiani was trained by the Parisian anatomist of Danish origin, Jacques-Bénigne Winslow, in the dual arts of anatomical wood modelling and injecting the venous and arterial systems of corpses with life-like fluids of preservation.<sup>12</sup> Winslow had learned the techniques in Holland, where he had studied under Frederik Ruysch. Peters and Dacome allude to the practice of injection as performed and perfected in the late seventeenth century by the Dutch anatomists Reinier de Graaf, Frederik Ruysch, and Jan Swammerdam. However, they only reference anatomical injection as a promising method to be used in the interest of a line of research that we would consider traditional, i.e., that of investigating the inner body in order to glean medical information through visualization.<sup>13</sup> What they neglect to reference, however, is the strong interest that injection elicited among those who viewed it as a means of preserving life and understanding the life force, two distinctly heretical practices that contrasted with Catholic teachings through the inherent refutation of the canonical notion of afterlife that the goals of injection represented. This was surely the

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<sup>12</sup> See Winslow 1742.

<sup>13</sup> Peters and Dacome 2007, 164.

purpose of Fredrik Ruysch and those who viewed his work, not the least of whom was the Czar Peter the Great who upon seeing one of Ruysch's most lifelike corpses, what appeared to be a sleeping baby, bent down to kiss its cheek.<sup>14</sup> And it was most certainly the purpose of Domenico Giuseppe Salerno and his rarely mentioned partner, Paolo Graffeo, also from Palermo. A contract that Di Sangro drew up for Domenico Salerno's activity in Naples bears only Salerno's signature, sources from the eighteenth-century to the present always mention Graffeo and Salerno in tandem. Since Salerno was, indeed, an expert injector, trained as he was in the techniques of the Dutch and Parisian schools, and since the anatomical models had been attributed to him, it stood to reason that the cadavers had been live specimens attended to immediately upon their death to preserve a lifelike appearance and that Di Sangro had brought Salerno to Naples, and worked with him to simulate and recreate bodily fluids, in particular the blood, through alchemical methods. Indeed, Di Sangro's fully equipped laboratory contained all the tools of the alchemist's trade. However, there is a great deal missing from this story, and while clear answers are not yet available, the retracing of the transfer of knowledge from Palermo to Naples brings us fully into the kind of transmission described by Bruno Latour which in the eighteenth century, connects global and local, with the intention of retransmitting the information globally again which was the intention of the Prince of San Severo.

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<sup>14</sup> Cook 2007, 101.

Sicily had long been known as a site deeply invested in embalming and cadaver preserving, to which the rows of Capuchin corpses in Messina bear ample witness. Bolognese scientist Marcello Malpighi was indeed recruited by Messina for a four-year sabbatical in which he taught the methods of preservation and injection that he had perfected.<sup>15</sup> In recognition of this tradition, in 1742 Charles III promulgated the new statute of the reformed Royal Palermitan Academy of Medicine, whose teaching function was officially recognized.<sup>16</sup> The Senate tasked Mastiani, who was still in Paris, with the purchase of over 50 surgical instruments for the newly reformed academy, making Mastiani the Chief of Staff upon his return in 1744. He died in 1756 and was replaced by Salvatore Pasquale, who had also been trained in France. Though young when he died, Mastiani had nonetheless succeeded in training his students, Domenico Giuseppe Salerno and Paolo Graffeo, who would create the anatomical models. Mid eighteenth century, Palermo's medical prowess far outshone that of Naples, creating an opportunity for a nobleman, such as Di Sangro, trained in the new philosophy, to play a role in advancing the discipline in Naples. The Prince's private laboratory became a potentially important site for the advancement of medical science. Indeed, the anatomical models that we view today in their twin niches in the Cappella di San Severo were transported from Palermo. The

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<sup>15</sup> Meli 2011.

<sup>16</sup> De Gregorio e russo 1761, 30.

transmission of the models from Palermo and Naples has been documented in an account that tells of the public showing of a cadaver before the Academy of Medicine at the hospital, where instruction in anatomy had become a staple.<sup>17</sup> Giuseppe De Gregorio e Russo (1703-1771), an illustrious doctor at the academy, has left a detailed account of how the cadavers, or anatomical machines, became a salient part of the Prince of San Severo's mystique. He refers to two kinds of cadavers in his report De Gregorio tells of the first time that a male cadaver was shown in Palermo at the Academy and the effect and impression it created: "the artificial liquid rendered the veins and arteries turgid, coloured in such a way that one might think that it was the body of a young man who was still alive."<sup>18</sup> This sounds like a cadaver preserved in the manner in which Ruysch preserved bodies, blurring the lines between life and death. However, he also talks about the public showing of the model to a restricted audience in Palermo, where Francesco Bonocore, "Il Protomedico," or head doctor from King Charles III's chambers was present for the viewing. In a letter to the Viceroy Fogliani, Bonocore gushed over the cadaver:

"I must honestly confess to Your Excellency that if the King of Denmark boasts as a miracle of anatomy the artificial skeleton with veins and arteries in white metal which he keeps in his cabinet in

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<sup>17</sup> Scinà 1859, 276.

<sup>18</sup> De Gregorio e Russo 1762, 246.



Copenhagen, the one our Father Salerno has shown deserves to be placed in one of the most famous galleries in all of Europe.”<sup>19</sup>

From these notes, it is clear that only one “machine” was shown. Following this demonstration, reports De Gregorio e Russo, the machine was swept from view and brought to Naples upon a decree from King Charles, where the King himself had arranged for their demonstration, an event to which Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, was personally invited and where, we might speculate, he saw the machine or the machines for the first time. De Gregorio e Russo also discusses the tradition of this kind of anatomical construction in Palermo. Though De Gregorio e Russo was not personally in attendance, we can only surmise that it was his colleague, Giuseppe Domenico Salerno himself who recounted to him what had transpired. De Gregorio and Russo reported that the King himself convened the meeting on November 27, 1756, discussing in an eloquent speech the glorious apparatus of the human body to a full audience of Neapolitans. It seems that he is talking about the models constructed with wire and wax, not injection. From the two accounts given by De Gregorio e Russo, we can surmise that Salerno and Graffeo were adept at both arts – that of preserving corpses in a lifelike state, as did Ruysch, and that of constructing anatomical models with skeletons, wires and wax. It is likely that Di Sangro wished to learn both arts from Salerno by hiring the Sicilian anatomist to work with him. Trained as he was by Winslow,

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<sup>19</sup> De Gregorio e Russo 1762, 246-47.

who had studied with Ruysch, Di Sangro was interested in how to preserve life and Salerno was the best person to learn from. Ruysch and his followers sought to preserve cadavers in such a lifelike way that spectators continually called into question whether death had really occurred. Ruysch and Winslow wrote eloquently about the grey zone between life and death, speculating philosophically and medically about characteristics and potential of the indefinable space and spectrum that ran between living and dying. Winslow's observations of Ruysch's preserved cadavers reveal the impressions they left on the young scholar during his visit to Ruysch's Amsterdam teaching theater in 1720:

