

António Bento and José Maria Silva Rosa, eds. *Revisiting Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*.

Religion and Civil Society 3. Hildesheim: Olms, 2013. 340 pp. €58. ISBN: 978-3-487-14889-2.

In the foreword, the editors describe their volume as “a bunch of essays by a handful of European scholars about Spinoza’s wisdom” (5). This broad umbrella applies to a collection of diverse essays loosely organized around themes and concerns arising mainly from Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth, *TTP*) and *Tractatus Politicus* (henceforth, *TP*). The volume’s essays reflect two main approaches to Spinoza’s political writings. One group seeks to frame a horizon of meaning for these two texts from their political, social, intellectual, and religious contexts, while another group of essays is dedicated to analysis of Spinoza’s interpretive approach to biblical texts in the *TTP*.

Representative of the first group, Jaume Aurell’s opening essay, “Spinoza’s Political Theology in Context: Dutch Democratic Republicanism and Radical Enlightenment,” reads Spinoza’s political writings as firmly anchored in the historical context of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. This piece is a good choice as an opening essay for a volume of this type and is of particular use to those studying Spinoza’s political texts for the first time. A seasoned reader of Spinoza’s texts will find the most interesting part of his essay the final section

where Aurell addresses the legacies flowing out of the encounter of the *TTP* with this context. And, in fact, some may wish that Aurell had devoted more space to this part of his treatment given the nature of his insights here. Though this article sets up nicely the essays that follow, taken on its own it exhibits a shortcoming shared by some of the other essays in the volume — a tendency toward overreduction of the meaning of Spinoza's political thought to the historical context(s) of his day.

Antônio Bento's "Spinoza and the Hebrew State" is an excellent example of an essay that focuses on themes related to Spinoza's biblical hermeneutics in the *TTP*. Bento does two things in this essay. He recounts Spinoza's personal and literary relationships with influential members of Amsterdam's Jewish community. He then uses the context of Spinoza's exchanges with particular members of this community, most notably Saul Levi Morteira, as a general frame for rereading Spinoza's critique of the status of the divine election of the Jews in the *TTP*. Bento describes the background story of Spinoza's excommunication in both a very detailed and very condensed way, but then goes further, using this background as an interpretive tool for reading one of the *TTP*'s central themes — the theme of divine election.

André Tosel contributes one of the most interesting essays of the collection, "La figure du Christ et la vérité de la religion," both for its reading of the status of Christ in the *TTP* as for its description of the history of Spinoza scholarship in France over the last thirty years. Tosel here stresses the need for a fresh rereading of the *TP* and the *TTP*, especially in France; as Tosel states: "The *TTP* should be reread then as an example of the theoretical and political conflict whose aim is the constitution of free multitudes, liberated from the yoke of the theologians of today who are not ecclesiasts — far from it — but economists" (125, my translation).

Tosel's article invites us to read these texts less for their particular context than as a call to see historicity as a platform for critiquing how contemporary structures, like the market and the indebtedness of peoples, restrain the spontaneity of present-day multitudes. By approaching Spinoza's texts in this way Tosel follows Benjamin's "Theologisch-politische Fragment," reminding us of the importance of nature's Messianic character for understanding Spinoza's approach to history (or histories).

The wide-ranging nature of these essays makes this a useful volume for readers of Spinoza's political philosophy seeking to contextualize Spinoza's works historically. It also provides a useful introduction to some of the issues raised by Spinoza's interpretive approaches to the biblical texts he analyzes in the *TTP*. I do believe that the volume could have undergone a more rigorous production process. Frequent editorial mistakes and omissions sometimes render the meaning of particular passages uncertain. Still, overall, the volume proves a very accessible text sometimes, useful to a specialist audience but clearly of value to the student working through Spinoza's political works for the first time.

SEAN D. ERWIN
Barry University