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# Spinoza in Denmark and the Fall of Struensee, 1770-1772

*John Christian Laursen*

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Baruch (Benedict) de Spinoza was the arch-heretic of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He was denounced in half a dozen languages from the time he began to publish until at least the 1780s, when Lessing's allegiance to Spinoza became the heart of a literary scandal.<sup>1</sup> In time-honored fashion, some of these denunciations led to the burning of books and the imprisonment or banning of authors. The most spectacular case, however, led to the trial of a prime minister, the cutting off of his right hand and of his head, and the drawing and quartering of his body in full public ceremony. The year was 1772, the prime minister was Johann Friedrich Struensee, and the country was Denmark.

Late eighteenth-century Denmark was not known for barbarities of the type represented by Struensee's execution. Previously disgraced prime ministers had merely been imprisoned, and other political enemies of the ruling powers had

<sup>1</sup> The chief recent secondary works are Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (eds.), *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700* (Leiden, 1996); Silvia Berti, F. Charles-Daubert, and R. H. Popkin (eds.), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Dordrecht, 1996); Paolo Cristofolini (ed.), *L'Hérésie Spinoziste: La Discussion sur le Tractatus Theologico-Politicus 1670-1677 et la réception immédiate du Spinozisme* (Amsterdam/Maarssen, 1995); Hanna Delf, J. H. Schoeps, and M. Walther (eds.), *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte* (Berlin, 1994); Rüdiger Otto, *Studien zur Spinozarezeption in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1994); Olivier Bloch (ed.), *Spinoza au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1990); Winfried Schröder, *Spinoza in der deutschen Frühaufklärung* (Würzburg, 1987); David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany* (London, 1984); Karlfried Gründer and Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, (eds.), *Spinoza in der Frühzeit seiner religiösen Wirkung* (Heidelberg, 1984); H. J. Siebrand, *Spinoza and the Netherlanders. An Inquiry into the Early Reception of his Philosophy of Religion* (Assen-Maastricht, 1984); Hermann Timm, *Gott und die Freiheit, I, Die Spinozarenaissance* (Frankfurt, 1974). Older work includes Leo Bäck, *Spinozas erste Einwirkungen auf Deutschland* (Berlin, 1895); and Max Grunwald, *Spinoza in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1897, repr. Aalen, 1986); see also Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven, 1997), 166ff. None of these mentions Struensee.

merely been exiled.<sup>2</sup> Why such harshness with Struensee? What was at stake in the fall of Struensee?

The answers to these questions are complex, but an important element of those answers lies in Struensee's public image, which made it seem both necessary and justifiable to treat him with such harshness. In turn, public opinion about Struensee was closely tied to the reputation of Spinoza. This essay will show that charges of Spinozism were part of the campaign that poisoned public opinion against Struensee. This was an unusually clear case of a theological and philosophical debate having direct political effects.

Before getting to the role of Spinozism and anti-Spinozism in eighteenth-century Denmark, let us fill in important points of the story. The charge against Struensee was *lèse majesté*, for plotting the death of the King and for usurping power in violation of the constitution. Behind these charges was a further element which encouraged outrage: sleeping with Queen Caroline Matilda. That much was true, as both the Queen, a sister of George III of England, and Struensee admitted, each in order to save the other. The King knew about it all along but did not care. He did not care because he had become a libertine, going out to whorehouses most nights with rowdy friends, and he figured that what was good for the gander was good for the goose. He was also schizophrenic and easily manipulable by those around him, so that Struensee and the Queen encountered no disapproval from him until he fell under other people's influence. After Struensee and the Queen were taken into custody, the King was forced to divorce the Queen and she was sent to live in a Hannoverian castle in Celle because her brother did not want the embarrassment of having her back in England. She died there a few years later.<sup>3</sup>

It is an irony that we owe our knowledge of the state of public opinion in Denmark in this period to Struensee. Until shortly before the fatal events mentioned above, the Danish press had been subject to censorship that might have prevented the expression of many of the subsequent attacks on Struensee. But in September 1770 Struensee persuaded the king to declare freedom of the press in all his realms (consisting of the kingdoms of Denmark and Norway, the Duchies of Slesvig and Holsten [Schleswig and Holstein in German], Greenland, Iceland, the Faroes, and colonies in India, Africa, and the Caribbean).<sup>4</sup> It is not widely

<sup>2</sup> Examples mentioned in the Luxdorph pamphlets: *Rigskansler* Count Griffenfeld, condemned to death for treason in 1676; sentence commuted to life imprisonment; died 1699. *Rigshofmester* Korfitz Ulfeldt (1606-64), son-in-law of Christian IV, plotter against Frederik III, hung in effigy in 1663 but died a fugitive near Basel (II, 19, #2, 63ff.).

