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## RADICAL CARTESIAN POLITICS: VELTHUYSEN, DE LA COURT, AND SPINOZA

Tammy Nyden-Bullock

Spinoza lived and wrote at a time of profound philosophical controversy in the United Provinces. Holland witnessed a shift from Scholastic Aristotelianism to the New Philosophy. Debates took place both inside and outside the academy concerning philosophy, theology, politics and religion. Spinoza's work should be understood within the context of these debates, which centered on Cartesianism. Of particular importance is Spinoza's influence by and role in a political movement known as "Radical Cartesianism".<sup>1</sup> All of Spinoza's political doctrines can be traced to writings from this movement, many of which he owned. This paper will provide a general introduction to Radical Cartesianism by explaining its historical context and discussing two Radical Cartesian authors within Spinoza's library: Lambertus van Velthuysen and the brothers De la Court (De la Court 1661 and 1662; Van Velthuysen 1667). The final section will discuss Spinoza's political philosophy as a systemization of their Radical Cartesian ideas.

### I. What is Radical Cartesianism?

Radical Cartesian politics is a phenomenon unique to Holland. As its name suggests, its proponents considered themselves Cartesians and tried to apply Descartes' new philosophy to particular political problems of the day. This fact may seem surprising and even counter-intuitive; after all, one would be hard-pressed to find political philosophy within Descartes' writings. However, we should take note of three things. First, the term "Cartesian" was often used at this time in a much broader sense, to include the New Philosophy in general, not just the particular ideas of Descartes. Radical Cartesians consciously incorporated the ideas of many thinkers, including Hobbes and Machiavelli. They took an eclectic approach to fighting the traditional Aristotelian, Calvinistic, and humanistic political theory taught in the schools. Second, they did not claim to find political doctrines in Descartes' writings. Rather, they took Descartes' approach to understanding the human passions and applied it to politics. Third, while they appealed to philosophical theories, their aim was of a practical nature, namely to support De Witt's republican leadership and try to prevent the reinstatement of stadholder-rule. Their writings were rarely systematic and were often written in the form of Dutch pamphlets meant to persuade the people. In order to understand Radical Cartesianism, we must first understand what it was reacting

<sup>1</sup> The term "Radical Cartesianism" is used throughout the secondary literature on Dutch seventeenth-century politics and political philosophy. For example, Klever 2001: 27; Israel 1995: 788; Van Bunge 1995: 54.

against. The next section gives a brief history of the Netherlands and explains how the divided culture of the mid-seventeenth century emerged.

### A. Historical Background

There was no official Dutch "constitution" until 1795. Before then, the Union of Utrecht served this role (Rowen 1972: 68-92). This treaty, unifying the northern provinces previously controlled by Spain, contained two contradictory impulses (Prokhovnik 2004: 158-9). On the one hand, it recognized the States General as a limited central body of government. This assembly consisted of representatives from the seven northern provinces and each province had one vote. On the other hand, it proclaimed that the sovereign rights of each individual province were to stay intact. Such rights were understood in terms of traditional privileges of cities and provinces dating back to Habsburg rule.

This tension between states rights and centralized power was quite complicated. The stadholder, another institution from Habsburg rule, was the highest-ranking official and dignitary in each province. It was normal for one man to be a stadholder of several provinces at once. Usually, a member of the House of Orange held the majority of provinces with the remaining one or two going to their Nassau cousins, resulting in a strong centralizing power. This centralizing power was like a monarchy in several respects. In Habsburg tradition, the stadholders were nobles living in a splendid and hierarchical courtly culture. Frederick Hendrik (1584-1647), Prince of Orange, capitalized on these traditions to increase the prestige, authority, and dynastic intentions of the House of Orange (Israel 1995: 306). He also attempted to enhance his prestige by marrying his son and heir, William II (1626-1650), to a daughter of Charles I of England, Princess Mary. This was the first time that the House of Orange-Nassau formed a marriage-alliance with a major royal line. Further, the stadholder fulfilled many functions of a monarch. He imposed taxes, oversaw the military, enacted laws for The Netherlands as a whole, and maintained the Dutch Reformed Church. The stadholders exercised their centralizing power through their delegates in the States-General. Since they held the majority of provinces, they had the majority of votes in the assembly. Decisions often came in conflict with the interests and traditional privileges of individual provinces, particularly Holland.

These tensions between Holland and The House of Orange were merged with other divisions in Dutch society: religious divisions between Remonstrants and Orthodox Calvinists and philosophical divisions between Cartesians and Aristotelians. Frederick Hendrik was the stadholder of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel during the rise of Cartesianism. He was heir to his brother-in-law Maurits of Nassau (1567-1625) who had taken a very tough stance against unorthodox strands such as Arminianism<sup>2</sup> and Remonstrantism.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Arminianism was a reaction to Calvinist orthodoxy that followed the teachings of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), an Amsterdam preacher. Arminianism held that Christ died for all people, not only for the elect, that people have free will and are saved through repentance and faith (not pre-

Whereas the Arminians claimed that the spiritual role of the Church was and should be separate from the secular role of government, the Orthodox saw divine law as the only law. They identified any tendency to give the government more say in the affairs of the church with the Arminian heresy. By siding with the strict orthodox Calvinists, Maurits secured an important relationship between the House of Orange and the Church (Vermij 2002: 274-5). Frederick Hendrik, on the other hand, had little sympathy for Counter-Remonstrant theology. He lived at a time when political Arminianism had gained quite a bit of power. Even if he had wanted to adopt his brother-in-law's tough stance he would have been unable to do so and preserve the stability of the state. Instead, he had to find a middle path that would accommodate both the 'Arminian' and 'Counter-Remonstrant' party-factions (Israel 1995: 486-490). His approach was to make both sides dependent on him so that they would want and need to cooperate with him. He would dispense favors to both sides, which dissatisfied both parties but left them unwilling to criticize his affairs or challenge his authority (Israel 1995: 491). And so his rule (1625-1647) was one of relative religious and philosophical tolerance. That is not to say that there was an end to tensions. Most towns became firmly tied to one of the party-factions. For instance, while Amsterdam and Rotterdam were Arminian, Leiden and Utrecht were solidly Counter-Remonstrant (Israel 1995: 493-4).

Frederick Hendrik was a politician first and foremost. Throughout his rule his leanings would shift from one party to the other as it benefited his own political career. His most significant shift would occur in 1633. Before this time he tended to side with the Arminians and support Holland. However, the Holland Arminians began to gain too much power. Before the early 1630s they could not challenge Frederick Hendrik because they needed his support to survive. But by 1633 public support had shifted towards the Arminians. They were no longer dependent on the stadholder and were pushing for primacy in the Republic (Israel 1995: 524). Frederick Hendrik therefore decided to shift his policies to align with the Counter-Remonstrants.

It is important to note that this division in Dutch society was not solely based on religion. Military and economic factors played large parts as well. For example, one of the most divisive issues during 1634 was the relationship between France and the United Provinces. An alternative to peace with Spain was an alliance with France, and Louis XIII had made a tempting offer of a close partnership and subsidies. If the alliance were made, The Netherlands would be

election). In addition to being a theological movement, Arminianism became a political movement in response to Maurits' policies, which took substantial power away from the province of Holland. Political Arminianism promoted toleration, attempted to reassert Holland's predominance, and resisted the aspirations of the public Church (Israel 1995: 488).

<sup>3</sup> The Remonstrant Church separated from the Reformed Church in 1619 as a consequence of theological debates between the liberal theology of Arminius and the strict orthodox theology of Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641) The Remonstrant Church was able to emerge into the open in the late 1620s. It is important to note that while many Arminians joined the Remonstrant Church, many did not. Some preferred to remain outside any formal church body and to do without clergy and a fixed confession of faith. An example of the latter are the Collegiants of Rijnsburg (Israel 1995, 395).

locked into confrontation with Spain and subordination to France for years to come. An alliance would also increase the power of the stadholder, therefore minimizing the influence of Holland indefinitely. What particularly upset the Arminian towns was a clause in the treaty that the United Provinces must not negotiate with Spain (Israel 1995: 524). This strongly conflicted with the commercial interests of Holland.

Frederick Hendrik signed the treaty with France and in May 1635, France declared war on Spain. Under the treaty the States General was required to help France invade the Spanish controlled South Netherlands. If the South failed to break with Spain, the Southern Provinces were to be split between France and the Northern Provinces once they were conquered. This agreement upset both sides. The Arminian States-Party (those who wanted to maintain a loose confederation of independent provinces and increase the power of Holland) did not like the idea of enlarging the Republic which would in effect enhance the stadholder's power and introduce new commercial competition with Amsterdam. Orthodox Calvinists did not like the fact that in any territory gained the Roman Catholic Church was to be preserved and the Reformed faith would not be allowed. The French failed to conquer the Spanish territory (Israel 1995: 527-8). However, this debate points out just how perilous Frederick Hendrik's position became with both parties. He had abandoned the now strong States-Party and it was clear to the Counter-Remonstrants that his alliances had always been made of convenience, not a deep commitment to orthodoxy. There was no longer any segment of Dutch society that strongly supported him.