I am very surprised upon my first view of the famous cabinet of Mr. Ruysch; I was even more surprised while attending a public demonstration during which he showed, among several handsome anatomical samples, two full childrens' bodies that he had preserved so well that they appeared to possess their full robustness and natural color.<sup>20</sup>

Severo's connection with blood and alchemy had an important dimension as well, one that was quintessentially Neapolitan and related to the ritual surrounding the biannual celebration of patron saint San Gennaro, whose blood, preserved in a vial and on a stone, would liquefy as an omen of prosperity and peace in the coming year. Appointed by Charles III to the most illustrious group of men who were the protectors

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<sup>20</sup> Gysel 1985, 153.

of San Gennaro's blood, Di Sangro came within close proximity to the 'miracle' every year, a veritable eyewitness to the liquefaction and a participant in the ritualistic preparations for the occurrence. Considering the importance of San Gennaro in the mythical and cultural life of Naples, and, among nobles the "keen vying for precedence and visibility in the rituals of the capital," the prominence of the Prince within the ranks of Neapolitan nobility is duly underscored by this prestigious appointment.<sup>21</sup> Yet Di Sangro's intellectual curiosity prompted him to move beyond the claims of miracle to understand the physical properties of this blood, or purported blood, in order, we speculate, to prove that what appeared to be a miracle was merely a reaction based upon scientific evidence. Such a bold attempt to debunk miracles, thus removing from the Catholic Church one of its primary means of control over the masses falls squarely into the kind of activity that can only be classified as radical. Here, too, the Prince's desire and ability to debunk and publicize widely demonstrates his confidence in the reception of such activities among an international, radical audience. When his alchemical experiments were discovered, he was relieved of his duties and accused of irreligion. Though condemned as a debunker of the miracle by the Church, he was sung as an enlightened, scientifically minded hero by Jérôme-Joseph de la Lande, renowned French astronomer and Freemason who wrote of his visit to Di Sangro in his *Voyage en Italie* where he hailed him as the most enlightened

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<sup>21</sup> Naddeo 2012, 17.

figure in the Kingdom. The anatomical machines, Ruysch, Pietro Giannone, another debunker of the miracle of San Gennaro, and the miracle itself all appear in *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* articles written by Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, the Prince's protégé, while Gabriel Mingard also wrote about the saint in one of his articles for the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* that we will analyse further on in this article.

#### **4. Networks of radical influence: Giannone, Di Sangro, De Felice, Mingard, and the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon**

Network theory posits that the connection between local sites of knowledge through people and publication ultimately means that knowledge networks come into contact and transmission takes place. In the relationship between the Prince of San Severo in Naples and Switzerland, especially Berne and Yverdon-les-Bains, a little studied example between two local networks in the history of the radical enlightenment may be observed. The ties between Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo and Switzerland pass through the brotherhood of Freemasonry, but just as importantly the authority of scientific networks. Let us begin with Freemasonry. Among the Freemasons identified as belonging to Raimondo di Sangro's grand lodge in Naples, Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice figures among those who attended regular meetings, but whose membership among the ranks could not be

thoroughly verified, though deemed to appear likely. According to De Felice's first biographer, Eugène Maccabez, De Felice left abruptly a position teaching philosophy in Rome, where he concentrated on Leibniz and Newton, to take up a university post arranged for him by Celestino Galiani and friends, where he was responsible for teaching experimental physics and mathematics.<sup>22</sup> It is highly likely that the Prince of San Severo was to be counted among those friends securing his arrival in Naples, for Di Sangro had become intent upon learning as much as he could about Newtonianism as Spruit has reported and De Felice was the person who could instruct him, though Spruit makes no mention of De Felice in his preface to the *Lettera apologetica*. De Felice quickly impressed with his erudition, however, and the newcomer was immediately charged with the translation of works by Galileo and others in a series called the *Scelta de' migliori opuscoli* of which only one would appear in 1753. His translation of Arbuthnot's *An Essay concerning the Effects of Air on Human Bodies* into Latin in 1753 attracted the attention of Albrecht von Haller, who quoted it extensively in his *Elements of Physiology* (1757-1766). As a prominent member of Bernese society, Albrecht von Haller strove to improve the cultural life in Berne. With Bernese patrician, Vincenz Bernard von Tscharnner, Haller sought to attract new talent to the capital of the Bernese territories. A letter from the Prince of San Severo to Tscharnner in 1756 reveals the joint interest that the two Freemasons held in placing Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice

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<sup>22</sup> Maccabez 1903, 1.

out of harm's way in Switzerland, for Naples had suddenly become a dangerous place for the Newtonian. By this date, The Prince was under scrutiny for the *Lettera Apologetica*, his experiments, Freemasonry, and irreligion. Felice referenced his relationship to the Prince in his autobiography, as "l'homme le plus savant de l'Italie," with whom he claimed he had begun "to shake off the despotic yoke of superstition and the exterior and empty religious practices of Roman Catholicism."<sup>23</sup> De Felice would eventually become the managing editor of a 56-volume encyclopaedia, know familiarly as the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, to distinguish it from Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* de Paris. This encyclopaedia, its managing editor, De Felice, and one of its most important and prolific contributors, the pastor Gabriel Mingard all reflect the influence of the interests and pursuits of Raimondo di Sangro's principles and ideas.

When we study Raimondo di Sangro's anticlericalism and his desire to rebuild Naples, and Europe as well, based on philosophical principles, his fate of being silenced by the Church ran parallel in many ways to that of one of the most radical Italian figures, also from Naples. The figure and legacy of Pietro Giannone (1676-1748), anticlerical lawyer, historian and papal critic in Naples whose 1723 *Istoria civile del regno di Napoli* (*Civil History of Naples*) would precede San Severo's *Lettera Apologetica* on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* offers a curious nexus of intersecting radical interests, people, situations, and, ultimately,

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<sup>23</sup> Maccabez 1903, 5.

unifying vision around which the next section of this article is organized. We fully concur with Spruit who finds that while Israel's collocation of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) and Paolo Mattia Doria (1662-1746) among the proponents of Radical Enlightenment might be something of a stretch due to the decidedly conservative tenor of their writings, there can be no doubt, instead, of Giannone's full-fledged presence among the ranks of Southern radical thinkers. Let us consider Giannone's life and how he provides a link from Di Sangro to Switzerland. Giannone's history of Naples' civil institutions and its examination of them as independent from Church history followed in the tradition of Venetian Paolo Sarpi's 1619 *Historia del Concilio Tridentino* (*History of the Council of Trent*), first published in London, and greatly admired in Protestant circles as unmasking curial interests and the temporal strategies designed to perpetuate strife. While the fiercely independent Veneto upheld Paolo Sarpi's principles, in the seventeenth century, Giannone, whose civil history of Naples was intended as a blueprint for political action when it was written in 1723, delineated a three-pronged purpose to inspire Neapolitans to keep the church out of politics, to cast off the feudal encroachment of the Spanish crown; and to reform the State, holding back nothing in its critique of papal interference and thus breaking with the time honoured tradition of protecting ecclesiastical history from emerging with a tarnished image once its dealings in political history had brought to the fore. The Kingdom of Naples was ripe for political unrest as dissatisfaction with two centuries of Spanish rule escalated, receiving reinforcements from nascent reform movements as well in other parts of Catholic Europe.