<sup>3</sup> See Hester Chapman, *Caroline Matilda, Queen of Denmark, 1751-75* (London, 1971), and Harald Jørgensen, *The Last Days of the Unfortunate Queen Caroline Mathilde* (Copenhagen, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> The cabinet order is translated in John Christian Laursen, "David Hume and the Danish Debate about Freedom of the Press in the 1770s," *JHI*, 59 (1998), 167-72; see also Harald Jørgensen, *Da censuren blev opgivet* (Copenhagen, 1970).

known that Denmark was the first country to declare unlimited freedom of the press as official public policy. For much of the century England and the Netherlands had effective freedom of the press, but it had never been declared official policy. The next to do so was rebellious Virginia, in the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776), followed by other colonies and then the Bill of Rights of the new United States.<sup>5</sup>

Less than ten years earlier Struensee had been city physician in Altona in Danish-ruled Holsten. Educated at Halle, he reacted against the Pietistic enthusiasm that prevailed there by leaning toward materialistic ideas. When he tried to publicize his Enlightenment ideas, his periodicals were shut down because of opposition from the clergy.<sup>6</sup> When he came to power as prime minister in Denmark, one of the first things he did was to arrange for the declaration of freedom of the press. He clearly expected that writers would be grateful to him.

What followed was an avalanche of fliers, pamphlets, and books. Alongside Enlightenment ideas for reforms in the government of Norway and the Iceland trade, complaints about the salaries of ministers and officers, and plans for banks and lotteries, came libels and scurrilous attacks on Struensee. As the holder of effective political power, he was a natural target for writers. By October 1771 he felt compelled to reassert some control over the press, requiring that the author or publisher be named on published pieces, and that the printer know who the author was, so that responsibility for libel and slander could be ensured.<sup>7</sup> But this was still difficult to enforce, and by then much of the damage had been done.

A Danish court official and man of letters, Bolle Willum Luxdorph, made a point of acquiring a copy of as many as he could of the writings that came out between 1770 and 1773 and had them bound in forty-five volumes as *Luxdorph's Collection of Press Freedom Writings*, now located at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.<sup>8</sup> Like the Thomasson collection of English Civil War pamphlets, this is an excellent source of information about the expression of public opinion in the otherwise ephemeral pamphlet literature of the period. Luxdorph's collection makes the study of "popular" anti-Spinozism possible.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Sweden actually declared freedom of the press before Denmark, in 1766, but it was limited by a clause excepting religious matters. See Hilding Eek, *Om tryckfriheten* (Stockholm, 1942), 151-96, and Otto Varenius, *Svensk tryckfrihet* (Stockholm, 1931).

<sup>6</sup> See Stefan Winkle, *Struensee und die Publizistik* (Hamburg, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> See J. C. Laursen, "Denmark, 1750-1848," *Censorship: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Derek Jones (London, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> *Luxdorphs Samling af Trykke-frihedens Skrifter*. The 45 volumes are divided into two series, before and after the coup against Struensee on 17 January 1772, and cited here by series number (Roman numeral), volume number, pamphlet # within the volume, and page number. The chief secondary work to draw on this collection is Edvard Holm, *Nogle Hovedtraek af Trykkefrihedstidens Historie 1770-1773* (Copenhagen, 1885), but he does not make anything of the Spinoza connection.

<sup>9</sup> I use "popular" in quotes here because most of the pamphlet writers were obviously literate and well-informed, so we are not referring to illiterates and the widest public. Contrast the

Struensee's years in power were marked by a flurry of reform measures designed to liberalize the economy, liberate the serfs, and generally bring his idea of Enlightenment to Denmark.<sup>10</sup> Many people, however, were hurt by these reforms, which brought inflation and unemployment with them. Thus, many interests came together in opposition to Struensee, even if masked by grander ideological critiques. Attacks on Struensee were articulated on the basis of at least four major grounds. First, patriots and nationalists resented the fact that the German- and French-speaking Struensee made no effort to learn Danish and did not disguise his contempt for their language. To them he was a "foreigner," even though he had roots in their king's territories in Slesvig-Holsten, where his father was a high official in the church administration.

The second ground for attack on Struensee was his relationship with the Queen, widely known from their behavior when riding and at parties and especially from the fact that Caroline Matilda's second child greatly resembled Struensee. In conservative, moralistic circles this was a major affront. Queen-Mother Juliane Marie headed a clique of Pietistic moralists who could not abide such behavior and who orchestrated the coup. The Queen's close relationship with Struensee gave some plausibility to allegations of a plot to do away with the King and rule in his place.

The third ground for resentment consisted in Struensee's ruling style. Taking full advantage of enlightened absolutism in support of his reformist activism, he abolished the royal council and ruled by cabinet decree. During a year and a half in power he was responsible for over 1800 cabinet orders and decrees, 1350 of which make up 1128 pages in the published edition.<sup>11</sup> During this period he moved from issuing decrees in the King's name and with the King's signature to issuing them in his own name. His arrogance, immaturity, and lack of diplomacy made him an easy target for accusations of failure to consult, usurpation of power, and tyranny.

The fourth ground for attack on Struensee lay in the general charge of "atheism, deism, naturalism, Spinozism, and materialism." Spinozism was widely known to be a major heresy, although writers often denied having read such evil works even as they asserted that they knew them to be horrible. The inconsistency between atheism and deism was generally ignored as all evils were lumped together. The details of Spinoza's metaphysics and even of his political ideas were probably familiar to very few critics.<sup>12</sup> We shall see below that the outlines

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anti-Spinozism here with the popular Spinozism discussed in Michiel Wielema, "Spinoza in Zeeland: the Growth and Suppression of 'Popular Spinozism' (c.1700-1720)," *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, ed. van Bunge and Klever, 103-15.