In 1647 Frederick Hendrik died, leaving his stadholderates to his son, William II. Under his rule the political and ideological lines in Dutch society became clear again. The Counter-Remonstrants strongly supported William II, without the conflicting feelings they felt for his father. The Orthodox Calvinists hated Frederick Hendrik's tolerant policies towards Catholics, Remonstrants, and Cartesians. On the other hand, they hated the 'libertine' regents of the States of Holland<sup>4</sup> even more, and therefore felt compelled to back the stadholder (Israel 1995: 595). William II changed all that. The religious and philosophical tolerance of his father's rule quickly came to an end.

For the first two years of William II's rule (1647-1648), the States of Holland were dominant among the Northern Provinces. In 1648 the Treaty at Münster was signed, ending the Thirty-Year's War with Germany and the Eighty Year's War with Spain. During the last stages of peace negotiations, opposition to Holland arose in the other provinces. While Holland wanted peace, some provinces saw peace as contrary to their economic interests. Zeeland, for example, was afraid that peace would disturb their trade with the Southern provinces. Utrecht and parts of Gelderland felt that the Netherlands should stick by the terms of their treaty with France and wait until France and Spain settled their differences (Israel 1995: 596). Holland was able to put pressure on Utrecht and all of the provinces other than Zeeland voted to ratify the treaty, against the

<sup>4</sup> The States of Holland was an assembly consisting of representatives from each of Holland's cities

advice of the stadholder. The States of Holland saw this as a victory over the House of Orange and evidence of their predominance within the provinces.

The fears of the other provinces were justified. While Holland generally thrived during peacetime, other provinces were suffering and resentment towards Holland was on the rise. Further, Holland itself became divided between the Orthodox and the regent upper class. Anti-Holland pamphlets were published in 1649-1650 by hard-line preachers blaming the high cost of bread and economic collapse of Zeeland on God's wrath with the regents for not supporting the public Church and for their tolerance of Catholicism and unorthodox Protestantism (Israel 1995: 598).

William II made clear alliances with the Reformed Church. Immediately after the peace, he introduced the Reformation into previously Catholic controlled areas, ordering churches to be stripped of papist adornment, installing Reformed preachers and introducing the State's Bible and Reformed Schools (Israel 1995: 600). Tensions between the Orthodox (now firmly aligned with The House of Orange) and the States-Party (which became increasingly associated with Cartesianism) grew. The States-Party was concerned about the ever-increasing harshness of the Reformation within the United Provinces. The Orangists criticized the States-Party as being a threat to the public Church. After all, if each province was fully sovereign, then each province could determine its own path not only in military and economic affairs, but also in regards to church policy as well. Such a system would overturn the Synod of Dordrecht, which gave central authority to the stadholder to preserve the Union.

William II developed a plan to break up Holland's power. He focused on the people, using a barrage of propaganda pamphlets to turn the people against the regents. He appealed to their Orthodox beliefs and painted the regents as an elitist power-hungry class. In this way, the Orangists were the party of the people while the republican<sup>5</sup> States-Party represented an aristocratic class. In 1650 William II staged his coup. He had six principal regents arrested while his cousin, Willem Frederick, the stadholder of Friesland, led 12,000 troops of the States General Army to converge on Amsterdam. The burgomasters were alerted just in time to close the gates and to call out the civic guard. The troops waited outside the city until the stadholder arrived. William II's power was now clear and Amsterdam yielded. William used his power to create tension with Spain and draw closer to France. Whatever his plans were, they were cut short by his sudden death from smallpox in November of 1650.

A week after his death his only child (who would become William III of England) was born. This left the House of Orange without an heir who was of age to take on William II's stadholderates. A Great Assembly was immediately held at The Hague (January 1651) in which the leaders of the province of

<sup>5</sup> The Republicans argued that the Orangists wanted a monarchy, not a republic. But as Jonathan Israel puts it, "Orangists agreed that the United Provinces formed a republic. They denied the Stadholder was a monarchical figure, incompatible with the institutions of a true republic, arguing that there was an inherent need for an 'eminent head', and that the Dutch state shared this feature with Venice and Genoa, which likewise each had its 'doge'" (Israel 1995: 608).

Holland forced measures through the State's General abolishing the position of stadholder.<sup>6</sup> This Act of Seclusion reduced the power of the Orangists (those who wanted central and unified government under the House of Orange), increased the power of individual provinces, especially Holland, and introduced the first stadholderless period (1651-1672). Radical Cartesianism was born during this time.

The States-Party was now at the helm and Johan de Witt (1625-1672) soon emerged as their leader, serving as Grand Pensionary<sup>7</sup> of Holland from 1653-1672. For these two decades Holland dominated the Republic, making De Witt the most powerful man in The United Provinces. De Witt's slogan was "True Liberty". It stood for many elements of republicanism. First and foremost was liberty from stadholder-rule, which De Witt and the States-Party perceived as a monarchical element inconsistent with a true republic. Self-rule of the provinces was paramount, and De Witt kept the interests of Holland at the forefront of his agenda, this interest largely being construed in economic terms. For example, he opposed the Orangist foreign policy, which favored territorial expansion because it led to war, which was bad for Holland's trading interests. In the same vein, religious tolerance was seen as key, not as a philosophical ideal, but rather as a practical means of encouraging Dutch trade and wealth.

De Witt's powerful position was a victory for Cartesianism as De Witt was strongly committed to philosophical liberty and was himself a Leiden-taught Cartesian. That is not to say that Cartesianism was given free reign under De Witt. Tensions between Orangists and regents were as high as ever and De Witt, like Frederick Hendrik, had to walk a thin line between outwardly expressing support for Cartesianism and offending the largely Orthodox populace. Further, the nobility remained a force to be reckoned with throughout the northern and eastern provinces and there remained many loyal Orangists throughout the population. Orthodox Calvinists in the lesser provinces continued to criticize Holland for what they considered excessive tolerance and inadequate support of the Reformed Church.

The 1660s brought new tensions for De Witt to deal with. The restoration of the monarchy in Britain gave Orangists hope that Charles II would use his power to help his nephew, Willem III, take back the stadholderate for the House of Orange. The merchant and regent class also saw the restoration as a positive thing since it might lead to peace in Europe and improve trading conditions. In

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that De Witt did not attempt to reform or formalize the constitutional structure to reflect Holland's current dominance. And so the constitutional ambiguities remained in place (Prokhovnik 2004: 159).

<sup>7</sup> The representatives in the States of Holland came exclusively from the families ruling the cities. They were not elected but rather determined by rules regulating the distribution of offices among the patricians. The States of Holland had few salaried officers. Of them, the most important was the Grand Pensionary who was the councilor of the nobility and as such acted as chairman of the States of Holland and their committees. Further, the Grand Pensionary was the leader of Holland's deputation to the States General. The Grand Pensionary was not himself a nobleman, his influence, rather, came from his role as spokesman of the urban patriciate to which he belonged (Kossmann, 2000: 15).

other words, both parties saw advantages in being friendly with England's monarchy and De Witt became worried about the future status of the States-Party and stadholderless government. Both the Orangists and the States-Party published numerous popular pamphlets. The former stressed the need for a figurehead and the traditions of the House of Orange. The latter stressed the value of true republicanism (that is, government without the monarchical element of stadholder) and the liberty that goes with it. At the heart of these debates was the nature of a true republic and the true "constitution" of The Netherlands.

It is within these popular pamphlet debates that Radical Cartesianism emerged. Many of the pamphlets written attacking the House of Orange were so antagonistic towards the Reformed church in their support of Cartesian philosophy that De Witt and the regent class could not prudently go along with them publicly. The events under William II's stadholdership made many Dutch republicans suspicious of the true intentions of the church and they developed a strong anti-clerical tendency (Vermij 2002: 276). The Radical Cartesians were happy to express this tendency in their pamphlets. Further, their ideas began to clash with what Jonathan Israel terms the elitist, regent republicanism of De Witt (Israel 1995: 788). For instance, the Radical Cartesians argued against monopolies and sometimes even for democracy over aristocracy.

## B. The Radical Cartesians

The beginnings of Radical Cartesianism may be found in the writings of Lambertus van Velthuysen (1622-1685). Van Velthuysen was a physician, a politician in Utrecht, and a devout Calvinist. He came by Cartesianism through his teachers Henricus Regius (1598-1679), a member of the medical faculty at the University of Utrecht with a strong interest in Cartesian physics, and Adriaan Heereboord (1614-1661), the first Leiden professor to be seriously interested in Cartesian philosophy. Van Velthuysen dedicated his career to showing that Cartesianism is consistent with the Reformed faith and to applying the New Philosophy to politics. He is largely responsible for bringing academic debates about Cartesianism to the public's attention, as well as spreading the ideas of Hobbes. There are two factors that contribute to his willingness and ability to defend Cartesianism and the highly unpopular ideas of Hobbes. First, he was not a professor and therefore was not limited by the many edicts restricting what could be taught in the universities (Verbeek 1997: 240). Second, as a member of the Walloon congregation,<sup>8</sup> he was not subject to the jurisdiction of the Dutch Reformed council. In this way he doubly escaped the oppressive power of his opponent, Gisbert Voetius (1589-1676). However, when members of Voetius' counter-reformation began to question Van Velthuysen's faith, he felt compelled to dissociate himself from the movement. He was highly distressed that other

<sup>8</sup> The Walloon congregation was an alternative Orthodox Calvinist Church that was founded by French refugees during the Dutch revolt against Spain. It had a separate hierarchy and leadership from the Dutch Reformed Church.