Giannone's book appeared at a time of growing discontent with the clergy.

As Pasquale Palmieri has shown, anticlerical sentiment had been building from the end of the seventeenth century, running unabated after the arrival of the Austrians in 1707 and further exacerbated following the advent of Charles III in 1734 with the enactment of a series of measures designed to restore dignity to the clergy.<sup>24</sup> The intellectual life of the kingdom provided a rallying point for various sectors of the kingdom, while developing a synergy between the evolution of radical ideas such as tolerance, freedom of the press, and sexual freedom in limiting ecclesiastical interference in concubinage and radical ideas from other parts of Europe, most especially those of the English Deists such as Toland, Collins and Tindal. Pietro Giannone's *Istoria Civile di Napoli* in 1723 constituted a culminating moment of everything that the Church had been fighting to suppress in Naples and the reaction against it was swift. The volume was burned and Giannone had to flee to Vienna in order to save himself from imprisonment. However, the legacy of Giannone's work, not to mention that of Tommaso Campanella in Naples before him, had left an important radical ideology intact, ripe for continuity in the figure of Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo. Indeed, the *Lettera Apologetica*, with references to Toland, its overt critique of the Curia, its discussion of San Gennaro's blood and how it might be explained outside of the confines

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<sup>24</sup> Palmieri 2011, 4.



of the miracle designation that had been attributed to it, among the many digressions that spiralled off from the defence of the Peruvian writing system in knotted threads known as the quipus, was seen as a likely call to radical action in 1750. At this point in his career, the Prince saw the possibility of disseminating from Naples radical thinking and action into the rest of Europe through publication. An encyclopaedia figured prominently among his disseminating plans for the future, and his protégé, Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, was to be his collaborator on this project. Only seven years later, however, Di Sangro's position in Naples had undergone a dramatic change. The placement of the *Lettera Apologetica* on the *Index* significantly tempered the Prince's desire for increased visibility both at home and abroad. Despite Di Sangro's attempts to refute the charges in the *Supplica*, a work, incidentally, that only served to implicate him further in the subversive activities of which he had been accused, his star continued to decline. The Vatican closed in on Freemasonry in Naples, Di Sangro's lodge in particular, forcing the Prince to reveal the names of the masons he had mentored. He thenceforth assumed a position of silence, renouncing, on the surface at least, his former public persona as a fearless and unabashed instrument of change. In reality though, Di Sangro's commitment to the radical cause merely went underground. Privately, he used his network of Freemasons to procure safe passage for De Felice into Switzerland following the death of Benedict XIV and the inevitable shift away from the enlightened and open dialogue of his papacy – albeit increasingly limited towards its end – that had nonetheless defined it. How, then, was Di Sangro's radical worldview to make its mark in absence of its

leader? The encyclopaedic compilation was to be that organ of diffusion, and its principal architect Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice, the brilliant young mind whom Di Sangro had taken in as a member of his inner circle.

Correspondence between Di Sangro and Bernese Patrician and Freemason Bernard Vincenz von Tscharner confirms the coordinated efforts that led to De Felice's clandestine escape from Italy into Switzerland, not to mention a reference to a high ranking officer in Switzerland who was most likely Baron Tschoudy in the *Lettera Apologetica*.<sup>25</sup> Tscharner would play a pivotal role in De Felice's career in Switzerland, and, we might speculate, saw him as the conduit for realizing a certain number of goals that were consonant with Freemasonry and the Radical Enlightenment. Tscharner oversaw De Felice's years of adaptation to life in Berne, placing him on a distinct publishing trajectory, including, first, the editing of two periodicals, 1758-1762, during which time he would eventually move to the small town of Yverdon-les-Bains, where he would set up a publishing house financed by Berne where the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* was published (1770-1780), but also where works of a decidedly radical bent were published, not the least of which was a 1768 edition of *Les Trois Imposteurs* and two editions of Jacques-Philibert Rousselot de Surgy's, *Mélanges intéressans et curieux our Abrégé d'histoire naturelle, morale, civile et politique de l'Asie, l'Afrique, l'Amérique et des terres polaires*, the first

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<sup>25</sup> Donato 2005, 108.

published in 12 volumes 1764-67 and the second in six volumes in 1767.<sup>26</sup>

The *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon offers an ideal vantage point from which to analyse Di Sangro's radical networks diachronically. The idea to create an encyclopaedia to counterbalance the *Encyclopédie* de Paris, the French summa of the state of knowledge mid eighteenth century, was actually developed while De Felice was in Naples, as discussed in the four-page article about the Prince of San Severo signed by De Felice himself in the Yverdon encyclopaedia. Expounding on Di Sangro's multi-faceted erudition, De Felice also expresses regret over the missing voice of Di Sangro as a collaborator in the enterprise. Following praise for every aspect of the Prince's abilities in the "useful arts," De Felice minces no word in his condemnation of the "insects" who prompted Di Sangro's demise as a public figure:

Un si grand homme parmi une noblesse aussi ignorante que la Napolitaine, devait exciter dans ces petits génies de la jalousie, et le prince de *San-Severo* devait être en butte à leur calomnie. En effet, il fut représenté comme un homme dangereux et sans religion, parce qu'il faisait trop de bien et trop d'honneur à son ordre, et qu'il n'étoit pas un fanatique ignorant. Mais *San-Severo* content des ressources immenses de son génie et de son cœur, méprisait souverainement les faibles efforts de ces petits insectes, qui ne furent jamais capables d'éclipser un seul

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<sup>26</sup> Perret 1945, 424-425.

moment son humeur gaie et communément uniforme, ni de détourner son cœur de la bienfaisance envers ceux même qui étoient les plus animés contre son grand mérite. Je ne quittais jamais cet homme estimable, sans en rapporter des connaissances précieuses, et sans être pénétré de cette bonté éclairée et solide de son cœur, qui faisait l'admiration de tous ceux qui avoient l'honneur de l'approcher.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the fact that the Prince penned none of the articles, there are traces of him throughout the work, including the article “Naples” which mentions Di Sangro’s scientific work on San Gennaro’s blood and his debunking of the purported miracle; it also describes the art of the alchemist, Di Sangro, in his quest to replicate the characteristics of human blood:

