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SPINOZA AND THE EARLY ENGLISH DEISTS

BY ROSALIE L. COLIE

I. "Spinoza" in England at the Turn of the Century

The figure of Benedictus de Spinoza appeared to his contemporaries, as it has often since appeared to readers, remote and even obscure. Of all the great seventeenth-century philosophers, Spinoza's life and the sources of his thought are least known.¹ The reactions of his contemporaries to Spinoza's life and thought, his influence upon these and later thinkers are still "problems" to the intellectual historian. This essay is part of a larger effort to solve one such problem in Spinoza criticism: the delineation of the changing attitudes of British thinkers towards Spinoza from 1670, the year of publication of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, to the beginning of the twentieth century. Here we confine ourselves to an examination of the English Deists for about a half-century after 1670.

Spinoza's early critics depended upon biographies and commentaries written by men with particular axes to grind, usually axes sharpened against Spinoza's stiff neck. In itself, the fact that his contemporaries felt impelled to write so much about the man, whom most of them hated and feared, is telling. They simply had to explain him to themselves because he did not fit into any convenient pattern of atheism or of heroism.

A man reading the *Ethics* at the end of the seventeenth century or early in the eighteenth who wanted to know more about its author would find very odd sources of information at hand. From Spinoza's own few works very little might be learned about their author, compared with the many volumes published by Descartes and by Hobbes. After his death in 1677, only three volumes were in print, his commentary on Descartes' *Principles*, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Opera Posthuma*, seen through the press by his friends. Other works were attributed to Spinoza, notably the republican publications associated with Johan de Witt's circle; since that time, other genuine works have come to light, *The Short Treatise on God, Man, and Well-Being*, an optical study of the rainbow and of a work on the laws of chance, all unavailable to his contemporaries; only fragments of the last two are known.²

¹ The standard and best works on Spinoza are R. P. McKeon, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York, 1928) and H. A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (Cambridge, Mass., 1934). Leon Roth mentions Spinoza's connection with Toland's thought in his *Spinoza* (London, 1929), 200-202, as does Stanislaus von Dunin Borkowski, *Aus den Tagen Spinozas* (Münster, 1935), II, 181, but no one has as yet fully worked out the ways in which Spinoza's thought influenced the deists.

² Benedictus de Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt (Heidelberg, 1925), IV.

There were also a few commentaries on Spinoza. The *Opera Posthuma* opened with a long eulogy of the author and a brief account of his life, for some time the only favorable commentary on Spinoza in print. In his *Religion des Hollandois*³ a Swiss Lutheran minister and army officer, Colonel Jean-Baptiste Stoupe, singled out Spinoza for special disapproval: he denounced Spinoza for his impious ideas, the States of Holland for allowing such ideas to flourish in their territory, and Dutch divines for their pusillanimous failure to refute the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.⁴ In Germany, Christian Kortholt, a prolific theological writer, formulated⁵ the official view of deism's heretical, fearful (and English) descent, from Lord Herbert of Cherbury through Hobbes to Spinoza. Most important of all the sources for Spinoza's life was the account given by Pierre Bayle in his *Dictionary*, an essay that grew with every edition, decidedly not to Spinoza's advantage. Bayle's article, often excerpted and translated by enthusiastic anti-Spinozists, was the chief store of information from which not only French and Dutch but also English readers gladly borrowed in their efforts to refute the arch-materialist-mechanist-atheist Spinoza. Only on one point, and that grudgingly, did Bayle yield at all to Spinoza's integrity: he admitted that, even though Spinoza's doctrine was pernicious and vicious, his life was by no standard decomposed, but rather decently and nobly carried on.⁶

The same emphasis, in Bayle's case arising from a deep concern with public morality, was still more evident in the single published independent biography of Spinoza that praised him at all positively.⁷

³ [Jean Baptists Stoupe], *La Religion des Hollandois . . . par un Officier de l'Armée du Roy* (Cologne, 1673); translated into English as *The Religion of the Dutch . . . Out of the French* (London, 1680).

⁴ Stoupe, *The Religion of the Dutch*, 29-30.

⁵ Kortholt, *De Tribus Impostoribus Magnis* (Cologne, 1680). A second and very scarce edition was published in Hamburg by the same publisher, J. Reumann, edited with additional commentary by the author's son. Christian the younger carried on his father's work by writing his academic dissertation at Leipzig in refutation of the English deists Matthew Tindal and Anthony Collins: *De M. Tindalio disserit . . . C. Kortholtus* (Leipzig, 1734).

⁶ Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* went into many editions from 1697 to 1740 and was several times translated or partially translated into English, under various titles: *An Historical and Critical Dictionary* (London, 1710, 4 vols.); *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, tr. Pierre des Maiseaux (London, 1734-38, 5 vols.); *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, tr. J. B. Bernard, Thomas Birch et al. (London, 1734-41 10 vols.). See also A. van der Linde, *Benedictus Spinoza. Bibliographie* ('s Gravenhage, 1871), 23-4.

⁷ One life of Spinoza, written shortly after his death, treated him favorably, but it remained unpublished during the period here under discussion. It was written by the French libertine Jean Maximilien Lucas; his *The Oldest Biography of*

*The Life of B. de Spinoza*⁸ was written in French by a Lutheran minister in The Hague, Jean (or Johannes) Colerus, who happened for a time to have occupied the very rooms vacated by Spinoza at his death. Strongly opposed to Spinoza's doctrine as he was, Colerus showed nonetheless a real admiration for the man and a certain sympathy for his difficult position in society. The situation is a curious one: as a minister Colerus could not condone the specific teachings of either the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* or the *Opera Post-huma*,⁹ yet the warmth of his tone in speaking of Spinoza's actual behavior betrays his genuine interest in the man and suggests as well that Spinoza's old landlord and landlady presented their lodger's character in such a way as to catch Colerus' imagination. Under his pen, indeed, Spinoza's virtues appear almost conventionally hagiographical, his behavior singular and rare. He had, Colerus tells, the good protestant virtues of frugality, sobriety, and silence; he was neat, spare, and formal in his appearance and dress;¹⁰ "he was besides very courteous and obliging to those" about him. He had great personal integrity, manifest in his refusal first of a pension offered by the Jews, then of a professorship at Heidelberg.¹¹ He had also personal courage and calm, as his cool behavior showed when a fanatic attacked him with a knife. This courage was no momentary thing, but a part of his character: when Spinoza returned to The Hague from Utrecht in 1672, it was known that he had met there with Condé and his house was soon surrounded by a threatening city mob. Though mobs in The Hague were not to be taken lightly after the lynching of the De Witts, Spinoza thus comforted his fearful landlord:

*Fear nothing, said he to him, upon my account, I can easily justify my self; There are People enough, and even some of the most considerable Persons of the State, who know very well what put me upon that Journey. But however, as soon as the Mob make the least noise at your Door, I'll go and meet 'em, tho' they were to treat me, as they treated poor Messieurs de Wit. I am a good Republican, and I always aimed at the Glory and Welfare of the State.*¹²

Spinoza, ed. and tr. A[braham] Wolf (London, 1927), Introduction, has a full discussion of the conditions surrounding the writing of the book and the reasons why it remained so long unpublished.

⁸ Jean Colerus, *La Vie de B. de Spinoza* (The Hague, 1706); translated into English as *The Life of Benedict de Spinoza Written by John Colerus* (London, 1706).

⁹ Jean Colerus, *La Vérité de la Résurrection de Jésus Christ, Défendue Contre B. de Spinoza* (The Hague, 1706), *passim*; *Life*, 61-4.

¹⁰ Colerus, *Life*, 37-45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 9, 45-50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9-10, 48-9.