Radical Cartesians, Spinoza in particular, had used principles from his own writings to draw conclusions that went against his orthodox beliefs. He dedicated the latter part of his career to arguing against what he saw as their atheistic conclusions.

The De la Court brothers were businessmen, members of the States-Party, and strong supporters of De Witt. Like van Velthuysen, they were students of Heereboord at Leiden and committed Cartesians. Johan (1622-1660) was a political theorist who opposed the Aristotelian and humanist political tradition taught at the schools. He offered an alternative approach that was influenced by Hobbes, Descartes, and Machiavelli and yet had democratic leanings. We don't know many particulars about Johan's life other than that he died young and his brother Pieter (1618-1685) edited and published his writings after he died. Pieter left his brother's words in tact, but added many details and polemics, turning Johan's theoretical treatises into political pamphlets. It is difficult to separate the ideas of the brothers and I follow the convention of most scholars who tend to treat them as one voice. An exception may be that while Johan was a staunch supporter for open democracy, Pieter seems to have amended some of his arguments and preferred a moderate aristocracy (Kossman 2000:70). In any case, together they provided an important radical voice in the public debates of the 1660s and, like Van Velthuysen, they were an important influence on Spinoza.

What ties Van Velthuysen, De la Court, and Spinoza (as well as Radical Cartesians in general) together is a particular combination of the ideas of Descartes and Hobbes. From Descartes they derive a commitment to understanding the psychology of the passions and the conviction that the passions can and ought to be kept in line with reason. The most important idea taken from Hobbes is that the drive for self-preservation is universal and fundamental to an understanding of human society. However, they understand this drive in terms that go beyond mere physical or material survival and understand the ultimate self-interest as preservation of the soul.

Another thing that Van Velthuysen, De la Court, and Spinoza have in common is that they are committed to religious and philosophical freedom. They argue for a separation of church and state as well as fight the view that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology and therefore should be under the supervision and control of the church. Overall, they offer naturalistic and rationalistic approaches to politics that take reason to be the foundation of both personal happiness and the stability of the state.

## II. Van Velthuysen

Van Velthuysen's first publication (1651) introduced Hobbes to the Dutch Republic. Contrary to its title (*Epistolica dissertatio de principiis justi et decori, continens apologiam pro tractatu clarrismi Hobbaei De Cive and Disputatio de finito et infinito, in qua defenditur sententia Cartesii de motu, spatio et corpore*), it was not so much an apology for Hobbes, as a presentation of Van Velthuysen's own views which were influenced by the English philosopher. Van Velthuysen agrees with Hobbes that the principle drive of every person is self-preservation,

but he understands this drive to be a moral duty proscribed by natural law. According to Van Velthuysen, God created the world, humans in particular, for some purpose. In doing so, He also willed the means necessary to that end, those means being reason and the natural appetites that are part of human nature. Therefore, humans are completely justified in using these means. People have the natural right to defend themselves and their property as well as the right to punish those who injure them. However, they do not have the right to take away the natural (God-given) rights of others. To do so would be unjust in that it goes against God's purpose in the world (Van Velthuysen 1995: 68-70).

For Van Velthuysen's, self-preservation is the basis of morality (Van Velthuysen 1995: 55) and particular moral rules are deduced from this fundamental law of human nature (Secretan 1999: 17). This natural instinct is universal and is therefore a moral guide that is accessible to people of any faith (Van Velthuysen 1995: 67). It does not depend on scripture (or any particular interpretation of it.) In this way, Van Velthuysen moves morality from the realm of theology to that of natural philosophy. This teleological egoism will become the basis of his arguments for religious tolerance and philosophical freedom.

Religious freedom is important for both the welfare of the people and the security of the state. Therefore, the sovereign must not be empowered to take it away (Van Velthuysen 1995: 124-5). Every subject has the right to withhold obedience to the ruler if such obedience jeopardizes his own salvation (Kossman 2000: 15). After all, salvation is the ultimate goal of the fundamental drive to self-preservation, the very drive that holds the state together. This idea combines Hobbes' egoism with the Dutch spirit of resistance born out of the revolt against Spanish rule. Another consequence of Van Velthuysen's approach is that it shows that a utilitarian perspective does not contradict Christian morality. This move makes permissible many merchant activities traditionally condemned by the Reformed Church, such as speculation (Secretan 1999: 21-24).

Self-preservation plays a central role in Van Velthuysen's political theory as well. It is the basis of sociability because one helps another best by helping oneself. While there is an element of Hobbes' social contract here, Van Velthuysen's political philosophy is importantly different. First, Van Velthuysen's notion of self-preservation goes beyond mere physical survival – he was concerned with the wellbeing of the soul. He links self-preservation with reaching the knowledge of the order of the world, which one calls "Divine Will" or "Providence". This knowledge can be acquired through reason or through revelation (Secretan 1999: 17-20). Second, while Van Velthuysen believed that a sovereign was necessary to maintain the proper functioning of the state, he thought that a sovereign body could do this better than an individual ruler because a sovereign body can better accommodate the divergent needs of the people (Blom 1995: 191). Third, he does not agree with Hobbes that the transference of rights to the ruler should be absolute or that power is in essence indivisible (Schoneveld 1983: 37).

The *Epistola Dissertatio* also incorporates the Cartesianism that Van Velthuysen learned from Regius and Heereboord. It is important to understand that the Cartesianism that took hold in Dutch universities, particularly Leiden, was not pure Cartesianism. Professors at the University of Leiden were required



to teach Aristotle. Those that taught Descartes' philosophy presented it as a logical extension of Aristotelianism and combined it with other modern philosophies, like that of Gassendi. This attempt, known as the *philosophia novantiqua*, was in keeping with the neo-Aristotelianism of Heereboord's teacher, Franco Burgersdijk (1590-1635), a Leiden professor who took an eclectic approach to philosophy and presented the possibility of a non-Scholastic interpretation of Aristotle.

From the *philosophia novantiqua* perspective it is a fact of nature that humans are born as a bundle of passions, not yet under the command of reason. The passions of the newborn are its only means of survival, and therefore not to be derided. Instead, the passions need to be nurtured by a caring parent or teacher. Through experience and education, particularly the development of reason, the child learns to put her passions to the right use in order to attain her goals. On this view, the passions will never be completely overcome or subdued with reason, nor should they be, for passions are necessary to drive humans to action (Blom 1995: 177). Reason does, however, have a central role, that is, to guide and to balance the passions.

Van Velthuysen starts from this particularly Dutch Cartesianism and builds from it a moral psychology that explains the natural inclination of self-preservation and our rights stemming from it. According to Van Velthuysen, God has united the human soul and body in such a way that the soul can both feel emotions and be affected by the body. The soul feels pain whenever the animal spirits move in a way that is contrary to this union and it feels pleasure whenever their movement is appropriate to it (Van Velthuysen 1995: 87). All passions can be reduced to these two: pain and pleasure. Further, God has linked each passion with a proper object (Van Velthuysen 1995: 74). In this way, God has given humans a natural drive to preserve themselves and a natural means to do so. Further, there are basic passions that are universal. While cultures differ in regard to the *cultivated* passions, they share the same *natural* passions. Van Velthuysen makes a point of distinguishing passions that are learned (e.g., shame from nudity or polygamy) from passions that follow from natural law. Natural passions, with the guidance of reason, form the basis of morality.

In 1655, Van Velthuysen published a Dutch pamphlet in response to attacks by Voetius against two newly installed Cartesian professors at Utrecht, Christophorus Wittich (1625-1687) and Johannes Clauberg (1622-1655), which focused on Descartes' Copernicanism (Verbeek 1992:79). This pamphlet is titled *Bewys dat het gevoelen van die genen, die leeren de Sonne Stilstandt en des Aertrycks Beweging niet strydich is met Godts-Woort* (Proof that the opinion of those who teach the rest of the sun and the motion of the earth is not contrary to God's Word). The *Bewys* and the ensuing debates were very important for spreading Descartes' ideas because it was published in Dutch before Descartes' writings had been translated into that language. Van Velthuysen was concerned with Voetius' propaganda against Descartes, whose actual philosophy was unknown to his audience. He wanted to provide the people an accurate image of

Descartes' views (Verbeek 1997: 241).<sup>9</sup> For Van Velthuysen, the *Bewys* and his later proofs were more than a defense of Cartesianism and Copernicanism. They were also attacks against the Voetian counter-reformation concerning the issue of philosophical freedom. It annoyed Van Velthuysen that Voetius used his authority within the church and academia to decry Cartesianism as impious (Vermij 2002: 279). For Van Velthuysen, this debate was about "Christelijcke vryhey" – Christian Liberty.