Il y a cependant à *Naples* aujourd’hui plusieurs incrédules et quelques personnes qui croient que le miracle de S. Janvier n’est qu’une préparation chimique. Un grand savant napolitain, aussi illustre par sa naissance, que par ses lumières, fit faire un ostensor ou reliquaire, semblable à celui de S. Janvier, avec des fioles ou ampoules de même forme, remplies d’un amalgame d’or et de mercure avec du cinabre, qui imite par sa couleur le sang coagulé; pour rendre cet amalgame fluide, il y a dans le creux de la bordure ou de l’entourage du reliquaire un réservoir de mercure coulant, avec une soupape, qui en

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<sup>27</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXX, 484-85.

tournant le reliquaire, s'ouvre pour laisser entrer du mercure dans la fiole. L'amalgame devient alors coulant et imite la liquéfaction [...].<sup>28</sup>

The article goes on to explain how this vessel was fitted with a reservoir of liquid mercury, with a small opening that allowed a bit of mercury to enter the flask. The amalgamation thus became runny, imitating the liquefaction of the blood: “Voilà le fameux miracle de S. Janvier. Grand Dieu! votre sainte religion a-t-elle besoin de pareilles fourberies de prêtres?”<sup>29</sup>

The *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon article describes in minute detail the liquefying of the blood for Di Sangro as a chemical process – not a miracle, but also as a matter of investigation into life, generation and regeneration as transformative processes. He is thinking about blood, its properties, what substances might replace it and exhibit the same functions as real blood while, at the same time, preserving life. Di Sangro is immediately intrigued by how things appear. The closer they look to life, the closer they might be to life. Where did Di Sangro's ideas come from and what are his sources? Until present, it has been difficult to link Di Sangro to any particular school of anatomical study, as this part of his activity was kept quiet, engendering legends of the sort previously mentioned. However, as Leen Spruit has suggested, Di

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<sup>28</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXX, 40.

<sup>29</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXX, 45.

Sangro's interest in origins, life force, the preservation of life and hermetic traditions and practices that provide access to this wisdom can be traced to his ties with the radical branches of the Dutch and British Enlightenment, and, I would add, his contacts with Dutch and British freemasonry in the 1740s.

Di Sangro's experiments and the goals of his research bear an uncanny resemblance to those of Frederic Ruysch (1638-1731), cited by Israel as one of the most important figures of Holland's scientific flowering. In early eighteenth-century Leiden, Ruysch's posed cadavers and preserved bodies, fully in line with Di Sangro's interests in the practices of the Palermo Academy and his desire to learn from Domenico Salerno. Building on Swammerdam's methods, Ruysch earned renown for his skill in preserving and displaying anatomical organisms as well as other physiological and entomological specimens. Although Israel makes no explicit connections between the scientific work of Ruysch, Swammerdam and the Radical Enlightenment, in *The Dutch Republic*, he is certainly presenting the massive intellectual and scientific flowering that created a context within which such enlightened ideas could take hold. There is no doubt that Ruysch' experimentation at the interstices of life and death, not to mention those of Swammerdam and Van Leeuwenhoek as well, constitute a celebration of the body as matter. These aspects of the Dutch Radical Enlightenment are transmitted through articles in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, in particular, a lengthy article on Ruysch. If we think about the transmission of Ruysch's methods to Winslow, then to Mastiani who brought them to Palermo and trained Domenico Salerno, it is not

surprising to find this discussion of Ruysch, his techniques, and the fine line between life and death that his preserved cadavers conjured up for those who saw them.

Ruysch had surpassed his master Swammerdam in his use of preparations injected into the vessels in order to preserve them, but he had surpassed Robert Boyle as well. Boyle had fashioned lifelike substances with plaster and gelatin; these were further improved up on by Marcello Malpighi and De Graaf, both of whom employed various coloured inks in their observations of the kidney and male genitalia. Ruysch' work, however, moves us most clearly into the metaphysical, for he spares no detail in his attempt to remind us of the tenuous relationship between life and death in the way he presents the bodies he has preserved. Indeed, these preserved bodies tell a story, "with babies preserved in their baptismal clothes as though they were asleep, and embryonic skeletons playing minute violins."<sup>30</sup> He devoted himself to making anatomical preparations and became a master in the technique of preservation; he conserved organs and entire corpses by injecting them with preserving fluids. His anatomical and zoological cabinet became a major attraction for foreign visitors. In 1691 Ruysch edited a catalogue of his cabinet's contents in both Dutch and Latin. He described his preparations and findings extensively in his ten-volume *Thesaurus Anatomicus*. Ruysch' collection consisted of curiosities with medical and scientific significance that highlighted the delicate

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<sup>30</sup> Cobb 2006, 104.

relationship between life and death, inviting speculation about these two states.

The fact that *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon* contains a long, article outlining Ruysch' experiments, lavish in detail about the injection process and the preparations used to preserve the cadavers, is not a coincidence. It bears the mark of San Severo's influence and interest in anatomical matters, especially the lessons that had been learned from Ruysch through Salerno. Though the article is not signed, stylistically it belongs to De Felice:

Sa principale occupation, celle qui consumoit la plus grande partie de son tems, c'étoit la dissection. Il poussa l'anatomie a un point de perfection auquel elle n'avoit point encore atteint. Les anatomistes s'en étoient tenus pendant long-temps aux instrumens qu'ils jugeoient nécessaires pour la séparation des parties solides, dont ils se proposoient de connoître la structure particuliere et les rapports mutuels, Reignier de Graff, intime ami de *Ruysch*, fut le premier, qui pour découvrir le mouvement du sang dans les vaisseaux & les routes différentes qu'il prend pendant que l'automate vit, inventa une seringue d'une espece nouvelle, à l'aide de laquelle il remplit les vaisseaux d'une substance colorée qui faisait distinguer les routes qu'elle avoit suivies [...]. Par consequent que le sang suivoit à sa place, lorsque l'animal étoit vivant.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 298.



Swammerdam perfected these experiments so that he could: “rendre sensibles les artères capillaires et les veines du visage.” However, the article explains that Swammerdam quickly abandoned his experiments because of religious guilt. Nevertheless, he passed his results on to his friend Ruysch, who found nothing in them that could offend God. Unfettered by religion, Ruysch moved forward with science in ways that were radical and deemed heretical:

Le succes repondit a ses premiers essais, & il débuta vraisemblablement par quelque chose de beaucoup plus parfait que ce que Swammerdam avoit fait. L'injection des vaisseaux étoit telle, que les parties les plus éloignées de leurs ramifications, celles qui étoient aussi déliées que les fils des toiles d'araignées, devinrent sensibles; & ce qui'il y a de singulier, c'est qu'elle ne l'étoient quelques fois qu'à l'aide du microscope. On découvrit par ce moyen des ramifications qu'on n'avoit point encore aperçues, soit en considérant des corps vivans, soit en dissequant des corps d'hommes morts depuis peu de tems.<sup>32</sup>

The article describes the injection of several children's bodies, addressing the difficulties of having sufficient numbers of adults for experimentation. It emphasizes both the life-like feel of these treated cadavers, their gradual acquisition of beauty, and their sweet smell:

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<sup>32</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 298.