Spinoza showed certain other virtues too, surprising in view of his reputation for atheism. His enemies would surely have doubted that it was possible for him to advocate so religious a thing, but Colerus reports: "He put the Children in mind of going to Church, and taught them to be obedient and dutiful to their Parents"¹³—which Richard Baxter, for instance, specifically denied.¹⁴ Most moving of all the events in his book was Colerus' account of Spinoza's death. The death of a great man has always had the power to move, and in Colerus' hands Spinoza's death was exemplary. He died showing "in all his sufferings, a truly *Stoical* constancy," honored by all his friends and the members of his household. So simple and dignified were the goods disposed of by his will that from them one could read, in Colerus' words, "the Inventory of a true Philosopher."¹⁵

If Colerus' life had been the only comment on Spinoza, the philosopher might have fared better at the hands of contemporary readers than he did. But in spite of his later success in eighteenth-century France, for example, and in nineteenth-century Germany, in his own time Spinoza was little honored, particularly in his own country.¹⁶ To the seventeenth-century mind, the facts of Spinoza's life, however interpreted, were few, inescapable, and damning. He was a Jew—which was bad enough in that reforming century, but he was not even a good Jew, having been excommunicated by his congregation.¹⁷ Thereafter he remained quite unconnected with any Christian community, though he had associations with several; and he died without benefit of clergy and without professing any recognizable seventeenth-century God. It is not surprising that his life became, almost too conveniently, the model of infidelity and atheism for men who needed a whipping-boy in the philosophical and theological debates at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth.

Some of the whippers are surprising, however. The first English-

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴ Richard Baxter, *The Second Part of the Nonconformist's Plea for Peace* (London, 1680), 2, 10-11.

¹⁵ Colerus, *Life*, 87, 91.

¹⁶ For Dutch reactions to Spinoza, see K. O. Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn Kring* ('s Gravenhage, 1890) and Madeleine Francès, *Spinoza dans le Pays Néerlandais* (Paris, 1937). In her definitive *Nederlandse Cartesianisme*, C.-L. Thyssen Schoute has a good deal to say about developing Dutch reaction to Spinoza's thought; she plans to continue her discussion of Spinoza in a second volume. For France, see the excellent study by Paul Vernière, *Spinoza et la Pensée Française avant la Révolution* (Paris, 1954, 2 vols.). I have touched upon some aspects of the anti-Spinozan reaction in England in my *Light and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1957), Chapters V and VI.

¹⁷ Some of Colerus' best pages give the terrible formula of anathema. *Life*, 10-30.

men to have read Spinoza carefully, the Cambridge Platonists, read him with great displeasure and valiantly set to work to refute his theology and his metaphysics.¹⁸ On religious grounds, Henry More and Ralph Cudworth could not accept the *Tractatus*, with its attack on miracles, prophecy, Old Testament historicity, and political clericalism: both tried their hand at Spinozan criticism. Though he had written his metaphysical treatise by the time he read the *Ethics*, Henry More nonetheless provided another refutation of the impious confounding of nature with God, of substance with Spirit.¹⁹ Cudworth referred now and again to the "Theological Politician" in the great mass of his *True Intellectual System of the Universe*,²⁰ and philosophers of like mind outside Cambridge also turned their attention to the Spinozan danger: Leibniz, the Lady Conway, Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, Richard Burthogge, the nonconformists Richard Baxter and John Howe all attacked from the ramparts of their Christian humanist stronghold.²¹ More's correspondent Robert Boyle (who through his friend Oldenburgh had considerable contact with Spinoza's ideas) had something to say about Spinoza's outrageous opinions, religious, metaphysical, and physical; later on the Boyle Lecturers echoed, often in exceedingly debased form, the arguments against Spinoza laid down earlier by Henry More.²² The roster of English opponents to Spinoza is a distinguished one and makes plainer than paragraphs of explanation the poor position Spinoza held in orthodox English thought. Of the Boyle Lecturers who opposed him, many held important office: Richard Bentley, the great scholar and Rector of the Royal Chapel of St. James; John Williams and Francis Gastrell, ultimately Bishops; John Harris, the popular scientist; Samuel Clarke, the pride of English philosophy and another Rector of St. James'; Brampton Gurdon, Archdeacon of Canterbury. Other notable figures of seventeenth-century thought drew against Spinoza too: Nehemiah

¹⁸ See T. J. de Boer, "Spinoza in Engeland," *Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*, X (1916); *Light and Enlightenment*, Chapters V and VI.

¹⁹ Henry More, *Opera Omnia* (London, 1679).

²⁰ Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678).

²¹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Réfutation inédite de Spinoza*, ed. A. Foucher de Careil (Paris, 1854); [Anne Conway], *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, tr. J. C. (London, 1692); [Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont], *A Cabbalistic Dialogue* (London, 1682); Richard Burthogge, *Essay on Reason* (London, 1694); *Causa Dei* (London, 1675); Richard Baxter, *The Second Part of the Nonconformist's Plea for Peace; Catholick Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable* (London, 1675); John Howe, *The Living Temple, Part II* (London, 1702).

²² See particularly, Robert Boyle, *A Free Inquiry Into the Vulgarly Receiv'd Notion of Nature* (London, 1685-6).

Grew in his *Cosmologia Sacra*; Edward Stillingfleet in many works; William Stephens, William Carroll, Stephen Nye, George Hickes;²³ George Berkeley did Spinoza the honor at least of taking him seriously.²⁴ Richard Blackmore celebrated Spinoza, together with Vanini and Hobbes, in his conservative physico-theology *The Creation*:

Spinoza next, to hide his black design
And to his side th' unwary to incline,
For Heaven his ensigns treacherous displays;
Declares for God, while he that God betrays;
For whom he's pleased such evidence to bring,
As saves the name, while it subverts the thing.²⁵

In *The Creation* Blackmore does not go on to derive the deists' thought from Vanini, Hobbes, and Spinoza, but Stephens, Nye, and Hickes all did, as did a greater man, Jonathan Swift. Writing of Tindal's *Rights of the Christian Church Examined*, Swift said: "And truly, when I compare the former enemies to Christianity, such as Socinus, Hobbes, and Spinoza, with such of their successors, as Toland, Asgil, Coward, Gildon, this author of the 'Rights' and some others; the church appeareth to me like the old sick lion in the fable, who, after having his person outraged by the bull, the elephant, the horse, and the bear, took nothing so much to heart, as to find himself at last insulted by the spurn of an ass."²⁶ A century and a half later, Leslie Stephen, a scholar who had undoubtedly read more deists' works than even the deists themselves, also attributed to Spinoza a major influ-

²³ The Boyle Lectures may be found in *A Defence of Natural and Revealed Religion: Being a Collection of Sermons Preached at the Lecture Founded by the Honorable Robert Boyle, esq. (From the Year 1691 to the Year 1732)*, [ed. Sampson Letsome and John Nicholl] (London, 1739, 3 vols.). See also Nehemiah Grew, *Cosmologia Sacra: Or a Discourse of the Universe As it is the Creature and Kingdom of God* (London, 1700); Edward Stillingfleet, *Letter to a Deist and Origines Sacrae*, in *Works* (London, 1709), II, 117-146; [William Stephen], *An Account of Growth of Deism in England* (London: reprinted 1709); [William Carroll], *Spinoza Reviv'd* (London, 1704); Stephen Nye, *A Discourse Concerning Natural and Revealed Religion* (London, 1696); George Hickes, Preface to *Spinoza Reviv'd*, 1704.

²⁴ George Berkeley, *Alciphron: Or, the Minute Philosopher*, in *Works*, III, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, 1948-57); *Berkeley's Commonplace Book*, ed. G. A. Johnston (London, 1930), 836, 839, 856.