<sup>10</sup> See the listing of his reforms in Winkle, *Struensee und die Publizistik*, 96, n. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Holger Hansen, *Kabinetsstyrelsen i Danmark* (Copenhagen, 1916).

<sup>12</sup> On his political ideas, see J. C. Laursen, "Spinoza on Toleration: Arming the State and Reining In the Magistrate," *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and*

of his philosophy were familiar to some pamphleteers but that usually they did not go into any interpretive depth. Rather, he was taken to represent in general all of the threats to morality, social solidarity, and political peace that could be imagined. This contributed to the vicious reaction against Struensee in some quarters.

Spinozism was only part of the general attack on Struensee for irreligion and immorality. Many of the pamphlets denounced a general loss of morality without specific reference to Spinoza. One genius even thought of reprinting Struensee's own father's sermon against cuckoldry, with implications obvious to everyone.<sup>13</sup> Even if Spinoza had been completely unknown in Denmark, Struensee's public reputation would have been low enough because of this more general expression of dissatisfaction.

Before going further, something should be said about the authorship of these pamphlets. Most of them were anonymous. Some of them may have been the spontaneous product of indignant observers of the cultural scene, and others may have been the product of hack writers paid by Struensee's enemies in an effort to orchestrate a public relations campaign. Both sides could play this game, of course, and Struensee and his supporters also supplied pamphlets in defense of his policies and morals. Many pamphleteers thanked him for granting freedom of the press. None, however, admitted that he was a Spinozist or tried to show that Spinozism was harmless.

Although indiscreet in many of his activities, Struensee was discreet enough not to leave much of a paper trail about his views on philosophy and religion. His friend David Panning reported that he almost never wrote letters and that he used to tear up the letters he received after reading them and throw them in the fire.<sup>14</sup> This means that we do not have an explicit avowal of Spinozism from him. We do nonetheless have several sorts of contextual material that implicate him with Spinozism, beginning with the fact that Spinoza's works were available in the original Latin as well as in both German and French translations. By Struensee's time, many intellectuals had become clandestine Spinozists, transmitting various parts of his thought in their writings by indirection. A smaller number had become overt Spinozists, often suffering immediate prosecution and persecution.

One of the few places that German-speaking Spinozists could go for refuge was Altona, the second largest city (after Copenhagen) under the Danish crown. Altona was relatively unlikely to persecute this type of heretic if they kept a low

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*Early Modern Europe*, eds. C. J. Nederman and J. C. Laursen (Lanham, 1996), 185-204, and Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*.

<sup>13</sup> (I, 19, #4).

<sup>14</sup> Holger Hansen (ed.), *Inkvisitionskommissionen af 20. Januar 1772* (Copenhagen, 1927), I, xvi.

profile. In the decades before Struensee's residence Johann Conrad Dippel, Theodor Ludwig Lau,<sup>15</sup> Johann Lorenz Schmidt (translator of Spinoza's *Ethics* in 1742), and Johann Christian Edelmann had spread the Spinozist faith throughout the city. Among those who maintained such an allegiance in Struensee's time were the physicians Johann Samuel Carl and Hartog Hirsch Gerson, the latter a regular at Struensee's dinner table in the 1760s, as well as David Panning, who roomed with Struensee and coedited a journal with him that soon was suppressed. Stefan Winkle has performed the service of unearthing the clandestine Spinozism in Struensee's circles in Altona before he became involved with the Danish royal family.<sup>16</sup> By 1764 clergymen were already reporting in letters that "The son of the General Superintendent [Johann Friedrich's father] is a doctor of medicine and City Physician, and an arch-slanderer of religion and whore-stallion."<sup>17</sup>

Struensee's journalism from the early 1760s, before he came to power in Denmark, reveals Spinoza's influence. One of his earliest pieces was "Thoughts of a Physician on Superstition and Quackery" in the *Journal for the Common Good* in 1760, the title alone indicating some Spinozistic affinities.<sup>18</sup> In the first volume of his own *Monthly for Use and Pleasure* of 1763 he contributed a "Report on Diogenes," in which the Greek philosopher was much praised, despite having generally been considered dangerous. Spinozistic themes such as the importance of frugality and self-control were highlighted.<sup>19</sup> Struensee also prepared an essay on Epicurus with similar implications, but it was never printed because of the successful efforts of the Chief Pastor of Hamburg, Goeze—who also fought with Lessing—to close down the magazine.<sup>20</sup> Goeze succeeded in having the third and last volume of this journal seized and burned, in part because of Struensee's "In Praise of Dogs,"<sup>21</sup> which included some irreligious satire.

<sup>15</sup> See April Shelford, "Worse than the three impostors? Towards an interpretation of Theodor Ludwig Lau's *Meditationes philosophicae de deo, mundo, homine*," *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought*, ed. Berti, Charles-Daubert, and Popkin, 439-74.

<sup>16</sup> Stefan Winkle, *Die heimlichen Spinozisten in Altona und der Spinozastreit* (Hamburg, 1988), 55ff; also Friedrich Niewöhner, *Veritas sive Varietas: Lessings Toleranzparabel und das Buch von der drei Betrügern* (Heidelberg, 1988), 353-57, and Franklin Kopitsch, *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona* (2 vols.; Hamburg, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Winkle, *Die heimlichen Spinozisten*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> "Gedanken eines Arztes vom Aberglauben und der Quacksalberey," *Gemeinnütziges Magazin*, November (1760), St. II, 75-91. See Winkle, *Struensee und die Publizistik*, 26ff.