Tous les cadavres qu'il a injectés, ont le lustre, l'éclat & la fraîcheur de la jeunesse; on les prendroit pour des personnes vivantes, profondément endormies; & a considérer les membres articulés, on les croiroit prêts a marcher; Enfin, on pourroit presque dire, que Ruysch avoit découvert le secret de rescusciter les morts, Ses momies étoient un spectacle de vie, au lieu que celles des Egyptiens n'offroient que l'image de la mort. L'homme sembloit continuer de vivre dans les unes, & continuer de mourir dans les autres.<sup>33</sup>

This description of Ruysch' work corresponds perfectly to the mapping of the tangle of inner pathways preserved by the Prince of San Severo in his cadavers. The fact that these injections needed to be done while the subject was alive, or very shortly after death, reminds us of the popular rumours about Di Sangro, accused as he was of injecting the humans who make up his anatomical machines while they were still alive. Though we know this is not the case, the relationship is evident.

## 5. Gabriel Mingard

We have mentioned Gabriel Mingard, author of the article on Pietro Giannone in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon and we have seen the nature of this article and how it advocated for the ideas and teachings of Giannone and his radical views. However, the article on Pietro Giannone

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<sup>33</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 299.

is only one of more than 400 articles signed by Mingard that address any number of issues and positions that Israel has classified as essential to a Radical Enlightenment outlook, among them sexual freedom, pantheism, anticlericalism, human rights, and censorship. A full analysis of these articles is not within the scope of this study, however, we may make a few points about the general contours of Mingard's contributions, how they fit the definition of the Radical Enlightenment, and how Mingard, as De Felice's closest collaborator and encyclopaedically, became the instrument of continuity, together with De Felice, of the Prince of San Severo's ideas.

Gabriel Mingard came from a long line of Vaudois pastors and was consecrated pastor himself in 1754. In 1756 he travelled to Naples, where he most likely met Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice and, we might speculate, Raimondo di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo. From 1756 to 1763, he was pastor at the Walloon Church of Breda. While little is known about the years he spent in Holland, he did marry Everardine-Henriette van Schinne while there on November 9 1762.<sup>34</sup> She was born in Batavia, daughter of the mayor of Amsterdam who had also assumed the presidency of the Board of Directors of the Dutch East India Company. Mingard became affluent as a result of his marriage, which enabled him to purchase a large lake-side home once he returned to Lausanne.

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<sup>34</sup> Hofmann 1996, 86.

The trip to Naples in 1756 prompted him to reflect on the so-called miracle of San Gennaro, which he recalls in the article ‘Polythéisme’, which he penned for the *Encyclopédie* d’Yverdon. Here, he deftly compares the deification of men who had lived among other men in antiquity with the canonization of what he refers to as “our” saints in the present day. His condemnation of the worship of these modern gods takes a particularly vehement turn as he recalls the worship of saints in France, Italy, and Spain who have become the object of the public’s obsession, fomented by the clergy. His most pointed comments, however are reserved for the worship of San Gennaro in Naples, who the Neapolitans have promoted to the status of sole god. He comments freely on the duping of the Neapolitan populace as they pray for the liquefaction of San Gennaro’s blood, quoting, verbatim, their chant:

Mais dira-t-on, comment ces héros, tels que Thésée, Hercule, Odin, Osiris & Isis, &c. sont-ils devenus les dieux suprêmes? par la meme raison qu’à Paris Sainte Genvieve, à Naples S. Janvier, en Irlande S. Patrick, à Sienne sainte Catherine, à Compostelle saint Jacques, sont plus respectés que Dieu, par le bas people, & que pour peu qu’on voulût s’y prêter, on verroit la populace oublier Dieu & ne penser plus à adorer que son saint. Laissez faire les moines grossiers & ignorans, & la populace de Naples, & bientôt il ne sera plus question de Dieu dans leur culte mais uniquement de S. Janvier. En 1756, j’ai oui ce people faire de Dieu un intercesseur au près de ce saint. & pendant qu’il attendoit la liquéfaction du sang, s’écrier, *Domendio! Prega san*

*Gennaro che faccia il miracolo; ainsi le héros déifié devint la divinité tutélaire, & bientôt la seul divinité d'un people.*<sup>35</sup>

Mingard's connections with Italy, his citing in Italian, and his scholarly output in translation confirm mastery of the Italian language. He claims having read Giannone's works *in* Italian in the article he wrote on Giannone for the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon; his mastery of Italian and his desire to promote Italian enlightenment figures can be seen in his translation of Pietro Verri's *Meditazioni sulla felicità* (1763) into French. He appears to have strong ties to the Radical Enlightenment in Italy and to its Swiss interlocutors, for he mentions having seen the manuscript for Giannone's work in Rome. While we do not know whether Mingard ever had any direct contact with Di Sangro, his defence of De Felice and of Italy's radical trajectory of erudition alludes directly to the Prince of San Severo in the 'Lettre du traducteur' signed G. M. that prefaces his translation of Pietro Verri's *Meditazioni sull'economia politica* (1771). Published in 1773, Mingard's translation or "revisions made to someone else's translation" which is how he explains his relationship with the translation of Verri that he is offering to his fellow members of the Société littéraire de Lausanne – though he probably did the translation himself if we consider his translation of Verri's *Meditazioni sulla felicità* some five years earlier in 1768. His reasons for not wanting to assume full ownership of the translation are thoroughly in line with much of

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<sup>35</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXIV, 261.

the mystery surrounding Mingard's intellectual activity and his need to avoid notoriety. We know that this need is not merely something he perceived, and that indeed, his activity as a collaborator on the Yverdon *Encyclopédie* had made him a target for scrutiny among the censors of the work, so much so that De Felice was forced to assign him a second set of initials with which to acknowledge his authorship of articles in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, thus articles penned by Mingard appear under the initials 'G. M.' or 'M. D. B.' In the preface to volume III of the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, De Felice explains why it had been necessary to protect the identity of Mingard as the author of certain contributions. We suspect, as well, that many unsigned articles are also by him, for as De Felice has indicated, his ideas were perceived as heretical to the Swiss protestant "sainte religion:"