²⁵ Sir Richard Blackmore, *Creation* (London, 1712); 154-6; cf. xlv: "Will they [the deists] confide in Mr. *Hobbs*? Has that Philosopher said any thing new? Does he bring any stronger forces into the Field, than the *Epicureans* did before him? Will they derive their Certainty from *Spinos*a? Can such an obscure, perplex, unintelligible Author create such Certainty, as leaves no Doubt or Distrust? If he is indeed to be misunderstood, what does he alledg more than the ancient Fatalists have done, that should amount to Demonstration?"

²⁶ Jonathan Swift, *Remarks upon a Book Intituled "The Rights of the Christian Church," The Prose Works*, ed. Temple Scott, III (London, 1909), 87.

ence upon the deist program so critical in the development of the English Enlightenment: "it is enough to remark that the whole essence of the deist position may be found in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. A few of the philosopher's pages have expanded into volumes and libraries of discussions; but the germs of the whole discussion are present."²⁷ It becomes important, then, to understand the elements of Spinoza's particular thought which made his work so attractive to the early deists.

II. Spinoza and Deist Politics

Deism itself is not easy to delineate. Evidently a man could be a deist and go to church, even be an ordained minister of the Church of England, like Samuel Clarke; he could be a deist and the leader of a conservative government, like Bolingbroke; he could be a deist, an aristocrat, a radical, and a worldly philosopher, like Shaftesbury; he could be a deist and oppose all Tory politics and most Whig policies, like Tindal; he could be a deist, a radical in political theory and a conventional Whig in politics, like Toland; he could be a deist and devote himself to pure, or relatively pure, philosophical problems, like Collins. The one thing a man could not do, at the end of the seventeenth-century, was to be a deist and keep silent.

In a classic article,²⁸ Professor Lovejoy has enumerated the basic tenets of deism: uniformitarianism in human nature and in religion; rational individualism; appeal to a *consensus gentium*; cosmopolitanism; antipathy to enthusiasm and originality; a negative theory of history based on a uniform standard. The title of this article, "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," reveals its aim—the author describes deism at its height, an archetypal deism, to which there were, particularly in its early days, exceptions in whole or in part. The parallel of deism to classicism is valid in the sense that both programs were reactions against the prevailing disorder of the Augustan Age in England: on close examination, that reasonable, rationalist, classical period from 1660 to 1740 appears to be as complex, irrational, eccentric, and inconsistent as many less apparently "organized" periods of history, with religious, political, economic, and social problems of a very disturbing nature.

In its early days, deism was far more chaotic than Mr. Lovejoy's archetype and dealt less with general laws of thought and of society than with what Locke called "the reasonableness of Christianity," or with the rational proofs of a deity believed to be supremely ra-

²⁷ Sir Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1876), I, 33.

²⁸ A. O. Lovejoy, "The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore, 1948), 79–88.

tional. The deists' rationalism led them not to a bland superiority to immediate events and issues but to a thorough, if not radical, determination to be a part of the political mechanism designed to bring about the ideal state of mankind that they postulated. The fact that their religio-philosophical and radical political ideas so often coincided simply filled the orthodox with greater determination to oppose them and, if possible, by opposing to end them.

Charles Blount and Charles Gildon, the earliest noticeable and identifiable English deists, were both politically active, regularly producing pamphlets in defense of a republican society and politics. They were followed by two extremely public Whigs, Matthew Tindal and John Toland, who agitated more professionally for the most radical policies the Whig party could bear. In their political activity, the deists of the late seventeenth-century were the carriers into eighteenth-century political thought of the theories of the Commonwealth,²⁹ borne in curious admixture with various radical notions from continental sources.

Their politics had its basis in a rationalist program that made them to a man reconsider the tenets of orthodox religion; their rationalist and "scientific"³⁰ habits of thought led them to fierce attacks upon scripture, upon revelation, upon prophecy and miracle as proper foundations for belief in God. Naturally enough, they were in search for some support for their ideas, something to give weight to their assaults upon what was for other men the single sufficient authority of Scripture, by its very existence the witness to its own truth. The deists had to take great care: they could not rely on such figures as Machiavelli, Vanini, or Hobbes³¹ without laying themselves open

²⁹ For the rôle in which Milton was cast, for example, by the early deist and Whig writers (many of whom were identical), see George Sensabaugh, *That Grand Whig Milton* (Stanford and London, 1952), Chapters IV and V. I am greatly indebted to Professor Caroline Robbins of Bryn Mawr, who has just completed a book on English, Scottish, Irish, and American radicals of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

³⁰ Blount, Collins, and Tindal were certainly much interested in the development of the natural sciences and in a method of limited empiricism; for instance, from the auction-catalogue of Anthony Collins' Library (*Bibliotheca Antonij Collins . . . which will begin to be Sold on the 18th Day of January 1737*), we can read his active interest in the specific preoccupations of modern science. None of these men, however, was even an amateur practitioner of science, as philosophers of the previous generation had usually been (More, Cudworth, Locke); they simply directed the formulations of natural science toward their own philosophical ends.

³¹ We may assume that the deists had read Hobbes, as most educated men had in the late seventeenth century. Occasionally Hobbes' attacks on miracle and prophecy were cited, as in Blount's *Miracles, No Violations of the Laws of Nature* (see below, Part III); but on the whole the early deists did not rely upon Hobbes as authority for their views. There are several reasons for this: first, whatever in fact his unorthodox religious beliefs may have been, Hobbes was consistently read

to the charge of atheism they labored so to avoid. Their authorities had to be men asserting their thesis, that religion is to be read more convincingly from reasonable apprehension of the works of God than from irrational, eccentric, or arbitrary revelation, whether personal or scriptural. Lord Herbert of Cherbury, whose views were measured and temperate; Locke, who distinguished himself from the deists' position, although many elements in his philosophy lent the deists authority and support;³² and Spinoza, who did not wrangle with his enemies, were therefore all sympathetic sources of authority for the early deists, Locke and Spinoza helpful in forming their politics as well as their religion. They were perfectly conventional men of their times in that, like Locke and Spinoza, they held that a viable politics had to rest upon a correct understanding of man's relation to God and of God's intentions for the world He had created.

Religion was, of course, a basis for practical politics as well as for political theory. The material dealing with King William's invasion and succession—later called the Glorious Revolution—the pamphlets, sermons, and studies published for or against the change in the sovereign, all turned on the question of religion. Since the political behavior of 1688 and 1689 was, though cast in religious terms, essentially radical, it is not surprising that the year 1689 saw published

and referred to by his contemporaries as an atheist; and the deists were concerned constantly to assert their own conspicuous, if anticlerical, theism. Though Spinoza too often suffered the charge of atheism, his theism lay open and extremely plain to sympathetic readers, whereas Hobbes's did not. Second, the early deists were political radicals and, whatever their sympathy for Hobbes' rationalism, they could not accept his conservative and absolutistic theory of the state and, therefore, tended to call very little upon his rationalist resources. Finally, as I suggest below (in Part III), the pessimism of Hobbes's view of human nature ran directly counter to the optimism and pride with which essentially Blount, Collins, Tindal, and Toland viewed themselves and their fellow human beings.