<sup>19</sup> "Nachrichten vom Diogenes," *Monatschrift zum Nutzen und Vergnügen*, Hamburg (1763), St. I, 57-67. See Winkle, *Die heimlichen Spinozisten*, 72; Winkle, *Struensee und die Publizistik*, 106-7.

<sup>20</sup> Winkle, *Die heimlichen Spinozisten*, 127, n. 353. Winkle reports that the manuscript was burned in an Allied bombing raid in 1943, so that regarding this and other matters we must rely on his research notes from before the war.

<sup>21</sup> "Lobrede auf die Hunde und das Album Graecum," *Monatschrift zum Nutzen und Vergnügen* (1763) St. III, 233-53.

Finally, in his last known piece of journalism in this early period, “On the Respect of the Writer toward the Public” in the *Schleswig-Holstein News* in 1764, Struensee claimed, like Spinoza, that freedom of expression was a public good, better than censorship.<sup>22</sup> Many readers of these often audacious essays would have recognized the radical implications of his writings, and some even might have identified their Spinozistic origins.

Much later, the king’s tutor and companion Salomon Reverdil reported that he had not approved of Struensee’s mix of Haller’s physiology and La Mettrie’s metaphysics, in which medicine had become a source of atheism.<sup>23</sup> La Mettrie had made quite a splash in 1747 with the materialism of *Man a Machine*, which had been banned and burned and caused La Mettrie to flee to Prussia and seek Frederick II’s protection. La Mettrie may have therefore been a more recent substitute in Reverdil’s mind for Spinoza; there has indeed been a recent debate as to how Spinozistic La Mettrie was.<sup>24</sup> In any case he was associated in many minds in Denmark with Spinoza.

Of course if Spinozism had been confined to Altona, it might not have made such a splash in Copenhagen. But the Danes were as aware of Spinozism and other subversive literature as other northern Europeans.<sup>25</sup> The Danish traveler Ole Borch (Olaus Borrichius) mentioned Spinoza and his friends in diary entries from 1661-62.<sup>26</sup> The son-in-law of chief rabbi of Copenhagen and Royal Physician Benjamin Mustafia had known Spinoza in 1673 in the Netherlands.<sup>27</sup> Thus, knowledge of his ideas could have spread to Copenhagen very early.

<sup>22</sup> “Von der Achtung des Schriftstellers gegen das Publikum,” *Schleswig-Holsteinische Anzeigen*, January (1764), St. I, 5-12 and St. II, 17-20. See Winkle, *Struensee und die Publizistik*, 70-75.

<sup>23</sup> Elie Salomon Reverdil, *Struensee et la Cour de Copenhague, 1760-1772; Mémoires de Reverdil* (Paris, 1858), 58-59. See J. C. Laursen, “Télémaque manqué: Reverdil at Court in Copenhagen,” *Reconceptualizing Nature, Science, and Aesthetics*, ed. Patrick Coleman, Anne Hofmann, and Simone Zurbuchen (Geneva, 1998), 147-56.

<sup>24</sup> André Comte-Sponville, “La Mettrie: un ‘Spinoza moderne’?” and responses by T. Verbeek, J. Moutaux, and F. Markovitz in *Spinoza au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Bloch, 133-50.

<sup>25</sup> See Martin Mulsow, “Freethinking in early eighteenth-century Protestant Germany: Peter Friedrich Arpe and the *Traité des trois imposteurs*” and Susanna Akerman, “Johan Adler Salvius’ *Questions to Baruch de Castro concerning De tribus impostoribus*,” *Heterodoxy, Spinozism and Free Thought*, ed. Berti, Charles-Daubert, and Popkin, 204-9 and 397-423, and Martin Mulsow, *Monadenlehre, Hermetik und Deismus: Georg Schades geheime Aufklärungs-gesellschaft, 1747-1760* (Hamburg, 1998), esp. 21-28.

<sup>26</sup> Wim Klever, “Spinoza and van den Enden in Borch’s Diary in 1661 and 1662,” *Studia Spinozana*, 5 (1989), 311-25. I owe this reference to Wiep van Bunge.

<sup>27</sup> The son-in-law’s name was Gabriel Milan, and he served alongside Spinoza as witness to a sworn statement in 1673. He was a Portuguese Jew from Hamburg who had the mail concession between Denmark and The Netherlands and served as General Agent of the Danish Crown in The Hague. He was later appointed Governor of St. Thomas but was arrested and executed for malfeasance in office in 1689. See Michael Petry, “Spinoza and the Military,” *Studia Spinozana*, 1 (1985), 359-69. I owe this reference to Richard Popkin.