Les talents de M. Mingard ayant été admirés, s'attirèrent nécessairement des envieux qui commencerent à repandre qu'on trouvoit dans les articles (G. M.) des endroits qui n'étoient pas conformes à l'orthodoxie de notre sainte religion, mais bien éloigné de continuer à nourrir leur jalousie, prit le sage parti d'employer deux marques. Il continua la première (G. M.) pour les articles qui n'avoient point de rapport à la religion, et fit usage de (M. D. B.), marque tiré du nom de sa campagne près de Lausanne, pour signer les articles qui pourroient donner prise aux clameurs ridicules des bigots. Dès lors les articles ont été trouvés très orthodoxes, parce qu'on n'a plus reconnu M. Mingard à cette marque. Quelle arme pour ceux qui

regardent les theologiens comme des titres dangereux dans la société!<sup>36</sup>

In the *Lettre du traducteur à les amis de la Société Littéraire de Lausanne*, signed G. M., Mingard alludes to his absence from their meetings, explaining that he was busy with other projects, though, indirectly, he is referring to his role as author of articles for the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon. Indeed, by the time Mingard's translation is published in 1773, the bulk of Mingard's writing for the 58-volume encyclopaedia had been completed. However, he alludes to these activities in such a way that it appears he was on a secret mission, carried out for the good of a larger constituency:

Messieurs, Des longtems je suis en arriere avec vous; je devois vous fournir aussi ma portion de dissertations & de mémoires sur les questions proposées à notre examen dans nos assemblées; mais par des circonstances qui vous sont connues, j'ai dû consacrer tout mon tems à des ouvrages qui ne vous étoient pas directement destinés, que je n'ai pas toujours pû vous communiquer, & dont quelques-uns n'étoient pas de nature à faire l'objet de nos conversations, Vous avez bien voulu par ces considérations me pardonner une oisiveté apparente, que, sans ces circonstances, vous auriez eu le droit de me reprocher comme l'effet d'une paresse blâmable, & de condamner comme la preuve d'une honteuse indifférence pour

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<sup>36</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, III, 'Avis'.

les objets intéressans & agréables, dont par notre institution nous devons nous occuper.<sup>37</sup>

He continues in his letter with a very explicit statement of his goals in presenting such a volume to the Société, while declaring how the volume is in line with the Literary Society's purpose, an explanation of why he had found Verri's *Meditazioni* to be worthy of a French edition, and in particular, worthy of a society like the Société littéraire de Lausanne, whose full title is Société littéraire et morale de Lausanne. His declaration of this society's mission to promote the good of humanity regardless of rank, class or religion is telling:

Nous avons choisi pour objets de nos conversations, tout ce qui se publie ou que nous écrivons nous-mêmes qui est de nature à intéresser un homme de lettres, un esprit qui cherche le vrai, un coeur qui aime la vertu, une ame honnête; tout ce en general, qui peut être utile à tous les hommes dans quelque tems qu'ils vivent, sous quelque climat qu'ils respirent, & quelle que soit leur condition. Tout ce qui porte ces caracteres, nous les lisons avec réflexion, nous l'examinons avec une entiere liberté, nous les critiquons avec une franchise amicable qui qui en soit l'auteur; mais cela, dans la seule vue de nous instruire, & de perfectionner notre raison. C'est d'après ces principes que

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<sup>37</sup> 'Lettre du traducteur' in Verri 1795, III-IV. This is the third edition of this work. The title of the first edition is *Réflexions sur l'economie politique*. The "Lettre du traducteur" in both editions is signed G.M.



vous avez voulu que notre Société fut ouverte à tout ami du vrai, du bon, du beau, sans nous mettre en peine quelle est sa croyance religieuse, son rang dans la société, ses intérêts politiques, & sa profession; pourvu que son caractere moral soît digne de l'estime des amis de la vertu. [...] C'est d'après ces principes, bases & règles de notre société, que j'ai cru pouvoir me faire un mérite de vous offrir comme ma part de contribution la traduction des *Méditazioni sulla economia politica*, ouvrage qui m'a paru excellent, & digne de l'attention de tout bon citoyen par l'importance des sujets que l'auteur y traite avec precision & sans verbiage, par le jour qu'il répand sur chacun d'eux, par la connoissance profonde qu'il a de son objet & de ses dépendances, par la solidité de ses raisonnemens, par la modestie de ses décisions, par cet amour du vrai & du bien qui caractérise l'honnête homme; & par cette philanthropie, par ce désir du Bonheur de l'humanité qui le rend cher à tous ceux dont le coeur est bon, & qui lui assure l'estime des ames droites.<sup>38</sup>

The content of this long quote presents in concise form the tenor of the more than 400 articles that Mingard wrote for the *Encyclopédie d'Yverdon*. Most importantly, however, in the ensuing 31 pages of this preface, Mingard not only praises the Italians for their contributions to this line of liberal thought, but also recognizes them as its creators. To

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<sup>38</sup> Verri 1795, VII-X.

make this point, he corrects a common view about the Renaissance that credited the Greeks with Renaissance thought:

Les Grecs savoient moins que les Italiens qui les accueillirent dans leur désastre: ces derniers n'aprirent d'eux que la langue grecque [...]. Lorsque ces fugitifs arrivèrent en Italie, y apporterent-ils le goût des bonnes connoissances? Non ils l'y trouverent déjà subsistant.<sup>39</sup>

Mingard, instead, speaks eloquently about the originality of the “Three Crowns,” Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarca, the brilliance and perfection reached by the Italian language some three centuries before French had acquired stability and eloquence.<sup>40</sup> He continues through the Medici, Galileo and Paolo Sarpi, as well as the many enlightened men and women active in small principalities who promoted letters and science despite the attempts of the Vatican to hold back erudition. He returns to this theme again in his discussion of Antonio Genovesi in Naples, whom he mentions as “being supported, protected and encouraged by powerful friends,” most certainly a reference to the Prince of San Severo, who was one of Genovesi’s greatest promoters and who had aided him in his reform of the university. In his autobiography, Genovesi left behind a flattering portrait of the Prince. Mingard emphasizes Di Sangro’s protection of Genovesi once again, without

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<sup>39</sup> Verri 1795, XV-XVI.

<sup>40</sup> Verri 1795, XIII-XIV.

naming the Prince directly, but rather, by citing the protection he received when he published a course on “philosophie raisonnée,” better, in Mingard’s opinion, than any other ever offered in Italy or published in the 60 years prior:

Il a eu besoin, il est vrai, de cette protection contre une superstition ignorante, opiniâtre, jalousie & malicieuse: mains enfin il a eu cette protection, & c’est à elle que nous devons ce corps de philosophie, dans le quel les vrais principes sont clairement développés. Vraisemblablement, ce bon genie a eu des bons disciples; que n’auroit-on pas à attendre des efforts de leur genie penetrant & actif, tel qu’est celui des Napolitains, si une liberté raisonnable lui permettoit de se developer sans gêne.<sup>41</sup>

This reference to Di Sangro’s milieu and the charge to continue this work through the *Encyclopédie* d’Yverdon culminates in the paragraph following the discussion of Genovesi:

C’est de l’Italie que nous est venu le savant & laborieux éditeur de l’Encyclopedie d’Yverdon, homme qui gene par mille entraves dans sa patrie, n’y auroit peut-être jamais fait connoitre son genie; mais qui mis en liberté par son séjour parmi nous, s’est montré tel qu’il est, éclairé, philosophe, doué de la plus grande penetration, & digne d’avoir été l’ami de

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<sup>41</sup> Verri 1795, XXVIII-XIX.