³² I hope to go more fully into Locke's reading of Spinoza in another place: suffice it to say here that though Locke certainly knew Spinoza's work (Bodleian MS Locke, f. 27, 5, 716; PRO, Shaftesbury Papers, 30/24/47, no. 30) and was roundly attacked by Stillingfleet, Carroll, Witty and occasional minor critics for his "Spinozism," he was by no means Spinozan in metaphysics, ethics or politics. For his correspondence with Phillippus van Limborch, see *Some Familiar Letters between Mr. Locke and Several of his Friends* (London, 1708), 427-460, 462-3. For his critics, see [William Carroll] *Remarks upon Mr. Clarke's Sermons, Preached at St. Paul's Against Hobbes, Spinoza, and Other Atheists* (London 1705), title page and 3, 6, 8-9, 10, 16, 24, 25; *A Dissertation upon the Tenth Chapter of the Fourth Book of Mr. Locke's Essay* (London, 1706), *passim*; *Spinoza Reviv'd: Or, A Treatise, Proving . . . the Rights of the Christian Church . . . To be the Same with Spinoza's Rights of the Christian Clergy* (London, 1704); *Spinoza Reviv'd. Part the Second, or a Letter to Monsieur Le Clerc* (London, 1711); Edward Stillingfleet, *Works* (London, 1709-10), III, 542-550; John Witty, *The First Principles of Modern Deism Confuted* (London, 1707), 11.

some of the most important political works of the century. The Term Catalogues for 1689 show that in Easter Term Buchanan's *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* was translated into English and published, as was the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*; in Michaelmas Term an anonymous book called *Two Treatises of Government* appeared.³³ What the Term Catalogues do not show is that still another book came out, apparently outside of official approval, *A Treatise Partly Theological, And Partly Political, Containing some few Discourses*—the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in its first full English translation.³⁴ Thus along with the classical continental texts on opposition to tyranny and the English book for centuries read as the official apology for King William's revolution, Spinoza's little book was introduced to an English public.

The translator was careful to remain anonymous, as was the printer, who was equally careful not to register his book for publication; their interest in its appearance, however, is quite clear. The title continues in a republican way: *To Prove that the Liberty of Philosophizing (That is Making Use of Natural Reason) may be allow'd without any prejudice to Piety, or to the Peace of any Commonwealth: And that the Loss of Public Peace and Religion it self must necessarily follow, where such a Liberty of Reasoning is taken away.* In the preface to the reader, the translator made plain his own Spinozan independence of public opinion; his truculence underscored his sense of difficult achievement:

The Gentleman that turn'd the following Treatise written Originally in Latin into English, did it at spare Hours, only to divert and please himself, and therefore cares not who is displeas'd with his having done it. There are certainly some, who will pass with severe Censure upon this Treatise; but that will not at all concern the Translator, who is not bound to make good the Authors Opinions, being only oblig'd to justify, that the version hath truly and faithfully (tho' not every where Word for Word) render'd the Author's Sense and Meaning.

"The Crape Gown and the Long Robe" might criticize as they chose; the translator cared no whit for them, since no "part of his Reputation depended upon the Judgment of Fools or Knaves." He asked no more of any reader than that "he will deliberately read the Book twice over, before he condemn or commend it": Spinoza himself had asked less.

The life and political opinions of Spinoza, so independent and disinterested, undoubtedly had considerable appeal to deist radicals, since they too had to cultivate a certain detachment from conventional society and politics. All readers knew that Spinoza had had

³³ *The Term Catalogues, 1688-1689 A.D.*, ed. E. Arber (London, 1903-6); II, 257, 282.

³⁴ (London, Printed in the Year 1689).

personal experience with two strongly theocratic traditions, the minority Judaism of Amsterdam in which he was brought up and the Calvinist theocracy of the United Provinces as a whole; his careful historicist demolition of the traditions of Old Testament theocracy was understood to have arisen from this experience. He presented his arguments, however, not as the opposition to specific political behavior but as philosophical truths before all worlds. His "liberty" was not, for instance, a national liberty such as Englishmen were accustomed to glorify, but a universally applicable liberty. The *Tractatus* asserted general laws of society, certainly, but from time to time drew its illustrations from practical politics and recent history. Spinoza's brief comments on contemporary English history show his astonishing objectivity and clarity in analyzing public events:

Hence it comes to pass, that people may indeed change, but never destroy a Tyrant, or turn ancient Monarchical Government into any other form. Of this the People of a Kingdom not far from us, having given the World a fatal Example, who under colour and form of Law and Justice, took away their King's Life; and when he was gone, they could do no less than change the form of Government; but after much Blood spilt, it came to this pass at last, that another person was set up, not by the Name of *King* . . . who could not possibly stand, unless he destroyed the Royal Line, and all that were suspected to be the last King's Friends . . . but the Nation at last finding they had done nothing for the publick good, by putting to Death their Lawful King, and by changing he Government, had brought themselves into a Condition worse than they were in before, they resolved to return from whence they had strayed; nor were they quiet until they saw all things restor'd to their former state.³⁵

In the period after the 1688 Revolution, Spinoza's sharply reasoned argument for toleration supported Englishmen like Blount, Gildon, and Toland, who sought precedents for their views wherever they could find any, whether among the theorists of the Commonwealth or of the continent. Spinoza, so thoroughly secular, criticized the theological schisms provoked whenever liberty of thought was restricted by law, and condemned the brutality involved in administering such legislation.³⁶ For him, indeed, liberty of thought was inseparable from virtue and education:

Such is mens Nature, that nothing is a greater Vexation to them, than to see those Opinions, which they verily believe to be true, condemn'd, and themselves accounted wicked and sinful, for doing that which they think is their Duty, both towards God and Man. This makes them detest the Laws, and count any seditious Attempts against the Magistrate lawful and just. In Laws against Opinions, wicked men are seldom concern'd; such Laws are commonly made, not to restrain bad, but to provoke good men . . . Such

³⁵ *A Treatise Partly Theological, And Partly Political*, 409–10. ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 438–9.

Laws are likewise useless.³⁷

Liberty of thought was not simply a privilege of scholars, it was also basic to a nation growing in power, "very necessary to the Advancement of Arts and Sciences, in which the greatest proficiency is made by those men who have their Judgments free from preoccupation." Practical politics was important in human life, both as a reflection of eternal truth and as a means to human freedom:

men are so to be govern'd, that tho' they be of different and contrary Opinions, they may live together in peace and amity. Without doubt this way of Governing is best, and subject to least Inconvenience, seeing it is most agreeable to Mens Nature. For in a Democratical Government (which comes nearest to the State of Nature) all covenant to act, but not to reason and judge by common Consent; my meaning is, because all men cannot think the same things, they have agreed to make that a binding Law which had most Voices, reserving still a Power of repealing that Law, when they thought fit.³⁸

The most successful example of this "Democratical Government," cited by Englishmen in search of a paradigm for liberty and toleration, was the free city of Amsterdam;³⁹ and Spinoza cited it as well as Henry Robinson, John Lilburne, and Roger Williams. To his enemies, Spinoza appeared to open the way to no religion at all; to his admirers, he gave the classic disinterested statement of the practical and philosophical bases of religious and political toleration.

In practical politics, no successful doctrine of toleration had at that time been published. The party that came nearest to the Spinozan program was the anti-Orangist party of Johan de Witt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland so horribly killed in the rising of 1672. De Witt's policies had been far less absolute than Spinoza's hypotheses for liberty, far more involved in the mundane empirical details of law and economics; but in the eyes of his enemies, De Witt's policies were sufficiently "Spinozan" to enable them, after his death, to slander his memory by making him an associate of the philosopher.

The question of Spinoza's dealings with De Witt is less important than the cultural fact that his "atheistical" politics could be interpreted by the enemies of republicanism as identical with Wittian politics.⁴⁰ Though nothing in modern scholarship confirms a personal connection between the two men, De Witt's part in a famous text in political economy, preaching some of the same ends as the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, has been established. That book, *The True Interest of Holland*, was chiefly the work of a Wittian economist, Pieter de la Court, who wrote under many variations of his own name and

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 445.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 448.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 448-9.