One of the key sources of information about Spinoza since 1697 had been Bayle's article about his work in the famous *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Bayle was careful to describe Spinoza's system as "irrational and absurd" while nevertheless introducing his ideas to large audiences throughout Europe. Ludvig Holberg, Denmark's most famous man of letters in the first half of the century, wrote that his favorite author was Bayle.<sup>28</sup> The rector of the University of Copenhagen for 1720-21, Andreas Frølund, translated the *Dictionary* into Danish shortly before he died in 1731. Never published, the manuscript is now in the Royal Library in Copenhagen.<sup>29</sup> By the 1770s charges of Spinozism could be easily understood in Copenhagen as charges of the most extreme heresy.

None of the above evidence absolutely proves that Struensee was a Spinozist, but the fact of his Spinozism is not as important as the fact that he was widely accused of being one in the Danish pamphlet literature collected by Luxdorph. Luxdorph's collection shows us how this charge worked against Struensee in the shaping of public opinion.

In 1771 a 31-page pamphlet titled *Serious Observations on the Common Condition* described the response of true religion to the general increase in irreligion. "Through the attacks which Vanini and Bruno made against it [true religion] with their dull weapons in darker times, it gained and lost nothing; but Tindall, Spinoza, Collins, and Bolingbroke are the ones who have taught it again to use its divine strength, and the greater its enemies and the more dangerous their weapons, the greater, the more decisive its victory."<sup>30</sup>

Unbelief is nothing but a product of corruption, according to this pamphlet: "Only those souls depraved by a wanton upbringing"; only those who were already debauched "before reading these books; only the loose heads, who always believe the last book they have read" could be affected by this literature.<sup>31</sup> This pamphlet was sophisticated, being neither anti-intellectual nor wholly anti-philosophical. In fact it cited many respected names. These so-called "strong spirits" claim to be so clever, but "Grotius, Puffendorf, Leibniz, Wolff, Locke, Neuton, Boyle, Boerhave, Haller, Hoffmann, Sulzer" were all good Christians, and "none of these has confessed their religion for fear of the Inquisition; none of these has

<sup>28</sup> Ludvig Holberg, *Selected Essays of Ludvig Holberg*, tr. P. M. Mitchell (Lawrence, 1955; repr. 1976), 37-38.

<sup>29</sup> *Bayles og Moreris Dictionaire af Magister Frølund, Kraft til Taxoe, 9 Tomer, 1757 tilhørte C A Rothe*, Folio, Thottse Samling No. 469-77.

<sup>30</sup> *Alvorlige betragtninger over den almindelige Tilstand* (Copenhagen, 1771): "Ved de Angreb, som Vanini og Brun gjorde imod den med deres sløve Vaaben i de mørkere Tider, vant og tabte den intet; men Tindal, Spinoza, Collin, Bolingbrok, disse ere det, der have laert den igien at bruge sin guddommelige Styrke, og jo større dens Fiender, jo farligere deres Vaaben blive, jo større, jo mere deciderende bliver dens Seier" (I, 14, #1, 16-17).

<sup>31</sup> "Allene de, ved en letsindig Opdragelse, fordaervede Siele, allene saadanne, som og uden disse Skrifter vilde blive lige lastefulde og ugudelige ... allene de løse Hoveder, der altid troer den sidste Bog, de læse ..." (I, 14, #1, 19).

been bribed by ecclesiastical benefice.”<sup>32</sup> Recent scholarship has established that several of these “Christians” may have been more Spinozistic than this author wanted to believe.<sup>33</sup>

*A Greenlander’s Description of Copenhagen* of the same period described how Copenhageners followed the notorious ancient Greek atheist Epicurus in his theory of atoms, which had been taken over by “a French doctor” (the infamous La Mettrie). In religion they took as their “model a Dutch Jew, Spinoza by name, who in a thick, tedious book in metaphysical Latin has attempted to prove that all of nature is only one substance and that all parts of nature are only as many modifications of it, so that all one sees in the whole of nature is equally great divinity, equally majestic, equally elevated.... According to his opinion it is the same whether one is a maggot, rabbit or hero, whale-oil, whalefish, or human.”<sup>34</sup> This author evidently knew something of the hagiographical tradition that portrayed Spinoza as a good man, because he added the point that although some readers of Spinoza “have torn themselves loose and deny all religion and who for their own reasons neither confess any sin or any punishment for the sin ... yet sometimes, which is to be complimented, live better, and show greater humanity than the rest, who pretend to believe and follow their heaven-sent book [the Bible]” but in fact do not live by it.<sup>35</sup>

A volume of pamphlets from 1771 containing thirty-seven items, most of which were prophecies and other satirical works, included four pamphlets referring to Spinoza. One of them was entitled *Dream-hall in North Scotland*. After some witticisms regarding the superiority of the German language (3-4) and professors at the university being always right (9-10), the piece went on to list the fruits of freedom of the press: “controversial writings ... project writings ...

<sup>32</sup> “Grotius, Puffendorf, Leibniz, Wolff, Locke, Neuton, Boyle, Boerhave, Haller, Hoffmann, Sulzer, ingen af disse have af Frygt for Inqvisionen bekiendt sig til Religionen; ingen af disse ere ved geistlige Beneficier bleven bestukken ...” (I, 14, #1, 24).