The *Bewys* argues that the Bible does not teach that the sun is still or that the earth is at the center of the universe. Such an idea is based on the misinterpretation of the scripture. Van Velthuysen goes on to give a theory of Biblical hermeneutics that would avoid such mistakes. Namely, that in order to understand Scripture we have to take into account the circumstances in which they were written, for they were written in the language and context of their time (Van Velthuysen 1655: 9). It is important to see how Biblical interpretation was much more than a theological issue for the Radical Cartesians. It was part of a broader discussion about the relationship between philosophy and theology, and ultimately, the need for philosophic freedom. An important conclusion of the *Bewys* is that philosophers should study nature and theologians should interpret scripture (by investigating the circumstances in which they were written) (Van Bunge 1995: 51).

Jacobus Dubois (?-1661), an orthodox minister, was quick to attack the *Bewys* and questioned Van Velthuysen's faith in his pamphlet *Naecktheyt van de Cartesiaensche filosofie ontbloot* (The Nakedness of Cartesian Philosophy Revealed). Thus began a fierce pamphlet debate between the two men. It is out of the scope of this paper to go through all of the details of this debate (cf. Van Bunge 1995; Klever 1991). However, we should note that Van Velthuysen developed a view that would become an important feature of Radical Cartesianism: theologians have no specific authority in the interpretation of scripture. He argued that the foundations of Christianity are clear to all readers of scripture and therefore in no need of interpretation by ministers. As for non-foundational beliefs people must have the liberty to discuss them (Van Velthuysen 1656: 78). As Van Velthuysen later argued in 1660, preachers do not have any special authority. Their opinions are those of private individuals whose opinion must rest on evangelical doctrine (Van Velthuysen 1660: 83).

This view has important implications for the relationship between Church and state. Van Velthuysen argued that the Reformed religion is based on freedom of judgement. This is exactly what makes it different than Roman Catholicism. No one should be forced to accept something as true because the church or a theologian states it. The Reformed *Confession* itself is true, not because the Reformed church says so, but because we believe it. When people become members of the church they maintain their Christian liberty. The doctors and pastors of the church have no right to elevate themselves to the level of the

<sup>9</sup> In a later pamphlet (1657: 23), Van Velthuysen explained that he wrote the *Bewys* for those who did not read Latin and whose curiosity was peaked by the preaching of ministers against the motion of the earth (Vermij 2002: 272).



*Confession.* Concerning astronomy and physics, which are not fundamental to Christian doctrine, people have a right to their opinions. When Voetius and Dubois try to make them a confessional question they display the arrogance of the Roman Pope. They reintroduce the very religious constraint against which the Dutch revolt was fought (Verbeek 1997: 238).

From this standpoint, Van Velthuysen spends much of his career arguing that all legal authority, including the power to punish, belongs only to the political administration, not to the church. In fact, the church itself is under the jurisdiction of the state. The important distinction is that the magistrate has domain over external behavior, whereas the church has domain only over matters of conscience (Klever 1991: 15). While Van Velthuysen maintained that the magistrate had the right to settle religious disputes, he also maintained that as far as subjects were concerned, they could withhold obedience if they believed the government's decision imperiled their salvation (Kossman 2000: 59).

This debate also had important consequences for the relationship between theology and philosophy. Dubois took the traditional view that philosophy was the handmaid of theology. Velthuysen vehemently rejected this view. He argued that to the contrary, natural knowledge reaches into the very heart of theology. Further, the issue of whether the sun moves around the earth or not is an exclusively philosophical issue (Van Velthuysen 1657: 37-38). Van Velthuysen's position on the distinction between and roles of reason and faith led Dubois to accuse him of Socinianism. But Van Velthuysen countered that Socinianism replaces scripture with reason. He, on the other hand, was securing the meaning and authority of scripture, which requires knowledge of the circumstances from which it came (Van Bunge 1995:53). While Van Velthuysen's separation between faith and reason is certainly consistent with Descartes' philosophy, this context makes it clear that it is also based in his opposition to the Voetian Counter-Reformation (McGahagan 1976: 140).

Eventually the debate died down, but in 1666 Van Velthuysen was to find himself once again in the spotlight. Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* was anonymously published and marked a turning point in Van Velthuysen's philosophical career. Meyer argued that philosophy should interpret scripture so as to overcome the disputes that plague Christianity and cause major political discord. His view was that religious divisions arise from various interpretations of scripture. If Christianity could agree on one interpretation, the political discord would be removed (Van Bunge 2001: 99). In other words, Meyer states explicitly what constantly lurked behind Velthuysen's own writings: the only way to end religious disagreements is by allowing philosophy, that is reason, to take over Biblical interpretation. Van Velthuysen feared that Meyer's work would be construed as a logical consequence of his own views. The rest of his career was dedicated to redefining his own Cartesianism so as to avoid being associated with Radical Cartesians such as Meyer (Van Bunge 1995: 54).

Van Velthuysen refuted Meyer in his *Dissertatio de usu rationis in rebus theologicis et praeesertim in interpretatione S. Scripturae*. He claimed that the fundamental difference between reason and faith is that the latter always relies on testimony, either human or divine (Van Bunge 1995: 55). Reason is the principle instrument in scriptural interpretation, but it should not be regarded as

the *only* principle of Biblical Hermeneutics. While reason will never contradict revelation (because of God's essential truthfulness), reason cannot replace faith. For we will often have to accept on faith particular contents of scripture that may be obscure or beyond human rationality, such as the double nature of Christ (Van Velthuysen 1667: 55-56).

The publication of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670 raised Van Velthuysen's concern to a new level. Spinoza's work was immediately condemned as atheistic and censored by the Court of Holland as a threat to religion and the church. Any one found to be involved in its printing, distribution, or sale were to be severely punished (Morgan 2002: 676). Van Velthuysen was concerned because Spinoza defended a hermeneutical position that was very close to his own. He was worried because he did not accept Spinoza's rejection of a transcendent God (Van Bunge 2001: 111-112). Van Velthuysen wrote several treatises attacking Spinoza and even corresponded with Spinoza over some of his disagreements (cf. Ep 42 and 43; Van Velthuysen 1676). Particularly, Van Velthuysen disagrees with Spinoza's philosophy of substance, his intellectualist notion of virtue, denial of free will, his deterministic and materialistic understanding of God and related aspects of his moral philosophy. Theologically, he objected to Spinoza's identification of God's will and intellect, which he saw as leading to Spinoza's determinism (Van Bunge 2001: 111-112). In allowing that the light of reason can supply salvation, Spinoza created a horrible controversy between philosophy and theology (Siebrand 1986: 85), one that Van Velthuysen thought would disturb his own project.

Van Velthuysen holds an ironic position in the history of Radical Cartesianism. He paves the way for the movement by introducing the Dutch public to the ideas of Descartes and Hobbes and by providing the first clear articulations of major Radical Cartesian doctrines. However, he was unwilling to follow those doctrines to their logical conclusions and so spent the second part of his career trying to dissociate his ideas from the very movement he unwittingly helped to start.

### III. De la Court

De la Court represents a new chapter in Dutch political theory. He does not base his theories on classical authorities like Aristotle or their Christian interpreters (Schoneveld 1983: 28). Rather, he bases it on an understanding of human nature that, like Van Velthuysen's writings, combined elements from the new philosophies of Hobbes and Descartes. His writings were neither systematic nor theoretical in nature, and yet, they present all the major political ideas that will become parts of Spinoza's system. De la Court freely mixed Cartesian, Hobbesian and Machiavellian philosophy with political anecdotes, maxims, historical examples and fables (Velema 2002: 14). He was clearly familiar with both classical and modern political theories, but his aim was not practical in nature. He wanted to justify De Witt's regime and to make policy

recommendations for reform (Prokhovnik 2004: 97). He strove to understand human nature and the Dutch situation as they really are and to construct a political system that best served that reality, rather than to discuss utopias and ideals of what man ought to be (De la Court 1702: 312).

This realism can be seen as one of the ways that Machiavelli influenced his thought. He admired Machiavelli's approach and accepted the Machiavellian idea that a city can only attain greatness if it upholds a free way of life, which requires a republican constitution. However, De la Court differed from Machiavelli in three important ways. First of all, because of the Dutch context of commercial interests, he was strongly motivated to seek neutrality in international affairs. Second, as common throughout the Dutch tradition, on both the States-Party and Orangist sides, he was reluctant to bring about official changes in the form of a written constitution. Rather than tying republican practice to constitutional reform, he tried to interpret Dutch history and its vague constitutional structure so that it favored republicanism. Third, De la Court did not accept Machiavellian values concerning civic virtue. At that time, discussions of civic virtue were associated with the Orangist and Calvinist political theory taught in the universities (Prokhovnik 2004: 101).