⁴⁰ Meinsma, 357-9; Francès, 319-35.

initials. So like Spinoza's views were those of the De Witt-de la Court circle that another book, *De Jure Ecclesiasticorum*, also from that circle, was often attributed because of its anti-clericalism to Spinoza himself.⁴¹

Spinoza's name came up in connection with the English version of the *De Jure*. In 1706 Matthew Tindal, an ardent anti-clerical radical and deist, published an adaptation of the *De Jure* entitled *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*,⁴² which in its turn promptly called forth a long series of refutations, many of which associated *The Rights* with Spinoza's *Tractatus*. One such critic, William Carroll, entitled his attack *Spinoza Reviv'd*; still others took Tindal's reliance upon Spinoza quite for granted, as did Abel Evans in his poem *The Apparition* (London, 1710):

Spinoza Smiles, and cries—The *Work* is done,
L—T [Tindal] shall Finish; (*Satan's Darling Son*):
L—T shall Finish, what *Spinoza* first Begun.
Hobbes, Milton, Blount, Vanini with him join;
All equally Admire the *Vast Design*.

Matthew Tindal is a fine example of early deism: his book, *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, published in 1730, was a major argument for the eternal reasonableness of a religion made manifest in the very existence of the physical world, and a reasoned denial of the validity of particular revelation. He was passionately radical in politics and passionately anti-clerical in religion and in politics. His attacks upon the Church of Rome and the High-Flying Tories within the Church of England would have been enough to make him seem "Spinozan" in the general sense in which that epithet was used, but he provided further specifically Spinozan grounds for his critics' objections. In a series of publications, written from 1694 to 1706, he followed the old Arminian, or new Spinozan and Lockean, view that the magistrate had power to legislate in religious matters, though no power to compel conformity—an argument directed against the strict demands of the Test Act. His reasoning reiterated his belief in the futility of persecution for belief and stressed with anti-clerical fervor

⁴¹ The book in question was *Lucii Antistii Constantis De Jure Ecclesiasticorum* (Alethopolis [Amsterdam], 1665). Hickee considered it to be by Spinoza in the Preface to Carroll's first *Spinoza Reviv'd* of 1704; Le Clerc defended himself from association with the "Atheistical Spinoza," the presumed author of the *De Jure*, in his *Bibliothèque Choisie* (tr. into English as *The Rights of the Christian Church Adjusted*, London, 1711).

⁴² [Matthew Tindal], *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted, Against the Romish, and all other Priests who claimed an Independent Power over it* (London, 1706, 2nd ed., corrected).

the necessary reliance upon a tolerant magistrate.⁴³ Hickes, Carroll, and Le Clerc all assumed that Tindal's arguments derived from the pseudo-Spinoza of *De Jure*—and they did not admire Tindal the more for his quotation from Toland's *Amyntor*, the life of the great republican of the Commonwealth, John Milton.⁴⁴ Like Milton, Locke, and Toland, Tindal's toleration was a limited one: he excluded the atheist from the natural liberties accorded all other men on the grounds that since the principles of atheism destroy conscience, atheists could not plead for toleration on the basis of their conscientious belief.⁴⁵

Tindal persisted in his views until his death in 1733, always maintaining a consistent radicalism in politics, even in the face of an increasingly conservative official Whiggery, and a consistently radical deism in his religious views. His more flamboyant contemporary, John Toland, whose varied intellectual contribution deserves more careful attention than it has hitherto attracted,⁴⁶ was an even more effective propagandist for deism. Toland's social origins suggest a potentially great radicalism: he was born in Ireland, and, as if this were by itself insufficient, he was said by his enemies to have been the son of a priest.⁴⁷ He admitted his Irish birth, but denied being the son of a priest. Brought up as a Roman Catholic, he underwent various stages of conversion to an ultimate radical Protestantism. He studied officially neither at Oxford nor at Cambridge, but at Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Leiden, patching together an extremely wide range of interests into a philosophy of considerable span. With the publication of his *Christianity Not Mysterious* in 1696 and with its burning ordered shortly after, by the Middlesex Grand Jury, Toland's reputation as a radical thinker was made.⁴⁸ For a time his notoriety was sufficient to dislodge him from the most seminal intellectual groups of London and Dublin society, but he did not come to grief. After a short period filled with energetic writing, he was able to become one

⁴³ [Matthew Tindal], *An Essay Concerning Obedience to the Supreme Powers* (London, 1694); *An Essay Concerning the Power of the Magistrate and the Rights of Mankind in Matters of Religion* (London, 1697).

⁴⁴ Tindal, *Rights of the Christian Church*, lxxi.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

⁴⁶ Though most work on Toland has been lamentably superficial, there is a recent series of valuable articles on his intellectual position by F. H. Heinemann: "Prolegomena to a Toland Bibliography," *N&Q*, CLXXV (1943), 182–6; "John Toland and the Age of Enlightenment," *RES*, XX (1944), 125–46; "Toland and Leibniz," *The Philosophical Review* (1945), 437–57. Miss Frances Yates of the Warburg Institute is at work on a study of the relation of Toland's thought to that of Bruno.

⁴⁷ Pierre des Maiseaux, "Some Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. John Toland," prefixed to Toland's *Miscellaneous Works* (London, 1747), I.

⁴⁸ Maurice Cranston, *John Locke, A Biography* (London, 1957), 413n.

of the most powerful of the regular Whig pamphleteers working for William III; and still later he was entrusted with a diplomatic journey to Prussia, where he was lucky in making the acquaintance of Leibniz. During his long life he too remained a fiery spokesman for Protestantism and for such Commonwealth policies as could be carried over into eighteenth-century political life. He wrote of himself:

Ever since I knew what it was to be a Member of Civil Society, or to concern my self about the Nature of Government, I have bin wholly devoted to the self-evident Principle of *Liberty*, and a profest Enemy to *Slavery* and *arbitrary Power*. I have always bin, now am, and ever shall be persuaded that all Sorts of Magistrats are made for and by the People, and not the People for or by the Magistrats: that the Power of all Governors is originally conferr'd by the Society, and limited to their Safety, Wealth, and Glory, which makes thos Governors accountable for their trust . . . I *am* therefore evidently and avowedly a *Common-wealths-man*.⁴⁹

Though a consistent crier-up of liberty, Toland never advocated Spinoza's democracy, "which," he said, "I think to be the worst Form of a *Common-wealth*, tho a thousand Times better than any sort of Tyranny,"⁵⁰ Toland's political efforts were directed toward the straightforward and consistent advocacy of free trade, of freely-elected parliaments, and of a permanent Protestant dynasty in England, upon whose leaders he urged generous laws of toleration. Like Tindal, Toland was a political radical who, once convinced, remained articulately radical all his life long. His political tracts are all "Spinozan" in that they advocated the policies often attributed to Spinoza, but they were also quite unSpinozan in their determined arguments for the familiar Protestant God of toleration and in their outspoken anti-Catholicism. It is not so much in Toland's politics as in his philosophy that we must look for the deepest Spinozan influence upon him.

III. Spinoza in Deist Religion and Philosophy

Though Spinoza's politics played a part in deist works, his chief contributions to their arguments were religious and philosophical. In the hands of many deists the complexities of Spinoza's theology and metaphysics often turned into a weapon against conventional orthodoxy, transformed from the two-edged blade of reasoning he had himself forged. The earliest direct use of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in England was made by Charles Blount, who published anonymously a free translation of Spinoza's Chapter VI, "On Miracles," in his *Miracles, No Violation of the Laws of Nature* (London, 1683). Blount was simply defending his views against God's extra-

⁴⁹ John Toland, *Vindicius Liberi: Or, Mr. Toland's Defence of Himself* (London, 1702), 125-7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

ordinary interference into human affairs; to accomplish his end, he interpolated into his translation from Spinoza passages from Hobbes' *Leviathan* that also dealt with miracles. The result was a polemical pamphlet designed to sway few men not already persuaded of Blount's views.