<sup>33</sup> See W. Klever, “Hermann Boerhaave (1668-1738) oder Spinozismus als rein mechanische Wissenschaft des Menschen,” *Spinoza in der europäischen Geistesgeschichte*, eds. Delf et al., 75-93; Stuart Brown, “Locke as Secret ‘Spinozist’: the Perspective of William Carroll” and W. Klever, “Slooke, alias Locke in Spinozistic Profile,” *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, eds. van Bunge and Klever, 213-60; and Winkle, *Die heimlichen Spinozisten*, 60, 106 n. 115.

<sup>34</sup> *En Grønlaenders Beskrivelse over Kiøbenhavn* (Copenhagen, 1771): “Disse have til Model en hollandsk Jøde, ved Navn Spinoza, som i en tyk kiaedsommelig Bog paa Metaphysik Latin har sagt at ville bevise, at heele Naturen var kun en eeneste Substantz, og at all Naturens Deelevare ikkun lige saa mange Modificationer deraf, saa at alt hvad man saae i den hele Nature, var lige stor Guddom, lige Majestaetisk, lige hoyt.... Efter dennes Meening bliver dette da det samme, enten man er Maddike, Canin eller Helt, Tran, Hvalfisk eller Menneske” (I, 14, #15, 5).

<sup>35</sup> “Disse ere nu de, som have revet sig fra, og fornaegte ald Religion, og som i Folge af deres Grunde hverken tilstaaer nogen Synd eller nogen Straf for Synden, og som dog undertiden, hvilket er det artigste, leve bedre, og viise større Menneske-Kierlighed end Resten, som giver sig ud for at troe og følge deres Himmelsendte Bog” (I, 14, #15, 5).

heretical writings ... financial writings ... Machiavellian and Spinozistic writings, of which there were a great number.”<sup>36</sup> In the same volume, *Ole Smith's Lamentation over Rice Porridge* observed that there

lived a flighty Jew-boy in Holland, who is called learned. That lout wanted to make people believe that the world has made itself, which was as damned a lie, as if I would make people believe that my [door] locks locked themselves and by themselves flew into my view. This fellow is said to have been named Spinach or Spinosa.

A French fool who let himself be called Mette [a girl's name] or Metrie, and who is also said to be horribly learned, has wanted to make people believe that all human beings are spontaneously composed of flying grains.<sup>37</sup>

The author went on to write in the same sarcastic vein that “freedom to write will do much to make us learn to think and act well. How much good the freedom to write has accomplished is shown by the incomparable works of Bayle, Leibniz, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Le Clerc, Newton, Wolff, etc., whose excellent works with irreparable damage would have been lost to the world, if the freedom to write had been stopped by a young, immature, lazy, authoritarian, or jealous glowerer.”<sup>38</sup>

Another pamphlet in the same volume was entitled *A Patriotic Conversation between a travelling Englishman and a citizen of Copenhagen held in the English coffee-house in Christianshavn*. In it the Englishman asks Heaven the rhetorical question, “What were you thinking when you gave a handful of greedy, barbarian, superstitious Spaniards permission and full power to spoil, torment, and torture such a lovely part of the world? —Did you want to make the Spinozists

<sup>36</sup> *Drømme-Sahlf i Nørre Skotland* (Copenhagen, 1771): “Strids-Skrifter ... Project-Skrifter ... Kiettermagerie-Skrifter ... Finanz-Skrifter ... Machiavellistiske, Spinosistiske Skrifter ...” (I, 15, #6, 13).

<sup>37</sup> *Ole Smedesvends begraedelse over Rissengrød* (Copenhagen, 1771): “hyr levet en forfløyen Jøde-Smaus i Holland, som man og kalder lærd. Denne Prygle har vildet bilde Folk ind, at Verden havde gjort sig selv, hvilket var lige saa forbandet en Løgn, som om jeg vilde bilde Folk ind, at mine Laase gjorde sig selv, og af sig selv fløy mig i Øinene. Denne Karl skal have hedt Spinat, eller Spinosa.

En fransk Nar, som lod sig kalde Mette eller Metrie, og som tillige kaldes graesselig lærd, har vildet bilde Folk ind, at alle Mennesker vare af sig selv sammen blaeste af flyvende Gran ...” (I, 15, #9, 7).

<sup>38</sup> The author went on to write that “Skrive-Friheden vil giøre meget til, at vi laere at taenke og handle vel ... Hvor meget got Skrive-Friheden har udrettet, vise de ulignelige Skrifter af Baile, Leibnitz, Voltaire, Montesquieu, le Clerc, Newton, Wolff ogsaa videre, hvis ypperlige Verker skulde have vaeret, til ubodelig Skade, tabt for Verden, dersom Skrive-Friheden havde vaeret standset af en ung, grøn doven, myndig, eller jaloux Gloebiest” (I, 15, #9, 14).

victorious?”<sup>39</sup> The pamphlet goes on to compare the political systems of Britain and Denmark; the only point of mentioning Spinoza is that in the author’s mind (and very likely in the readers’) a victory of his partisans would be a world-scale disaster.