De la Court rejects the view that a monarch can be raised from birth with the proper education for ruling, thus instilling him with political virtues. All individuals, no matter which class they come from, are subject to passions and must develop reason in order to keep them in balance. On the contrary, the situation surrounding a monarch's upbringing makes it more difficult for him to become virtuous because it is set up in such a way that it encourages the dominance of the passions. First, the incumbent prince always fears that his successor will want to rule as soon as he is able to do so. So he will purposely keep his successor ignorant. While the courtiers might help the successor in order to gain his favor, they will try to turn him into a weak ruler so that when he takes power they will be able to control him. These two situations lead to the successor being raised in an environment of useless entertainment; meant to distract him from the education he needs to become a strong ruler. Such entertainment encourages his lusts and fails to develop his reason. Therefore, the upbringing of a monarch does not cultivate virtue, but vice (De la Court 1662a: 59-69 and 1662b: 145-150; Velema 2002: 16).

There are three problems that result from allowing one man raised in such a way to rule the state. First, the prince will need unlimited wealth in order to continue to follow his base passions and continue the entertainment to which he has grown so accustomed. He will procure this wealth by sucking the country dry, raising taxes and engaging in offensive wars (De la Court 1662a: 70-73 and 1662b: 138-42; Velema 2002: 17-18). Second, since the prince would rather follow his lusts than govern, he gives the majority of the responsibilities to courtiers. Such courtiers gain the monarch's ear through flattery and helping the prince pursue his base pleasures. Therefore, these courtiers end up being corrupt as well. In an attempt to keep the center of power in the court, they will make decisions to constantly replace provincial governors and to keep large urban populations in check with armies (De la Court 1662a: 86-92 and 1662b: 156;

Velema 2002: 17). Third, there will always be bitter struggles over succession, often resulting in war (De la Court 1662a: 133-137).

De la Court's main point is that it is very dangerous to organize a state to depend on "virtuous" rulers who would put aside their own interests for those of the state. Such "virtue" is an illusion. The true virtue of an honest man and good politician consists in prudently linking his own advantage to the general interest (Haitsma Mulier 1980: 132). Strong institutions and policies are needed to force politicians to behave effectively by making the interests of the sovereign necessarily match the common interest of the people. For De la Court, political virtue is not a check on necessity, but rather the consequence of it:

A good government is not one in which the welfare or the misery of the subjects depends on the virtue or vice of the rulers, but...one in which the welfare or the misery of the rulers necessarily follows the welfare or the misery of the subjects (De la Court 1662a: 34; translation in Velema 2002: 15).

Behind these views on political virtue is the *philosophia novantiqua* approach to the passions that we saw in Van Velthuysen. This approach is central to De la Court's understanding of human nature. Humans are vulnerable, needy and weak. Natural drives and strong passions dominate them. The strongest human drives are self-love and the desire to further one's own interests, which De la Court characterizes in terms of property, honor, and power (Velema 2002: 14). These two drives determine and shape the goals of individuals. The passions, which the De la Courts sometimes associate with incorrect judgements, can frustrate the attainment of these goals. In order to escape this situation one must have two things, a strong will and reason. The passions can and should be tamed by the development of reason and virtue through education in order to align the passions with our goals. An important general goal of each individual, then, is to develop their reason so as to master passions that would hinder our self-interest.

De la Court's view on the passions is different from Descartes' *Passions of the Soul* in two important ways. First, De la Court has a much more dramatic view of the conflict in the human soul. He draws on the same passions as Descartes, but does not think that those passions can be controlled. Second, he treats the urge to self-preservation as more central than Descartes does. Everything, including the quality of friendship, is reduced to the fundamental egoism of humans (Kossman 2000: 63). Even though De la Court does not think that man can overcome the passions, he does think that people should use reason to whatever extent possible in order to improve their life (Kossman 2000: 64).

Notice that for De la Court, reason and virtue do not overcome our self-interest, but work with it. It is unrealistic to expect even the most civilized and rational person to rise above selfish passions unless he is literally forced to do so (Velema 2002: 14). This concept is central to De la Court's political philosophy. The very purpose of the state is to check the passions with reason (Haitsma Mulier 1980: 131). The best state is one where the passions are reigned in most tightly. Johan thought this was most effectively done in a democratic republic where there is no individual power (Kossman 2000: 65). Power is corrupting and

ultimately leads individuals to become slaves to the passions. Just as an individual strives to master the destructive passions with reason, a good state will be set up in a rational way so as to prevent self-destruction at the hands of the passions of individuals. It is dangerous for the state to have to rely on the virtue or rationality of any individual. Instead, it must be set up so as to make its individuals virtuous and reasonable. That is the very purpose of law and the state in general.

De la Court's political philosophy is laid out in his three main works: *Consideratien van Staat, ofte politieke weeg-schaal* (Considerations of State or Political Balance) (1662a); *Politieke discoursen* (Political Discourses) (1662b); and *Interest van Holland ofte Gronden van Hollands-Welvaren* (Interest of Holland or the Foundation of Holland's Welfare) (1662c / 1702). The *Politieke Weegschaal* supports the Act of Seclusion that prevented William III from becoming stadholder. It considers pure monarchical, aristocratic and democratic forms of government in order to determine which is the best form for a Republic. It concludes, as Spinoza does later, that it is best for an assembly to be the highest institution in a republic, as is the case in Holland and the United Provinces (Prokhovnik 2004: 98). The *Politieke discoursen* is written in the style of Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and addresses the issue of the distribution of powers between cities within the Dutch republic. The *Interest of Holland* was published with De Witt as author, even though he only contributed two chapters. The rest was written by Pieter De la Court. This work analyses, in great detail, the consequences for Holland's trading interests of the international situation resulting from the Münster and Westphalian peace treatise of 1648 and considered the advantages and disadvantages of forming alliances with France and England. De la Court proposed an isolationist stance and an aggressive advocacy of Holland's leadership over the other provinces (Prokhovnik 2004: 99). Further, he argued that given the economic interests of Holland, a republican form of government is far superior to a monarchical one. By "republican", De la Court means a state wherein an assembly has both the right and the power to come to all resolutions, make orders and laws or break them, and require or prohibit obedience to those laws. "Monarchy" or "monarchical" means a state where one person has these rights and powers (De la Court 1702: 312-313).

There are two common Hobbesian themes found throughout these works: absolutism and the view that self-interest is the primary motivation of man and therefore foundational to political theory. The De la Court brothers came by Hobbes in the same way they came by Descartes, through their teacher and brother-in-law Heereboord. Hobbes had more influence in Leiden than in Van Velthuysen's Utrecht. Heereboord and his fellow Leiden professor Johannes De Raey (1622-1707) were very much interested in Hobbes' philosophy and passed this interest on to their students (Schoneveld 1983: 37). While De la Court takes some fundamental elements of absolutism and self-preservation from Hobbes' philosophy, he uses these elements to draw very different conclusions.

De la Court was a political absolutist in two senses. He denied that people had the right or power to do anything other than obey the lawful rulers and he argued against mixed government. In other words, he rejected any constitution that combined monarchical, aristocratic, and/or democratic elements. De la Court

agreed with Hobbes that sovereign power must be indivisible or the disintegration of the body politic would follow (Velema 2002: 15). Take, for instance, the need of a state to enter into treaties with foreign powers. In order for such treaties to work, it must be clearly stipulated who will maintain that treaty, whether it is one person (monarchy), a small assembly (aristocracy) or everybody (democracy) (De la Court 1662a: 23-26).

When we consider his Dutch context, it is not so surprising that De la Court used Hobbesian absolutism to argue *against* monarchy. De la Court's goal was to show how the Dutch Republic should be governed without a stadholder. He characterized stadholder rule as a monarchical element that functioned alongside and above the aristocratic and democratic elements found in the States General and the States of Holland. De la Court rejects such mixed rule out of hand. It was his opponents – the Orangists – who associated themselves with *respublica mixta*, in order to distinguish their view from both oppressive monarchies and "stubborn regents" (Blom 1995: 52).

De la Court also used natural law arguments against monarchy. Humans are equal in nature. Nobody is made to rule or to be ruled. He concludes from this that democracy is the most legitimate form of government. For a government that is ruled by one or a few is only legitimate if all of the people have given that power to them. While it is conceivable that a democracy would entrust power to a few, it would never give it to one man and his descendents. The origins of monarchy could only be violence and fraud (De la Court 1662a: 36-39). Further, democracy is the most natural, rational, and equitable form of government. Since everyone pursues his own interests, when the majority support a decision, it is because the majority of people have concluded that that decision is in his own interests. Such a decision will necessarily result in a decision that is in the interest of the people as a whole (Kossman 2000: 69).

At the time most people felt that democracy was an uncertain and unreliable form of government because it was subject to the whims of an immature and irrational populace. De la Court agreed that the masses were ignorant, but he believed this ignorance was a result of poverty and lack of education. Since humans are equal in nature and the intellectual potential between individuals did not vary greatly, such ignorance could be overcome with prosperity and education (Kossman 2000: 69). That is not to say that De la Court was arguing that Holland should become a popular democracy. He was not looking to destroy the current "constitution" and start over. Rather, he was trying to interpret Dutch tradition and the current "constitution", as vague as it was, as advocating an aristocratic form of government. De la Court's arguments for democracy should be seen as 1) part of his argument against monarchy / stadholder rule and 2) part of his attempt to break up the regents oligarchy that was gaining power in Holland. De la Court felt the need to point out that aristocracy led by the regent class is only legitimate because it serves the needs of the people. This perspective guides his arguments against the guilds and monopolies of the regents and in favor of free trade (De la Court 1702: 60-61).