The book provoked one sharp response, however, from a clergyman named Thomas Browne (quite unconnected with both the doctor and the Arminian Canon of Windsor). Browne produced a small book with a long title: *Miracles Work's Above and Contrary to Nature: Or, An Answer to a late Translation out of Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, Mr. Hobb's Leviathan, &c.* (London, 1683). Although he did not know at the time who was responsible for the publication of Blount's book, Browne recognized its evil motivation at once: the sixth chapter of the *Tractatus* had been chosen "as effectual by it self to compass the design of his whole Treatise: viz. To instill the Principles of *Deisme* or *Atheisme* into the minds of his Readers."⁵¹ He had studied the *Ethics* as well as the *Tractatus* and knew that the nature Spinoza postulated was not the simple mechanistic nature of, say, Galileo, but "the whole aggregate and compages of the Bodies in the World and the Order in which they act"—as well as an "infinite number of things beside matter."⁵² For him, as for Henry More and his fellow-Platonists, the miracles by proving the providence and generosity of God to Man proved also His benevolence and free will. The proof itself thus clearly separated God from His creation, not as "*Spinoza* asserts, *that nothing can happen contrary to Nature: viz. because God and Nature are one and the same thing, God Nature subsistent, and Nature God modified.*" Spinoza's argument "plainly terminates in one of these two, *Atheism or Idolatry*"⁵³—for Blount to have selected Spinoza as his source spoke for his impiety.

The *Tractatus* was itself answered at about this time by Matthias Erbery (Earbery, Erbury), a "School-Master of Wye in Kent," whose long refutation of the *Tractatus* appeared in 1697 under two titles⁵⁴ and attempted "a Collective Answer to the whole Book" rather than the usual random anti-Spinozist commentary, always for Erbery "too Philosophical, or too Philological."⁵⁵ The book was a dialogue between Logicus, "an old, grave Clergyman," and Scepticus, a young man misled. Widely read in the mechanical philosopher Descartes, in the atomist Gassendus, and in the dangerous religious writings of

⁵¹ Browne, *Miracles*, 2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 33-4.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

⁵⁴ Matthias Erbery, *Deism Examined and Confuted. In an Answer to a Book Intituled Tractatus Theologico Politicus* (London: for Charles Browne, 1697), also published as *An Answer to a Book Intituled, Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, same imprint and pagination.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, "Preface to the Reader."

the Socinians, Scepticus had the

misfortune at the same time to light upon the *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* of *Spinosa*. This turn'd him a perfect Deist, he threw away his Bible, and set up this Book in the room of it. He now thought himself to be set at liberty above the slavish condition of those, who though they were to be rul'd by their Bibles; and so fond was he of this Author, that every Summer, he carried him into the Fields with him in his hands, and each Winter he wore him in his Muff.⁵⁶

Scepticus and Logicus discuss the questions raised by the *Tractatus*—prophecy, revelations, miracles, the historicity of the Pentateuch, the nature of God, the propriety of using the mathematical method for religious proof—until Scepticus finally yields to the overwhelming logic and authority of Logicus (whose name in the middle of the book suddenly changes to “Theist”). Scepticus agrees that man is basically a Hobbist brute who can be saved only by the proper inculcation of spirituality into his system,⁵⁷—an interesting line of argument. Erbery establishes the Hobbist view of man in the state of nature as a true description of life on earth; so dreadful to contemplate was the Hobbist society that it must at once induce religion to palliate its horror. The Spinozan view of man, clearly far less pessimistic than the Hobbist, offered an alternative to orthodoxy by its postulation of a man who might be expected, with his greater potentialities and independence, to raise himself to blessedness without any priestly intervention. For all its “atheism,” Hobbes’s deeply unhappy view of human nature served the conservative orthodox argument well in its refutation of Spinoza.

Conservatives like Erbery might rely on Hobbist argument, but Hobbes’s political absolutism closed his work to Blount and Gildon, devoted to republican and Commonwealth policies. Spinoza offered a distinct “democracy” to accompany his radical religious views, and thus satisfactorily supported Blount’s various views. In his *Religio Laici*, for instance, Blount demonstrated considerable “Spinozism” in his discussions of metaphysics and theology, particularly in his classic deist attacks upon prophecy, miracle, and the life after death.⁵⁸ Unfortunately for his cause, in 1693 Blount killed himself, thus tidily justifying his orthodox opponents in their assertions of deist immorality.⁵⁹ Dedicated to rationalism though Blount and

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 160

⁵⁸ *Religio Laici* (London, 1683). For Blount’s anti-Hobbism, see *Anima Mundi* (London, 1679), 33–4.

⁵⁹ Charles Gildon, “An Account of the Life and Death of the Author,” prefixed to Blount’s *Miscellaneous Works* (London, 1695); cf. Gildon’s retraction from deism in *The Deists’ Manual: or, a Rational Enquiry into the Christian Religion. With some Considerations on Mr. Hobbes Spinosa . . . &c* (London, 1705); in the

Gildon were—Gildon explained that Blount died “by the precepts of Nature and Reason”—neither was a serious deist. Rather the two men were publicists and propagandists for liberty—liberty in politics, in learning, in religion.

Anthony Collins, educated at Eton and King’s, a lawyer and the close friend of Locke in the philosopher’s old age, was a far more interesting and cunning thinker than they. By himself, Collins shows quite plainly the sort of anomaly later critics have come to suspect within deism. He was a reputable squire’s son who married money, conversed with the learned, and remained socially quite conventional; unlike most such men, he helped to formulate the most radical positions of deism. Collins was truly a philosophical deist, perhaps the first in England, and he did his work in his gentlemanly library, rather than in the scrimmage of political pamphleteering.⁶⁰

Collins’ chief attention was not directed to politics; compared with Tindal and Toland, Collins had very little influence upon contemporary politics. He did take the typical deist’s interest in religion, however, and produced one of the major deist religious texts of the century, the *Discourse on the Grounds and Origins of the Christian Religion*, published in 1734. His views of the Bible were the “reasonable” ones of Locke: he looked upon Scripture as a series of documents written at different times, the authenticity of which must often be called into question.⁶¹ In the matter of miracles Collins asserted the Spinozan position that God can do only what is “possible”; that His prescience does not exclude the exercise of man’s decisive free will.⁶²

In a book ostensibly written in response to Archbishop King’s famous sermon on predestination⁶³ but actually presenting more fully ideas he had already expressed, Collins presented a Spinozan God of an extremely abstract nature, to whom human senses and forms were inappropriate and to whom they should not, even analogically, be

Preface Gildon nonetheless continued his defense of Blount’s particular cause for suicide.

⁶⁰ See also the extraordinary collection of books in Collins’ library.

⁶¹ [Anthony Collins], *An Essay Concerning the Use of Reason in Propositions, the Evidence whereof depends upon Human Testimony* (London, 1709), 18–21. In general, Collins has been overlooked by scholars, perhaps because of Stephen’s dismissal of him in both the *DNB* life and the *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. Recently G. R. Cragg (*From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, Cambridge, 1950) and John Yolton (*John Locke and the Way of Ideas*, Oxford, 1956) have dealt seriously with Collins, particularly in his relations to Locke.

⁶² Collins, *An Essay Concerning the Use of Reason*, 45–50.