A pamphlet entitled *The Greenlander Professor’s Observations about the Moon* reported that Epicurus “holds that the deity has neither salvation nor condemnation for virtues and vices; Spinoza denied all divinity and some say the same about the just-mentioned Epicurus. Some made him spiritual, some material. And isn’t it a long time ago that R. thought that he was an old dignified man with a long beard?”<sup>40</sup>

Sometime in 1771 Voltaire’s “Letter” praising the king for granting freedom of the press was published in Danish translation (I, 20, #4). It included in its appendix a selection from Voltaire’s *Philosophical Dictionary* entitled “Liberty of the Press,” another piece by Voltaire in favor of freedom of the press, and a Danish translation of David Hume’s “Of Liberty of the Press.”<sup>41</sup> There are two reasons why this probably worked against Spinozists in Denmark. One is that Voltaire himself was probably second only to Helvetius or Spinoza as an arch-heretic in many people’s minds.<sup>42</sup> The Luxdorph pamphlets often mention his work as an example of the corruption of the times.<sup>43</sup>

The other reason that Voltaire was of little use to the Spinozists was his rhetorical strategy in defending freedom of the press. In the selection from the *Philosophical Dictionary* he writes that: “Spinoza’s book is the most dangerous and harmful of them all. Not only does he, as a Jew, attack the New Testament, but as a scholar he destroys the Old. His system of atheism is more coherent and thought out a thousand times better than those of Straton and of Epicurus.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *En Patriotiske Samtale imellem en reisende Engelskmand og en Kiøbenhavske Borger holdt paa det Engelske Caffè-Huus paa Christianshavn* (Copenhagen, 1771): “O Himmel! hvad taenkte du, da du gav en Haandfuld graadige, barbariske og overtroiske Spanier Forlov og Fuldmagt, at ødelegge, pine og martrø saa elskvaerdig en Deel af Verden?—Vilde du give Spinozisterne Seier?” (I, 15, #15, 3-4).

<sup>40</sup> *Den Grønlandske Professors ... Betragtninger over Maanen*; “Epicur holder for, at Guddomen har hverken Salighed eller Fordømmelse for Dyder og Lyder;... Spinoza negtede al Guddom, og nogle sigte det samme om nysbemeldte Epicur. Nogle gjorde ham aandlig, andre legemlig. Og er det ikke meget længe siden, at R. troede, det var en gammel aervaerdig Mand med et lang Skiaeg” (I, 15, #21, 6).

<sup>41</sup> See Laursen, “David Hume and the Danish Debate about Freedom of the Press in the 1770s.”

<sup>42</sup> Bjørn Kornerup refers to Voltaire’s reputation in *Den Danske Kirkes Historie*, ed. Hal Koch and Bjørn Kornerup (Copenhagen, 1951), V, 319. See Hans Hertel, “Den frosne Spottefugl: Voltaire og hans arv i dansk aandsliv 1740-1870,” *Digiternes paryk: studier i 1700-tallet*, ed. Marianne Alenius, et al. (Copenhagen, 1997), 335-61 and John Christian Laursen, “Voltaire and Christian VII,” forthcoming.

<sup>43</sup> E.g., I, 14, #1, 18-19; I, 18, #4, 27; I, 18, #5, 16; I, 18, #6, passim.

<sup>44</sup> “Den farligste og skadeligste af alle, er den af Spinose. Han angriber ei allene som Jøde det Nye Testament, men som lærd ødelegger han det gamle; hans ateistiske Laerbygning haenger

Voltaire admits, at least for rhetorical purposes, that “I detest his book,” and this must have undermined his subsequent defense of Spinoza.<sup>45</sup>

Voltaire’s defense is that books are harmless, no matter how bad they are. “Have you noticed the shape of the world being changed by this book? Has any minister lost a Shilling of his income since the publication of Spinoza’s work? Is there a bishop whose income has diminished? On the contrary, their revenues have doubled since that time; all the trouble is limited to a small number of peaceable readers who have tested Spinoza’s arguments in their studies, and who have written for or against these very little known works.”<sup>46</sup> Added to the likely resentment caused by the satirical implication that the greatest harm caused by Spinoza’s heresies would be reflected in the income of the church, another reader’s response would have been that we see harm all around us in the form of immorality and irreligion. Voltaire could claim that books do not affect the world, but many people believed otherwise. Voltaire’s levity probably did not help the Spinozists’ public image.

After Struensee’s arrest a German-language pamphlet from early 1772 entitled *Poetical Thoughts on the Hell-Power in which Count Struensee Ruled, and would continue to rule, and also On the Futile Lying-Grounds of the Fools who say, that there is no God* included stanzas which read as follows (and were followed by more in this tone):

That they [the Jews] were dispersed out of Canaan,  
 You can probably see without glasses.  
     Is it not hellish blindness  
     What so remarkably has happened  
 And lies before the eyes of all the world  
 Is not seen by a naturalist,  
     Who is born out of Spinoza’s school  
     Who has the self-esteem of a cow  
 And delights in the animal-lust  
 That he has chosen for his treasure and heaven.

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bedre tilsammen, er bedre udtaenkt tusinde Gange end Stratens og Epicurs” (I, 20, #4, 16; French original in “Liberté d’Imprimer,” *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Paris, 1879), XIX, 586-89.

<sup>45</sup> “Jeg har Afskye for hans Bog” (I, 20, #4, 16).