De la Court uses the Hobbesian notion of self-interest to argue for economic and religious freedoms. Like Hobbes, De la Court accepts the view that self-interest is the dominant natural drive in human nature. Further, he agrees with

Hobbes that sociability derives from this egoistic drive. In the state of nature people live in a perpetual state of war and in constant fear of each other. The state of nature is so bad that it is worse than living in the worst kind of state (De la Court 1662a: 13-23). Anyone living in the state of nature therefore desires to leave it and does so by joining in the social contract. Society therefore arises because of the self-interested desire of individuals to escape the state of nature.

Humans continue to be driven by self-interest, so the only way for society to keep from slipping back into the state of nature is to be set up in such a way that the interests of all members of the state, including the ruling elite, be linked by common interest. The *Interest of Holland* argues that under De Witt's rule, "the inhabitants of Holland, being in a state of freedom, are by a common interest wonderfully linked together ..." (De la Court 1702: 31).

De la Court understands the common interest largely in economic terms. He points out that Holland is a populous province that supports itself on fishing and trade. It is in the interest of both the people and the rulers (who are merchants) to have a large population with profitable occupations and thriving markets (Blom 2001: 91). He describes the situation as follows:

One man being a god to another under a good land, that there are so many people in it, who according to the nature of the country are honestly maintain'd by such suitable or proportionable means, and especially that the welfare of all the inhabitants (the idle gentry, and foreign soldiers excepted) from the least to the greatest, does so necessarily depend on one another: and above all, it is chiefly considerable, that there are none more really interested in the prosperity of this country than the rulers of the aristocratical government, and the persons that live on their estates (De la Court 1702: 36).

The reason that the current republic works so well is that the well- or ill-being of the rulers depends on or is joined with the well- or ill-being of the fisherman, the manufactures, and those that convey those goods by land and sea (De la Court 1702:312). This joining of interests happens in two different ways. First, the rulers in Holland cannot support themselves on wages from their official positions. They therefore must rely on other means of support, such as fisheries, etc. Second, even those that are independently wealthy are interested in fisheries and trade because that is how their families acquired the money and they want to marry their children to rich merchants. In these two ways the prosperity of Holland benefits its republican rulers (De la Court 1702: 318-320).

This work is written during the height of the Dutch Golden Age. Holland had never seen such prosperity and De la Court warned that this happy situation could be ruined by one mistake in government:

However, this excellent and laudable harmony and union may be violated, even to the ruin of all the inhabitants, none excepted but courtiers and soldiers, and that by one sole mistake in government, which is the electing one supreme head over these inhabitants, or over their armies...God preserve Holland from the fury of a monarch, prince, or one supreme head (De la Court 1702: 37).

He warns that should Holland return to stadholder-rule, it is likely that the prince would curb and obstruct Holland's greatness and power in order to increase his own.

De la Court explains that Holland's prosperity is largely due to its freedoms. He argues that freedom of the individual is necessary to promote profitable economic activities. It is only by consulting one's self-interest that citizens are able to make the right choices. Religious dogmatism frustrates this freedom and leads the church to interfere with politics in destructive ways (Blom 2001: 91). De la Court argues, like Van Velthuysen before him, that the clergy should not have any coercive power. Only civil magistrates should be able to command and compel the inhabitants of Holland to perform or omit outward actions, only the magistrates should be able to punish people for disobedience (De la Court 1702: 51). Religious persecution is very dangerous to the well being of individuals, the well-being of the state and to the well-being of the Reformed Church itself. Religious persecution harms individuals because it hardens their hearts so that they cannot receive God. Further, those that are persecuted are likely to be changed from sweet tempered to violent and will adopt the tyrannical maxim, "as he hath done to me, so will I do to him..." (De la Court 1702: 70). Second, religious intolerance harms the state because it causes people to flee and a large population is necessary for Holland's trading interests. Finally, freedom of religion is especially beneficial for the Reformed religion because there is no greater sign of a false religion than its attempt to coerce people. By allowing religious tolerance in Holland, more people will come to Holland from abroad and will see the truth of this religion, which "may and ought to depend upon its own evidence and veracity" (De la Court 1702: 53-55).

Next to freedom of religion, is the need to have freedom for people, including foreigners, to practice their trade of choice. Otherwise, people will not settle in Holland. Free trade is good for the common interest and does not harm others (De la Court 1702: 57-59). Republics flourish far more in art, manufacture, traffic, population and strength than monarchies. "For where there is liberty, there will be riches and people" (De la Court 1702: 6). De la Court champions "True Liberty" and a free republic, because it excels in the virtues of prudence, industry, truthfulness, peacefulness, education, and in the moderation of the passions (De la Court 1662a: 215).

#### IV. Spinoza as a Radical Cartesian

By looking at Spinoza's Radical Cartesian context, we come to see that Spinoza's legacy is not one of innovation so much as the systematization of political ideas already circulating in his time. He unifies the various Radical Cartesian ideas about philosophy and theology, self-preservation, freedom and the dangers of monarchy by giving them a metaphysical and epistemological foundation.

Like Van Velthuysen, Spinoza thinks that philosophy and theology have different purposes and methods, but Spinoza characterizes this difference in

epistemological terms. On his view, the purpose of philosophy is to find truth and wisdom whereas the purpose of theology is to instill piety and obedience (TTP 15: 184/20 /S 523). Faith is based on history and language and must be derived only from scripture and revelation. (TTP 14: 179/32 /S 519). These belong to the first kind of knowledge. Revelation occurs through images alone (TTP 1: 19/24 /S 397-398). That is to say, prophets perceive the revelations of God with the help of the imagination. Because of this, they may perceive things that go beyond the limits of the intellect:

For many more ideas can be constructed from words and images than merely from the principles and axioms on which our entire natural knowledge is based (TTP 1: 28/21 /S 403).

Further, the teachings of the prophets are in the form of parables, allegories, and are expressed in corporeal form because these are at the level of imagination (TTP 1: 28/26 /S 404) and this is the level of knowledge on which the multitude functions. Scripture does not explain things through their natural causes. Rather, it uses "methods and styles that best serve to excite men's wonder and consequently instill piety in the masses" (TTP 6: 87/34 /S 451).

Spinoza does not view religion as unimportant or trivial because it functions at the level of imagination. On the contrary, its importance is exactly that it speaks to the masses:

I wish to emphasise in express terms—though I have said it before—the importance and necessity of the role that I assign to Scripture, or revelation. For since we cannot perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a way to salvation, and since only revelation teaches us that this comes about by God's singular grace which we cannot attain by reason, it follows that Scripture has brought a very great comfort to mankind. For all men without exception are capable of obedience, while there are only a few—in proportion to the whole of humanity—who acquire a virtuous disposition under the guidance of reason alone. Thus, if we did not have this testimony of Scripture, the salvation of nearly all men would be in doubt (TTP 15: 188/19 /S 526).

In other words, if it were not for religion, very few people would act virtuously. While it is better to be virtuous for the sake of virtue alone, it is better to act virtuously out of obedience than not at all. Here we see Spinoza following the *philosophia novantiqua* approach of Van Velthuysen and De la Court. Passions, themselves, when under the guidance of rational teachers, can be useful to overcoming other more dangerous passions.

Since the masses are incapable of becoming virtuous through reason alone, religion is a very important means to the functioning of the state. Spinoza says that it is no wonder that the prophets, who considered the common advantage, commended humility, repentance, and reverence. When people are subject to these affects they can be guided far more easily than others. In a good state, where the sovereign rules and guides its people according to reason, the people ultimately live under the guidance of reason and can become free and enjoy the life of the blessed (E3 P54S: 250 /C 576).

Nevertheless, we must keep in mind the nature of religion so that we do not confuse it with philosophy. Spinoza warns against accepting everything in scripture as the universal and absolute teaching of God. We must keep in mind at all times that scripture is adapted to the understanding of the masses. Therefore we must take special care so as not to confuse the beliefs of the masses with divine doctrine (TTP 14: 173/4 /S 514). For natural divine laws are universal. They are among the common notions and within the realm of reason. They do not require belief in historical narratives. These laws do not enjoin ceremonial rites or actions whose explanation goes beyond human understanding (TTP 4: 62/5 /S 429).

Philosophy, on the other hand, is based on universally valid axioms and the study of nature. It functions at the level of reason and is concerned with causes and natural, divine laws. All causes are necessary and this necessity is nothing other than God's eternal nature. All things, humans included, are determined to act and exist in a definite way by God's essence:

...knowing that all things are determined and ordained by God and that the workings of Nature follow from God's essence, while the laws of Nature are God's eternal decrees and volitions, we must unreservedly conclude that we get to know God and God's will all the better as we gain better knowledge of natural phenomena and understand more clearly how they depend on their first cause. And how they operate in accordance with Nature's eternal laws (TTP 6: 85/25 /S 447).