⁶³ William King, *Divine Predestination and Fore-Knowledg, Consistent with the Freedom of Man’s Will* (London, 1709).

applied.⁶⁴ In addition, Collins made an important distinction between the theist and the atheist: the theist believes in Archbishop King's God, "a general cause of effects," because he believes in providence and natural harmony. The "Atheist affirms Wisdom is not necessarily to such a Purpose, but that all these admirable Effects may be produc'd by Causes and Powers of which we have no Idea."⁶⁵ The distinction, crucial in this period, altogether ignored the question of revelation and successfully removed Spinoza (as well as Collins himself) from the ranks of atheists, since Spinoza continually affirmed that God was the cause of all effects, and that with wisdom and application man might come to know something of his God.

In 1713 Collins published a most important (and a very small) book, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, in which he gave a gentle definition of a term very dangerous indeed:

*By Free-Thinking then I mean, The Use of the Understanding in endeavouring to find out the Meaning of any Proposition what soever, in considering the nature of the Evidence for or against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming Force or Weakness of the Evidence.*⁶⁶

As often as possible, Collins cast his dangerous asseverations and propositions into secular terms so as to modify the direct assault of his ideas upon the Church. He was also exceedingly careful, like Blount, Tindal, and Toland, to assert his own essential theism, however Spinozan his metaphysical formulation. To those divines who constantly accused the free-thinkers of ignorance, Collins gave a sharp and distinct answer: "Ignorance is the foundation of *Atheism*, and *Free-Thinking* the Cure of it." Even if free-thinking were to produce more atheists than were extant, he thought that those new atheists would not outnumber the superstitious in societies where free-thinking is restrained.⁶⁷ Collins' roster of authorities is interesting: he cited Bacon and the non-juring George Hicke; Socrates, Plato, Epicurus, and Cicero; Erasmus, Scaliger, Cartesius, Gassendus, Grotius, Hooker, Chillingworth, Falkland, Herbert of Cherbury, Hales, Seldon, Milton, Wilkins, Marsham, Spencer, Whichcote, Cudworth, Sir William Temple, and Locke; Hobbes (who was, he insisted, a "virtuous" man, as even his opponent Clarendon has been forced to admit⁶⁸), and Tillotson ("whom all *English Free-Thinkers* own as their Head").⁶⁹

Collins' *Free-Thinking* naturally provoked many an answer; of them all, it was Richard Bentley's response that most powerfully as-

⁶⁴ [Anthony Collins], *A Vindication of the Divine Attributes* (London, 1710), 8-9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁶⁶ Collins, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London 1713) 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 106, 129, 177, 171.

sociated Collins with Spinoza, correctly perceiving Collins' acceptance of Spinoza's irrevocable chain of causality: "They *free* by way of distinction," he wrote, "that have the most slavish of systems, mere matter, eternal sequel of causes, cabin'd fatalists, fetter'd Spinozists?"⁷⁰ Bentley's reading of Spinoza may have been superficial, but he understood that Collins' was not. Rejecting the balder mechanistic necessity of Hobbes, Collins leaned toward the more humanistic determinism of Spinoza, by which freedom from customary human bondage could be achieved only by man's full realization of the total necessity of all things in God. As Collins put it in his clear didactic prose:

. . . *I contend only for what is call'd moral necessity, meaning thereby, that man, who is an intelligent and sensible being, is determined by his reason and his senses; and I deny man to be subject to such necessity, as is in clockes, watches, and other beings, which for want of sensation and intelligence are subject to an absolute, physical, or mechanical necessity.*⁷¹

Collins' psychology was obviously Lockean, but he carried the particular kind of necessity that man is under far beyond the limits Locke suggested in his *Essay*. Collins reasoned thus: man is a necessary agent because all his actions have a beginning or a cause; if a cause is not a necessary cause, it is no cause at all; therefore liberty of will is not only impossible but also, because it denies God's ultimate power as first cause and originator of all causes in man, atheistical.⁷²

For him, then, the free-will defense of religion so constantly reiterated in his period, the incessant cry of the Boyle Lecturers and other anti-deistical writers, was trivial, since "*Liberty* is both the real foundation of popular Atheism, and has been the profes'd principle of the Atheists themselves." He went on to say, "*fate* or the *necessity of events*, has been esteem'd a religious opinion and been the profess'd opinion of the religious, both among the Heathens and Jews, and also of that great Convert to Christianity, and great converter of others, St. Paul."⁷³ Human liberty in Collins' moral world, as in Spinoza's, lay in a true understanding of the limits of life and an understanding conforming to God's unalterable universal plan.⁷⁴

Collins did not even permit the free-will explanation to account for the origin of evil: for him as for Spinoza so-called evil had to proceed, like everything else, from the omnipotent deity, its place to be understood in the totality of things, its problems to be dealt with by

⁷⁰ Philaleutherus Lipsiensis [Richard Bentley], *Remarks upon a Late Discourse of Free-Thinking* (London, 1737, 7th ed.), 154.

⁷¹ [Anthony Collins], *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (London, 1717), Preface, iii.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 57-9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 61-2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-3, 71-3.

harmonious human reason. "If this were not true, 'twould be an Argument of Imperfection in the Deity, which is a Contradiction to suppose."⁷⁵ Indeed, human ethics was reduced to the necessities originating in the creation, in which questions of man's will had no part:⁷⁶

To admit that any Created Being can *Act* in a Manner contrary to what it does, or fulfill any other end, is, I apprehend, tantamount to allowing it to be independent of the Deity, and consequently to have in its Election and Power to thwart the shemes [sic] of the great Author and Superintendent of all things, and thereby to bring *Good* and *Evil* on itself, and the rest of the Creatures.

As conclusive proof, Collins resorted to the empirical and rationalist argument:

The Doctrine of the *Necessity of Human Actions* is unattended with all the Absurdities that of *Free Will* labours under, since it is intended to prove no more than what every unprejudiced Man without Argument will assert to. That each Being *Acts* the Part which his Creator brought him on the Stage to perform. What Contradiction more irreconcilable, than that any thing should resist his Will, for whose *Good Pleasure*, and by whose *Power* alone 'twas Created, and in whom *All things Live, Move, and have their Being*, and who is well pleas'd with the Works of his Hands.⁷⁷

Collins' views, in his mind securely based on Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* and *Essay on Human Understanding*, were the most strongly argued formulations of radical deism in the period of its development. His two works on human liberty were the only ones that genuinely attacked the problem of causation with an eye to morality, and in this his chief precedent was Spinoza's *Ethics*.

Collins's contemporary John Toland also openly read Spinoza and considered with care not only the Spinozan attitude to religious questions but the Spinozan metaphysics as well. Added to Toland's *Letters to Serena*, epistolary treatises directed to Sophia Charlotte of Prussia, were two essays written to an unnamed "Gentleman" that directly dealt with Spinoza's philosophical assumptions. Toland

⁷⁵ [Anthony Collins], *A Dissertation of Liberty and Necessity* (London, 1729), 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 22-3. One of Collins' many critics, John Jackson, saw deeply into the Spinozan metaphysics underlying Collins' ethics and sharply attacked the underlying assumption of infinite matter (*A Defense of Human Liberty*, London, 1730, 13). See also Jackson's critique of Samuel Collier in *The Known God; Or the Author of Nature Unveil'd* (London, 1737), in which he takes exception to Spinoza's doctrine of the infinite. For Collier's comment on Locke's doctrine of infinity, see above. See also S[amuel] C[ollier], *An Impartial Inquiry into the Existence of God* (London, 1718), 168, 185; and *The Christian Religion Founded on Reason: Or, Two Essays on Natural and Revealed Religion* (London, 1729), ix, xi.

began with great clarity: "I am persuaded the whole System of Spinoza is not only false, but also precarious and without any sort of Foundation."⁷⁸ A familiar beginning, certainly; what follows⁷⁹ is more extraordinary:

For my part, I shall always be far from saying that Spinoza did nothing well because in so many things he succeeded so ill. On the contrary, He had several lucky Thoughts, and appears to have bin a Man of admirable natural Endowments, tho' his share of Learning (except in some parts of the Mathematicks, and in the understanding of the Rabbins) seems to have been very moderate.