Genovese. Ce n'est pas là, je le sais, le langage d'une foule de gens; mais je sais aussi que l'envie, la jalousie, & des oppositions d'intérêt à l'occasion de son entreprise, font parler plusieurs personnes non en gens de lettres, mais en libraires.<sup>42</sup>

Mingard has now focused our attention on the transmission of knowledge from Naples into Switzerland. Genovese and Di Sangro, not mentioned explicitly but easily read into the definition of “protector” emphasized twice by Mingard, De Felice and now Mingard become the line of transmission. Mingard also sings the praises of De Felice, but laments the poor treatment he has received from many. Mingard warns his colleagues about the danger of thinking like “book dealers,” i.e., “libraires” rather than “gens de lettres” when they think about De Felice. He references one of De Felice’s biggest challenges once he moved to Switzerland and began managing the Yverdon publishing house where his scholarly contributions to the *Encyclopédie d’Yverdon* were overshadowed by his managerial duties.

At this juncture in his preface he presents the Milanese Enlightenment, having discussed the brilliance of the Neapolitan enlightenment that continued to leave its mark in Switzerland through Fortunato Bartolomeo De Felice and his encyclopaedia. De Felice himself was potentially the link between Mingard and Verri, for he had collaborated with Verri on the publication of the Italian periodical

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<sup>42</sup> Verri 1795, XXX.

*Estratto della letteratura europea* (1758-1762) first produced in Berne, and later in Milan with Milanese publisher Giuseppe Galleazzi. Mingard has now fully inserted Pietro Verri into a longstanding Italian tradition in excellence not only in philosophical thought, but also in the provocatively modern views not heretofore credited to Italians that challenged authority and pushed for reform. He waxes eloquently about Cesare Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene* as well as his *Ricerche intorno alla natura dello stile*, not to mention the first work he translated by Pietro Verri, *Meditazioni sulla felicità*. He offers these works as the culmination of a long process of erudition and useful science for everyone that originated in Italy and that should be read and emulated by all:

Heureusement pour l'humanité, qu'il se trouve encore un nombre de vrais philosophes qui ne dégradent pas un si beau nom, mais qui sachant à quoi est destiné la philosophie s'efforcent de la ramener à sa vraie destination, & travaillent à la faire constamment marcher à côté du théologien, du juriconsulte, du moraliste, de l'homme d'état, du législateur, & du prince, pour que son flambeau pur & sans nuage artificiel éclaire tous leurs pas & les mène à la source du vrai Bonheur des peuples.<sup>43</sup>

A rapid perusal of the articles penned by Mingard in the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon expand upon the ideas that have been delineated in the

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<sup>43</sup> Verri 1795, XXXIX-XL.

prefatory letter we have just examined. The 380 articles he wrote belong to a discrete set of categories under which all articles are classified, the classification appearing after the title. Many of the Italians he cites in this letter are those whose biographies he penned for the volumes of the *Encyclopédie* d'Yverdon, an indication that he was specifically selected to establish and create a radical corpus for the Swiss compilation, as well as follow through with a further consideration of Italy's contribution to radical thinking in his lengthy discussion of Italian erudition in this letter serving as preface to the translated volume.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. Zilia's Quipus: Madame de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne* as a screen for masonic interests

One of the least known chapters in the phenomenal European success of Madame de Graffigny's 1747 epistolary novel *Les Lettres d'une peruvienne* is Raimondo Di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica*.<sup>45</sup> Published in 1751, some three years prior to the publication of the first Italian translation of

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<sup>44</sup> De Felice 1770-1780, XXXVII, 298.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of Graffigny in Italy, see Kulesa 1997, 135-37; and on the specific topic of Graffigny and the "querelle des femmes," see Kulesa forthcoming.

Madame de Graffigny's novel in Venice in 1754, San Severo's exposure to the novel in the original French and his focus on the Peruvian writing system of knotted threads, the quipus, raises a number of questions about this work, not the least of which is how Graffigny's epistolary novel of female agency and self-determination in a transcultural setting became the fodder for Di Sangro's controversial work. For Graffigny, the quipus function as an exotic device in the *advertisement* to the novel to explain how she, Graffigny, as the protagonist's "messenger," brought Zilia's letters to the attention of the public. The historical-exotic twist comes precisely from the writing in knots, the quipus, reported by Garcilaso de la Vega, son of a Spanish conquistador and an Incan princess, in *Royal Commentaries of Peru and General History of the Incas*, one of Madame de Graffigny's primary sources. Interest and trepidation about the quipus date from Pizarro himself, who commented on them in 1533; subsequently, Jesuit José de Acosta wrote about them in his work on indigenous scripts, participating, as well, in the subsequent ban placed on their use by the Catholic Church in Lima in 1583.

The timing of the publication of Di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica* is important, as it was planned as a culminating moment in the Prince's rising masonic star. For Freemasons from London to Amsterdam to Berlin, the ritual path to Masonic enlightenment drew on symbols from the ancient world. Di Sangro had studied the production of symbolic systems of communication in conjunction with the origins of man. When he purchased a sixteenth-century Jesuit manuscript that both depicted and deciphered the Incan quipus, Di Sangro knew he had an

important element to add to the Masonic mix. Desirous of promoting the universalist ideas that European Freemasonry believed to be embedded in the symbols of ancient Egypt, Etruria, Greece, Persia, and now, the Incan Empire, Di Sangro wrote the *Lettera apologetica* in 1751 to make public his discovery of the manuscript on quipus. Di Sangro was a seeker and a disseminator. Thus he touted his book as a new Masonic catechism, intending first, to capture the Italian Masonic imagination, and second, to reach European freemasonry in England, France, Holland and the German States, where he had many contacts.

It is important to underscore the date of publication, 1751. As we discussed in the first part of this essay, Di Sangro, in the burgeoning, public years of his career, operated openly, fully confident that he was performing useful work to society as a whole, work whose positive results, he believed, were recognized by both Church and State alike. However, no sooner did the work issue from his personal presses, than it was placed on the *Index*, prompting the Church to place Madame de Graffigny's highly popular novel in its numerous Italian translations on the index as well, though this aspect of the Italian reception of de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une peruvienne* has never been treated before. Di Sangro's *Lettera apologetica* and the manuscript he purchased are being studied by archeologists today as the most precious source texts we have on Peruvian quipus and their possible meanings.