It is the nature of reason, the second kind of knowledge, to regard things under this species of eternity (E2 P44C2: 126/C 481). Here Spinoza, like Van Velthuysen, makes philosophy a means to know God's will. They both raise the status of philosophy well beyond the handmaiden of theology (TTP Praef: 10/31 /S 392).

By naturalizing morality and making philosophy the authority on truth, both Van Velthuysen and Spinoza take away the special moral or intellectual authority of clergy. No one should be forced to believe that something is true because the clergy says so. Van Velthuysen appeals to Christian liberty and his theory of scriptural interpretation in order to argue that the fundamental principles of faith are assessable to all people. Similarly, Spinoza provides his own theory of scriptural interpretation and uses it as part of an argument against the special status of clergy. But unlike Van Velthuysen, his theory of scriptural interpretation depends on scripture alone, not philosophical theories and methods.

Spinoza uses his approach of interpretation to argue that all tenets of religious faith boil down to the following:

That there is a Supreme Being who loves justice and charity, whom all must obey in order to be saved, and must worship by practicing justice and charity to their neighbor (TTP 14: 177/12 /S 517).

In other words, the teaching of religion consists entirely in loving God above all and in loving one's neighbor as oneself (TTP 14: 174/22 /S 515; TTP 12: 151/11 /S 508-9). He concludes that the best means to human blessedness

(i.e., loving God intellectually or knowing the true nature of God) is to live well with other people and to act so as to help them further their chances of human blessedness. Living sociably with other humans is not only necessary to our survival, but to the ultimate form of self-preservation—love of and union with God. Even though Spinoza completely separates the purpose and methodologies of philosophy and theology, he holds that their moral teachings are in complete agreement (TTP 15: 186/25 /S 525).

Notice that Spinoza, like Velthuysen, considers morality to be within the domain of philosophy, not religion. Religion is about obedience, and blind obedience at that, not virtue:

For love of God is not obedience but a virtue necessarily present in a man who knows God aright, whereas obedience has regard to the will of him who commands, and not to necessity and truth. Now since we do not know the nature of God's will, while we are quite certain that everything that happens comes to pass from God's power alone, it is only from revelation that we can know whether God wishes to receive honour from men like some temporal ruler. Furthermore, we have shown that the divine commandments appear to us as commandments or ordinances only as long as we do not know their cause. Once this is known, they cease to be commandments, and we embrace them as eternal truths, not as commandments; that is, obedience forthwith passes into love, which arises from true knowledge by the same necessity as light arises from the sun. Therefore by the guidance of reason we can love God, but not obey him; for by virtue of reason we can neither accept divine commandments as divine while not knowing their cause, nor can we conceive God as a ruler enacting laws (TTP And 34: 264/12 /S 581).

Religion is, in a sense, about blind obedience because it does not know the causes of things. One does something *because* God commanded it. Such obedience is important to the welfare of the state (TTP 14: 179/9 /S 518-9), but it is not virtue. Philosophy, on the other hand, teaches why one should be virtuous: because it is in our best interest—not because of some eternal reward or punishment, on the contrary, because virtue is a reward in itself. Virtue *is* an increase in our power.

Just as Spinoza provides an epistemological bases for the Radical Cartesian distinction between philosophy and religion, he provides a metaphysical understanding of the Radical Cartesian doctrine of self-interest. According to Spinoza, all things, including humans, strive to persevere in their existence. In order to survive, humans must come together and form a society. Without mutual aid, people would not have the time and skill to support and preserve themselves to the greatest possible extent. (TTP 5: 73/13 /S 438). And so people come together by giving up the rights they have in the state of nature and agreeing to obey the laws of the state.

Spinoza claims that if people desired only what is prescribed by true reason, than society would not need any laws:

Nothing would be required to teach men true moral doctrine, and they would then act to their true advantage of their own accord, wholeheartedly and freely. But human nature is far differently constituted. All

men do, indeed, seek their own advantage, but by no means from the dictates of sound reason. For the most part the objectives they seek and judge to be beneficial are determined only by fleshy desire, and they are carried away by their emotions, which take no account of the future or of other considerations (TTP 5: 74/31 /S 438).

Therefore society needs government and coercion; it needs laws to control and restrain the people's lusts and urges (TTP 5: 74/31 /S 438). The laws must be set up so that, whether they will it or not, people act in the interests of the common welfare. Here we see De la Court's influence. The state must not depend on human virtue, but rather, cause human virtue through necessity. For Spinoza, no emotion can be checked except by an emotion stronger than and contrary to it. The state can keep people from harming one another only by making them fear some greater harm (Israel 2001: 238), such as punishment by the state.

It is impossible for a people to be guided as if by one mind, which is required in a state, unless the laws are prescribed by reason (TP 2/21: 283/S 688). When people are subject to the passions, they disagree in nature and are to that extent enemies (E4 P32 /C 561-562 and TP 2/14: 275/S 686). People agree in nature to the extent that they live according to reason. Therefore, they are most useful to each other *when* they seek their own advantage (E4 P35C2 /C 563). A person governed by reason wants nothing for herself that she does not desire for other people (E4 P18S /C 556). This is because the greatest good of those who seek virtue is to know God and this is a good that can be possessed equally by all people insofar as they are of the same nature (E4 P36D: /C 564). In order to be free from the passions, humans must unite together and form a state:

...in order to achieve a secure and good life, men had necessarily to unite in one body. They therefore arranged that the unrestricted right naturally possessed by each individual should be put into common ownership, and that this right should no longer be determined by the strength and appetite of the individual, but by the power and will of all together. Yet in this they would have failed, had appetite been their only guide (for by the laws of appetite all men are drawn in different directions), and so they had to bind themselves by the most stringent pledges to be guided in all matters only by the dictates of reason (which nobody ventures openly to oppose, lest he should appear to be without capacity to reason) and to keep appetite in check insofar as it tends to another's hurt, to do to no one what they would not want done to themselves, and to uphold another's right as they would their own (TTP 16: 191 /S 528).

In order to preserve oneself one must enter into a society governed by rational laws and obey those laws. That is to say, one must at least agree to live in accordance with reason. However, to preserve oneself in the ultimate way, that is to make the mind eternal, one must develop her own reason so that her mind understands God's nature through the common notions, and ultimately, is able to gain an intuitive understanding of God.

A state, like all individuals in Spinoza's philosophy, strives to preserve itself. Spinoza treats the state as one body and accordingly treats the state as he treats bodies in his metaphysics: A body remains the same body to the extent that it retains a certain form – that is, a certain ratio of motion and rest among its



parts. It is not enough that its parts continue to exist; they must maintain a certain relationship to each other. Every state must preserve its own form and cannot be changed without incurring the danger of utter ruin (TTP 18: 228/10 /S 557). So when Spinoza speaks of the preservation of the state, he does not simply mean that the state avoids dissolution:

The quarrels and rebellions that are often stirred up in a common-wealth never lead to the dissolution of the commonwealth by its citizens (as is often the case with other associations) but to a change in its form—that is, if their disputes cannot be settled while still preserving the structure of the commonwealth. Therefore, by the means required to preserve a state I understand those that are necessary to preserve the form of the state without any notable change (TP 6/2: 297/S 701).

Spinoza calls the constitution “the soul of the state”. As long as it is preserved, the state is preserved. He tells us that a constitution can only stay intact if it is upheld *both* by reason and by the sentiment of the people. If the laws depend solely on the support of reason, they are likely to be weak and easy to overthrow (TP 10/9: 357/S 751). In other words, the rule of reason is necessary to the preservation of the state, but not sufficient. Spinoza takes seriously the power of the will of the people. He notes that no matter how good the constitution or organization of a state, in times of crisis, people panic and will break laws if they perceive them as against their own interest.

The state itself is always in the state of nature. It cannot do wrong in the sense of civil law (TP 4/6: 294/S 698). We cannot speak of the state doing a wrong except in the sense that it causes its own downfall. In this sense, the state does wrong when it does something contrary to the dictates of reason, for it is when it acts from the dictates of reason that it is most fully in control of its own right (TP 4/4: 293/S 697). The sovereign, that is, as it were, the mind of the state, is bound to observe the terms of the contract for exactly the same reason as the person in the state of nature is—so that he not be his own enemy. The sovereign is bound not by civil law, but by the natural law of self-preservation. It must take care not to kill itself (TP 4/5: 294/S 698). This is the only reason that the sovereign is bound to rule according to reason and to consider the needs of the people.

The state, like all individuals, has the natural right of avenging itself and of making judgements concerning “good and evil”. It acquires the power to impose a common framework of proscribed conduct for its citizens, to make laws and to enforce them. Because the people are ruled by the passions, the state cannot effectively maintain its laws by force of reason alone. Reason alone will not compel the people to obey, after all, reason cannot completely restrain the passions. Instead, the state must use warnings, deterrents and penalties (Israel 2002: 238-239), i.e., it must use the citizens’ passions (fear of punishment) to control any individual passions that may be dangerous to the stability of the state. However, it is in the interest of the state to arrange the laws so that they yield the same actions in its citizens that a rational person would choose. Spinoza grants that the sovereign has the right to demand what it wishes of its citizens, it has the right to govern in the most oppressive way and to execute citizens for the

most trivial reasons, but in doing so they are not acting in accordance with reason and jeopardize their own power. After all, there is no government that is so mighty that the sovereign has unlimited power to do whatever it wishes:

Indeed, since they cannot so act without endangering the whole fabric of the state, we can even argue that they do not have the absolute power to do these and other such things, and consequently that they do not have the absolute right to do so. For we have demonstrated that the right of sovereigns is determined by their power (TTP 20: 240/5 /S 566-567).