<sup>46</sup> “Have I seet at denne Bog har forandret Verdens Skikkelse? Er der en Praest som har tabt en Skilling af hans Indkomster ved Afgangen af Spinoses Verk. Er der en Bisp, hvis Indtaegter ere formindskede? Tverimod, deres Indkomster have fordoblet sig siden den Tid; hele Ulykken traeffter allene et lidet Antal af fredelige Laesere, som have undersøgt Spinoses Beviis i deres Kammer, og som have skrevet for eller imod disse meget lidet bekendte Verker” (I, 20, #4, 16-17).

You dreaming naturalist  
 In your baseless false grounds  
     Oh, raving blind atheist  
     Out of base love for sins  
 You deny a true God  
 And take his Word with trumpery and scorn  
     Only for your desire's lusts  
     Which you take for your paradise  
 So that your shameful enjoyment  
 Devastates your body and soul as a tyrant.<sup>47</sup>

This piece may have been commissioned by the coup plotters—or else written by a sympathizer—in order to persuade the German-speaking population in Copenhagen (and Slesvig-Holsten) that Struensee deserved his fate.

The chief literary product of the Struensee affair was written in German by Balthasar Münter, who was appointed Struensee's spiritual advisor during his confinement in the Spring of 1772 and who claimed to have converted him to Christianity.<sup>48</sup> Münter's book, published in 1772, was a best-seller, reprinted in the original German in 1772, 1773, and 1774 (Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Leipzig editions). It was translated into Danish and Dutch in 1772, French in 1773 (Copenhagen, Paris, Lausanne), 1774 (Amsterdam) and 1838, English in 1773 (London), 1774, 1775, 1776, 1824, 1825, 1853 (Boston), and 1882, and Italian in 1848 (Florence). Münter made a great deal about all of Struensee's moral failings and bad influences without explicitly mentioning Spinoza. Either Münter deliberately tailored his story, or Struensee misled him, since, for example, he reports that Struensee knew nothing of the writings of Reimarus, which Struensee most likely knew in his time in Altona and Hamburg.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Poetische Gedanken über der Höllen-Macht, in welcher Graf Struensee Geherrscht, und ferner herrschen wollte, wie auch Über den Nichtigen Lügen-Grund der Tohren Die da Sprechen, es ist kein Gott* (Copenhagen, 1772) (II, 6, #6, 9): "Dass sie aus Canaan zerstreut, / Kanst du wohl ohne Brillen sehen, / Ist das nicht Höllische Blindheit / Was so merkwürdig ist geschehen / Und aller Welt vor Augen liegt / Sieht ein naturaliste nicht, / Der aus Spinoza Schul geboren / Der sich dem Vieh gleich acht und schätzt / Und sich in Thieren-Lust ergetzt / Die Er zu seinem Schatz, und Himmelreich erkohren. / Du träumender Naturalist / In deinen Grundloss falschen Gründen / O Rasend blinder Atheist / Aus Schnöder Liebe zu den Sünden / Verneinst Du einen wahren Gott / Und achts sein Wort für Tand und Spott / Nur bloss um deiner Wollusts Lüsten / Die Schätzt Du für dein Paradiess / Um ihrer schändlichen geniess / Thust du dein Leib und Seel, als ein Tyrann verwüsten."

<sup>48</sup> Balthasar Münter, *Bekehrungsgeschichte des vormaligen Grafen und Königlichen Dänischen geheimen Cabinetsminister Joh. Friedrich Struensee* (Copenhagen, 1772).

<sup>49</sup> Winkle, *Struensee*, 286ff.

The attitudes expressed in the pamphlets and in Münter's work are evident in the charges brought against Struensee before the emergency Inquisition Commission set up to deal with the case.<sup>50</sup> Without actually calling Struensee a Spinozist, the charges accusing him of *lèse majesté* repeatedly characterized him as lacking religion (*ingen Religion*) (137, 155), as railing against God's word, and as sharing freethinkers' sentiments (138). As evidence, the charges specifically mentioned the pamphlets carrying scurrilous attacks on Struensee! (136). This was only relevant as evidence regarding his character, and not germane to the criminal charges.

Struensee's defense was in turn vigorously argued, desperately describing religion as Struensee's only comfort in the present hard times and rejecting the prosecutor's attempts to render him odious by focusing on irrelevant character issues.<sup>51</sup> But this was really a *coup d'état*, and the foregone conclusion was that he would be declared guilty. The judgment of the Commission included reference to his "contempt for religion, morals, and good manners."<sup>52</sup>

Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* had stressed the importance of freedom of thought and speech. Nevertheless, the prevailing reaction was that Spinoza's own philosophy deserved censorship and suppression because of its alleged irreligion and its social and political consequences. It is therefore ironic that not only did his reputation constitute part of the reason for the fall of the first political actor to institutionalize one of the key instruments of freedom of thought, but that one of the reasons for that fall was the effect on public opinion of the charge of Spinozism levelled against Struensee in the very press that he had freed.

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<sup>50</sup> Hansen (ed.), *Inkvisitionskommissionen*, I, 135-66. I have translated the name of this commission literally as Inquisition Commission, although the officials surely meant something like Commission of Inquiry and did not intend to imply any association with the Holy Roman Inquisition.

<sup>51</sup> Hansen (ed.), *Inkvisitionskommissionen*, I, 175-91, at 176.

<sup>52</sup> Hansen (ed.), *Inkvisitionskommissionen*, I, 212-33, at 232.

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