As we have said, the unabashed tracing of conjoined beginnings for man, symbols, and signs in the *Lettera apologetica* features Raimondo Di Sangro, the Prince of San Severo, at the height of his powers, confidently staging a controversy of heterodoxy through the



publication of this work. The impact was all the more pronounced thanks to the popularity of Mme de Graffigny's novel. Di Sangro not only believed he would emerge unscathed, but what is more important, he actually believed himself sufficiently powerful to wage the battle of heresy with the Church and win.

Di Sangro's intuition about the depth and scope of the quipus and the singular importance of the manuscript for his contemporaries and for posterity was uncannily accurate, as the ongoing analysis today of its contents by scholars of every stripe amply demonstrates. First, the Prince correctly surmised that knotted threads were denser and richer in meaning than the mere counting function that had been assigned to them by chroniclers who had tried to downplay their potential. Anthropologists view the very manuscript that Di Sangro is credited with saving as the 'Rosetta Stone' for quipus as they begin to comprehend their narrative function, the extent of their expressive capacity and the embodiment of a highly sophisticated representation of the world and beyond. One of the most intriguing recent analyses comes from anthropologist Gary Urton, who has likened the system of knots to the binary system of ASCII code. Urton's work seeks to demonstrate that the quipus could be read by anyone trained to interpret them, and that the knots, when deciphered, are comparable to a precise system, like the alphabet. Indeed, their communicative power made the missionaries wary; in his work, Urton specifically cites the fear that the quipus instilled in the Spaniard *conquistadores* and missionaries, who believed them to be inspired by the devil. Fortunately, renegade Jesuit Blas Valera thought differently, preserving

and transmitting in his manuscript the key which is finally allowing scholars to restore indigenous historical memory and to investigate non-alphabetic communication systems.

The contents of Raimondo Di Sangro's library offer evidence of intense documentation on symbolic representations, alphabets, histories of civilization, in particular, histories of Peru and the Incas, travel accounts, histories of the Jesuits, and critiques of Jesuit activity. The collection of these works, their complementary and overlapping domains, offer insight into Di Sangro's hypotheses, fulfilled by the discovery of the quipus, and the documentation he used to establish the new genealogy of signs, symbols and forms of communication among people and gods through time. Of particular interest is his copy of Pierio Valeriano's (1477-1560) *Hieroglyphica*, first published in Basel in 1556, translated and reprinted numerous times – Di Sangro's copy is an Italian translation published in Venice in 1625. Both a Renaissance dictionary of symbols and a work of comparative ancient sources, the *Hieroglyphica* served as inspiration to Di Sangro with its collation of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and medieval symbolic systems, plus commentary. Di Sangro, in the *Lettera apologetica*, now adds the quipus. Just as Valeriano's text was amply illustrated, so too is Di Sangro's text, with full colour fold out pages of the quipus, intended, it would appear, to be read and examined in tandem with Valeriano, as a confirmation from another cultural and historical reality of symbolic references emerging from yet to be explained contexts. Di Sangro's documentation of Latin American history and culture is reflected in three texts: the French translation of Garcilaso de la Vega's *Commentarios reales de los Incas* – the 1715 *Histoire*

des Yncas Rois du Perou, translated by J. Baudoin, edition published in Amsterdam, Augustín de Zárate's *Historia del descubrimiento y conquista de la provincia del Perú*, – possibly the 1714 edition, Antonio De Solis, *Storia della Conquista del Messico* – possibly the 1704 edition published in Venice and translated by a member of the Crusca Academy.<sup>46</sup> The works in question all document the period when power passed from the indigenous populations to the conquistadors, told by Spanish as well as indigenous chroniclers. Di Sangro sought information about the destruction of indigenous culture, sympathetic representations and assessments of native languages and cultures, and possible sites where remnants of those cultures might have been preserved. Noteworthy as well in Di Sangro's collection are numerous histories of the Jesuits and critical assessments of their activity. Di Sangro's interest in the Jesuits stems from their proselytizing mandate and their subsequent travels throughout the globe, resulting in some of the very histories and cultural reflections that populated his library. Di Sangro knew that the Jesuits, would be the ones, if any, who might have acquired true insight and appreciation for indigenous cultures, signs and belief systems, on the front line of contact, as they were, with indigenous peoples.

The Prince of San Severo would find exactly the kind of knowledge transmission about indigenous cultures from a Jesuit source, Pedro de Illares, who sold him the manuscript *Historia et Rudimenta Linguae*

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<sup>46</sup> See Spruit 2002, 262-79, for the partial list of the books appearing in Di Sangro's library.

*Piruanorum*. This document, Illares reports in his section of the three-part manuscript, is what remains of “the ‘Jerusalem’ through which the Conquistadores passed.” Indeed, the document, Illares claimed, was handed to him in a bag with a few other items including a rosary, and its subsequent sale to Di Sangro, constitutes the continuity of a transmission process among like-minded Jesuits who fought to preserve indigenous culture and sought, in their writings, to tell a different story of conquest and what had been lost. Di Sangro saw himself as the next in this chain of transmission, his *Lettera apologetica* being a moment of transmission, diffusion and revelation of the quipus and their universal function. When he read the account signed by Jesuit Juan Anello Oliva, told to him purportedly by an Incan Sage, Di Sangro knew he had found what he was looking for:

The Indian sage commented that Christ’s words, written in the Bible, were irrelevant, because writing with pen and paper was useless; quipus, he claimed, were the ‘true writing, because, containing both spirit and thought, they bind God and man together’.<sup>47</sup>

What better culminating message in a text meant to trace the history of transmission of the human sacred than the addition of the quipus?

The crackdown of the Church was swift and brutal, due in great part to the text’s potential for success, riding as it were, on Madame de

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<sup>47</sup> Hyland 2003, 201.

Graffigny's coattails. Certainly, Di Sangro's visibility as the leader of Neapolitan Freemasonry played a major role in the banning of the book, exacerbated by Di Sangro's identification with the missionary work of the condemned heretic Blas Valera. On the surface, San Severo's rise and demise as a visible and vibrant cultural figure appears rapid. However, a deeper perspective, one that traces the extent of his erudition and his strategic plans and projects for their dissemination with the goal of enlightening his peers, points to yet another Enlightenment context, that of the Radical Enlightenment, and a branch of the Radical Enlightenment that not only continued in the tradition begun by Giannone, Vico and Doria as discussed by Israel as important motors of the Italian context, but also moved the agenda forward to encompass a far richer set of cases where radical thought and action could be expressed, from the linguistic, to the scientific, to the medical, to the social, to the religious, to the political, to the educational. Dismissed for too long as the offbeat product of the local, little understood culture of eighteenth-century Naples and its kingdom, today, thanks to the emerging importance of the Radical Enlightenment, we can begin to see how Di Sangro's pursuits and ideas were perfectly in line with others like him and how they formed a nucleus of radical thinking that had built within it plans for expansion, which were carried out in Switzerland through the network that has been described in this article.

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