Spinoza uses this reasoning to argue for religious and philosophical freedom. If the sovereign is to retain its full control and not be forced to surrender to agitators, then it must grant freedom of judgment to the people. It must govern so that the conflicting views that its citizens openly proclaim do not hinder them from living in a peaceful society (TTP 20: 245/21 /S 570). It is disastrous when governments do otherwise. When a state attempts to deprive its people of their freedom and the beliefs of dissenters are brought to trial...

The exemplary punishment inflicted on honourable men seems more like martyrdom, and serves not so much as to terrorise others as to anger them and move them to compassion, if not to revenge. Upright dealing and good faith are undermined, sycophants and traitors are encouraged, and opponents of freedom exult because their anger has won the day and they have converted the government to their creed, of which they are regarded as interpreters. As a result, they even boast that they have been chosen directly by God and that their decrees are divinely inspired, whereas those of the sovereign are merely human and should see that all this is directly opposed to the welfare of the state (TTP 20: 247/1 /S 571-572).

Spinoza thinks that any attempt to force people to speak only as prescribed by the sovereign, without regard to their different and opposing opinions, is sure to end in utter failure (TTP 20: 240/15 /S 567). People are of such a nature that they are most resentful when the beliefs they take to be true are treated as criminal and when that which motivates their pious conduct to God and man is treated as wickedness. When this happens they are emboldened to denounce the laws and to do anything to oppose the magistrate. They consider it not a disgrace, but an honor to stir up sedition and to do the most outrageous actions for this cause (TTP 20: 244/3 /S 569). According to Spinoza, the real disturbers of the peace are those who vainly seek to abolish freedom of judgement, which cannot be suppressed (TTP 20: 246/23 /S 571).

While the attempt to suppress freedom of judgement is most dangerous for the state, the encouragement of this freedom is most beneficial for both the state and its citizens. Freedom of judgement is necessary to foster the sciences and arts (which are of the utmost importance for the well being of the state) because free and unbiased judgment is necessary to succeed in these fields (TTP 20: 243/19 /S 569). Further, the state of blessedness requires most of all a judgement that is independent and free (TTP 7: 116/32 /S 470). If any individual citizens are to achieve intellectual love of God, it is necessary that they live in a good society, that is, one that allows freedom of judgement and expression.

For Spinoza, then, the ultimate purpose of the state is not to dominate or restrain men by fear and deprive them of their independence. On the contrary, it is to free every man from fear so that he may live a secure life as far as possible, that is, so that he may best preserve his own natural right to exist and act without harming himself or others:

It is not, I repeat, the purpose of the state to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their mental and physical faculties in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger, or deceit. Thus the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom (TTP 20: 241/3 /S 567).

Such freedom is the central notion of Spinoza's political and moral philosophy. As a Radical Cartesian, Spinoza sees freedom as moral freedom, which can only be enjoyed by rational beings. The state of nature, where man is ruled by his passions, is not a state of freedom, but bondage. Society is necessary for humans to break the bondage of the passions. It is only through obedience to its laws that humans can begin to free themselves from the passions (Kossman 2000: 81). By joining together with other people and forming societies, people not only gain more resources for combating starvation, the elements, etc., they also gain the tools necessary in order for reason, as well as the sciences and arts, to develop.

The freest individual is one who lives in a good state and obeys the commands of the sovereign most closely. For, in a good state, the highest law is the welfare of all. Those that obey such rational laws become free from the passions of the state of nature and are able to live their lives according to reason, thus allowing them to pursue the highest form of freedom: intellectual love of God. This highest form of freedom is human blessedness and results from knowing God's nature.

According to Spinoza, the worst state is a monarchy, for it is the least able to watch over the common welfare of all its people and bring about that which is to the benefit of the majority of its subjects (TP 7/3: 308/S 710). First of all, one man is not capable of sustaining such a heavy load. A pure monarchy is, in Spinoza's estimation, only an illusion. What is thought to be a pure monarchy is actually an aristocracy because the king requires many advisors and assistants to help him carry out his duties. This is an aristocracy of the worst kind because it is a concealed one (TP 6/5: 298/S 701-702). Second, the interests of the monarch differ from those of the people. Citizens pose a greater danger to the state than its enemies, for there are but a few good men. The king is therefore most afraid of his citizens and strives to his own safety, not consulting the interests of his subjects, but plotting against them, especially the wise and those who hold power through their wealth (TP 6/6: 299/S 702). Further, Spinoza argues, like De la Court, that kings fear their sons will do them harm so as to rule. Kings therefore raise their children so as not to be a threat to them (TP 6/7: 299/S 702). They do not teach them the best manners of statecraft or the means to best meet the people's needs. From all this it follows that the more absolute the transfer of the rights of the people to the king, the less he is in control and the more wretched

the life is his subjects (TP 6/8: 299/S 702). A further disadvantage of monarchy is the instability of its very nature. Since the king's will is civil law itself and the king is the commonwealth itself, the death of a king is, in a sense, the death of the state and civil order reverts to natural order (TP 7/25: 319/S 719).

Even though Spinoza discusses a mixed monarchy in the *Political Treatise* that is able to avoid these problems, he warns The Netherlands against taking up this form. That is to say, he warns of the dangers of bringing back the role of stadholder. First, a state cannot temporarily turn into a monarchy without endangering its republican constitution (TP 10/1: 353/S 748). Second, the monarchy that he proposes is only good when established by a free people. A people accustomed to a different form of government will not be able to get rid of the traditional foundations of their state, changing its entire structure, without the greatest danger of overthrowing the entire state (TP 7/26: 319/S 719).

Spinoza argues that democracy is the most natural form of government because it approaches most closely the freedom that Nature grants each person:

For in a democratic state nobody transfers his natural right to another so completely that thereafter he is not to be consulted; he transfers it to the majority of the entire community of which he is part. In this way all men remain equal, as they were before in the state of nature (TTP 16: 195/14 /S 531).

Democracy, then, is the form of government most in line with human nature and most able to meet the goal of the state and enable its people to meet their goal: self-preservation.

Studying Spinoza's Radical Cartesian context helps us understand that his politics are not merely a theoretical exercise, but part of a very practical political discussion. He sees the difficulties in seventeenth-century Holland as resulting from a poor constitution. In response to those who argue for the need of a stadholder and the waste of time inherent in the debates that took place during the stadholderless period Spinoza says:

Now if anyone retorts that the state of Holland has not long endured without a count or a deputy to take his place [this was the function of the stadholders] let me take this for a reply. The Dutch thought that to maintain their freedom it was enough for them to abandon their count and to cut off the head from the body of the state. [Phillip II of Spain.] The thought of reorganising it in a different form has never entered their minds; they have left all its limbs as they had previously been, so that Holland has remained a country without a count, like a headless body, and the state without a name. So it is not surprising that most of its subjects have not known where its sovereignty lay. And even if this were not so, those who in fact held the sovereignty were far too few to be capable of governing the people and suppressing their powerful opponents. As a result, the latter have often been able to plot against them with impunity and finally have succeeded in overthrowing them. Therefore the sudden overthrow [in 1672 with the murder of the De Witt brothers] of this same republic resulted not from waste of time in useless deliberations but from the defective constitution of that state and the fewness of its rulers (TP 9/14: 352/S 746).

Spinoza accepts the Radical Cartesian political position that the problems with the constitution of The Netherlands is that one, it is not absolute, and two, it is not representative of the majority of the people. This is precisely the radical nature of this political movement—it not only condemned monarchy but also criticized the government made up of the regent class during the stadholderless period.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Spinozas politische Schriften sind nicht nur eine theoretische Übung oder ein philosophischer Abschluss seines Systems. Sie sind Teil einer sehr praktischen politischen Diskussion im Holland des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts. Spinoza wurde beeinflusst durch und spielte eine Rolle in einer politischen Bewegung, die unter der Bezeichnung „Radikaler Cartesianismus“ bekannt ist. Hier wurden Ideen von Descartes und Hobbes zusammengeführt, um gegen die Wiedereinsetzung eines Statthalters zu argumentieren. Die Bewegung lieferte Argumente für religiöse und politische Freiheit und gegen die Monarchie auf der Basis eines fundamentalen Triebs zur Selbsterhaltung und eines besonderen Verständnisses der Leidenschaften.

Der Artikel liefert eine allgemeine Einführung in den Radikalen Cartesianismus indem der historische Kontext erklärt wird und zwei Stimmen aus dem Radikalen Cartesianismus diskutiert werden: Lambertus van Velthuysen und die Brüder De la Court. Im letzten Abschnitt wird Spinozas politische Philosophie als eine Systematisierung ihrer radikal-cartesischen Ideen diskutiert.

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