Spinoza's "admirable natural Endowments" indeed provided Toland with a model for admiration. From Colerus' *Life* he had obviously read of Spinoza's virtues: as a citizen, Spinoza was impeccable, as a philosopher, scrupulous. He was a sober man and frugal, obedient to his country's laws; he desired no riches; his moral life was good.⁸⁰ Like Toland, Spinoza had suffered by being cast out from society; like Toland, he had been attacked by unworthy adversaries "who gain'd nothing on his Disciples by the contumelious and vilifying Epithets they bestow upon his Person for the sake of his Opinions. . . ."⁸¹

Nonetheless, these opinions were wrong, and not simply on religious grounds. Toland criticized his philosopher at diverse points: he could not accept Spinoza's account of how matter came into motion;⁸² he found Spinoza's terminology misleading in that Spinoza had, he said, taken abstract notions for "real Beings" and based his hypotheses upon such misapprehensions.⁸³ Most confusing of all, the terms "infinity" and "space" in the *Ethics* have "bin wonderfully perplex'd" and lead to no distinct ideas. Though Newton and Locke, albeit unwillingly, were against him on the point, Toland could "no more believe an absolute Space distinct from Matter, as the place of it; than that there is an absolute Time, different from the things whose Duration are considered."⁸⁴ For all his refutation, though, it is Spinoza's strengths, rather than his faults, that seem to have impressed John Toland.

When William Wotton wrote his *Letter to Eusebia* in answer to Toland's *Serena*, he acutely noted his opponent's tone toward Spinoza. "You will observe, Madam," he wrote, "That the only Reason why Mr. Toland finds fault with *Spinoza*, is, for asserting that there is but one substance in the Universe, and at the same time *not* allowing it to

⁷⁸ John Toland, *Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), 135.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 147, 148-9.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 179.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 182-3. Toland's views on infinity were undoubtedly influenced by Leibniz; on this point, as on few others, he apparently opted for Leibniz against his countryman Locke.

be *self-moving*.”⁸⁵ Actually, Wotton felt, Toland was in many ways more dangerous than Spinoza, to whom the English reader came already armed, since “What Mr. *Toland* therefore superadds to *Spinoza’s* Scheme is this. He makes *Motion to be essential to Matter*; *i.e.* he makes *Matter to be self-moving*; whereby we may suppose that he intends to supply all the Defects of Spinoza’s Hypothesis: *i.e. Make the World without a God.*”⁸⁶ Toland became for Wotton an atheist pure and simple, where Spinoza had at least the grace of a curious theism:⁸⁷

Now, Madam, what wrong have I done to Mr. *Toland*, when I affirmed that his Words do plainly shew, that his true quarrel with *Spinoza* was, That according to *Spinoza’s* Scheme he was obliged to take in a Deity, if he would explain the *Phaenomena* of Nature: Whereas if Matter had been allow’d to have been a self-moving Principle, in Mr. *Toland’s* Opinion all might have been done without it.

In considerable measure Wotton was right about Toland, as Bentley had been right about Collins: the man was Spinozist in many of his views. The title of Toland’s *Pantheisticon* of 1720⁸⁸ owes something to his study of Spinoza as well as to his study of Bruno; in the *Mangoneutes*, published in the same year, Toland defended against Wotton his old respect for Spinoza’s character:

So I think still, notwithstanding I differ from Spinoza in the very groundwork of his Philosophy, and that I was at the same time confuting him. I can commend the man in many things, whom in other things I leave or oppose: nor is there any procedure that exposes writers to more ridiculous extravagancies, than thinking themselves oblig’d to answer every thing he advances, from whom they differ in any one thing.⁸⁹

The philosophical quarrel had degenerated sadly: Wotton did not challenge the philosophical assumptions of either Spinoza or Toland; he simply charged Toland with having called Spinoza “a Great Man.”⁹⁰ And that opinion Toland never disclaimed: though Spinoza’s “*system of matter without motion* was undigested and unphilosophical. . . yet Spinoza was for all that a great and a good man in many respects, as may not only be seen by his works; but also by the *Account of his Life* since that time published by Colerus, a Lutheran Minister, as contrary to some of his sentiments as any man breathing.”⁹¹

⁸⁵ [William Wotton], *A Letter to Eusebia: Occasioned by Mr. Toland’s Letters to Serena* (London, 1704), 47. ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 48. ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸⁸ Toland appears to have coined the word “pantheist” in 1705; so far as I know, he himself never used the noun “pantheism” in his writings. For Toland’s knowledge and use of Bruno, cf. Heinemann, “John Toland and the Age of Enlightenment,” *loc. cit.*, 140–1. (See footnote 46 above.)

⁸⁹ Toland, *Mangoneutes*, in *Tetradymus* (London, 1720), 185.

⁹⁰ Wotton, 47.

⁹¹ Toland, *Mangoneutes*, 185–6.

In 1720, just when Toland was making his last defenses of Spinoza, an abridgement of Colerus' *Life* was published in England, together with an abstract of the *Tractatus* and an ambiguous preface.⁹² The old *Life* was substantially unchanged: Spinoza remained the noble, singular figure that Colerus had first presented, and the abstract of the *Tractatus* was certainly far from damning. But the writer of the Preface took no chances with the anti-Spinozists; he had made the edition, he said, "To prevent therefore the Belief that *Heresy* is ever the less pernicious for being attended with Humanity and Goodness," since it had come to his attention that Spinoza had "obtain'd as considerable a Reputation for his Virtue, and the Integrity of his Life, as for his Irreligion, and the Impiety of his Opinions." Yet the plain-speaking anti-Spinozism of the preface is certainly belied by the tone of the book; the anonymous adapter, it would seem, simply wanted to put Spinoza's life before a wider public and chose the quickest and most acceptable manner of putting it there.

"Spinoza was for all that a great and a good man"; he had a "Reputation for his Virtue, and the Integrity of his Life": how came these phrases to be applied to the man in whom Cudworth, More and Baxter saw absolutely no good at all? The answer lies in the particular form in which the deists could cast the figure of Spinoza. Aloof, apparently uncommitted to anything but truth, Spinoza's life could be read as a moral exemplum for the life of reason. Deliberately apart from ordinary society, conspicuously brave in the face of its opposition, Spinoza consistently contemplated that society and devoted his attention to its proper and reasonable organization. Whatever his motives, he looked deeply into the structure of the Judaeo-Christian world of ideas into which he was born, and attempted his supremely abstract rational approach to pneumatology, to metaphysics, to morals and to political morality; his vision was so compellingly presented as to command the admiration even of men who feared aspects of the doctrines he set forth. In 1680 all Englishmen who noticed Spinoza at all had looked upon him with uniform horror; by 1720 he had become, to men of one cast of mind at least, a figure conspicuous for honor and integrity. From the shifting philosophical, emotional, and social ideals of the early deists emerged their idealized Spinoza, a private and public radical, uncommitted to any organized group or policy, absolutely dedicated to the abstraction of truth from life, eternally critical of himself, his world and the processes of reason, to provide for them the detached and pure model of the reasonable life they hoped could be lived.

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⁹² Colerus, *An Account of the Life and Writings of Spinoza. To which is added, An Abstract of his Theological Political Treatises* (London, 1720).