

“How Hobbes got to Spinoza: A Radical Cartesian Journey”

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1. Introduction

There appear to be several Hobbesian ideas in Spinoza’s philosophy. For instance, Spinoza characterizes the state of nature as horrific, bases the social contract on the foundational principle that all things strive to preserve themselves, and argues for political absolutism. Yet unlike Hobbes, Spinoza understands self-preservation as something more than mere survival and argues for a democratic, rather than monarchical government. We are left to wonder how Spinoza came to have these Hobbesian ideas and why he altered them in such significant ways? To understand Hobbes’ influence on Spinoza, it is crucial to consider the context in which Spinoza would have read Hobbes. For while we know that he had direct access to at least some of Hobbes’ writings, he was also exposed to Hobbesian principles through a Dutch political movement with which he was intimately connected, which I will refer to as Dutch Radical Cartesianism. In the following, I will attempt to shed some light on the complexities of Spinoza’s “Hobbesism” by placing them into the Dutch Radical Cartesian context.

We know that Spinoza read Hobbes. He owned a Latin edition of *De Cive* and there is some conjecture that he may have had access to a manuscript version of the *Leviathan* translated into Dutch by Abraham van Berckel.¹ One might be tempted to

¹ Schoneveld, W. (1983), *Intertraffic of the Mind: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Translation With a Checklist of Books Translated from English to Dutch, 1600-1700*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 40

assume that Spinoza read Hobbes at some point in his philosophical career and simply adapted Hobbes' political ideas to better fit his own metaphysical and epistemological system. But this is, as they say, to put the cart before the horse. For Spinoza's particular choices about what to adopt and what to reject in Hobbes are consistent with Dutch Radical Cartesian thought, which *precedes* Spinoza's developed metaphysics and epistemology. Elsewhere I argue that *part* of Spinoza's motivation for developing the particular metaphysical and epistemological account that we find in his *Ethics* is his desire to provide a philosophical foundation for the political ideology of this movement. This paper will examine the Hobbesian elements of that political ideology, which used a combination of Cartesian and Hobbesian ideas to argue for democracy, the rule of reason, and a view of self-preservation that in its highest form, involves a knowledge of God.

Let us begin by first examining Spinoza's adaptations of Hobbesian ideas. In the second part of the paper, I will show that these adaptations are found in the writings of the Dutch Radical Cartesians, which were written earlier than Spinoza's political works.

2. The Hobbes in Spinoza

Spinoza agrees with Hobbes that in the state of nature, people have the right to do whatever is in their power. He also agrees with Hobbes that human existence in the state of nature is perilous and miserable and that therefore it is well worth the giving up of one's rights in the state of nature and agreeing to obey the laws of the state in order to gain a peace and security that is otherwise impossible. Both Spinoza and Hobbes think that the formation of the social contract, and sociability in general, stem from a most

fundamental drive to strive to preserve oneself. This striving is the basis of all human psychology and is therefore fundamental to political theory.

While Spinoza accepts these Hobbesian ideas, he cashes them out in very different ways. On Spinoza's view, people in the state of nature are ruled by the passions, which vary from person to person. To the extent that people are subject to the passions, they disagree in nature and are therefore enemies (E IV P32, 561-562 and TP 686). This results in a horrible situation where people are in constant conflict and survival is all but impossible. For this reason, Spinoza thinks that humans must unite together to form a society. It is only within the context of society that people can develop reason and overcome the passions, which for Spinoza, are the source of human bondage. The institutions and laws of the state must be set up in such a way that they make it necessary for its citizens to act as one body, to agree with each other, thus avoiding the kind of conflict found in the state of nature. A state requires that the people be guided as if by one mind and this is only possible when the state is ruled by reason.² For men agree in nature to the extent that they live according to reason. Therefore, they are most useful to each other *when* they seek their own advantage.³ A person governed by reason wants nothing for herself that she does not desire for other people.⁴ This is because the greatest good of those who seek virtue is to know God and this is a good that can be possessed equally by all people insofar as they are of the same nature.⁵ Through the governance of

² TP chap. 2, 688

³ (E IV P35 c2, 563).

⁴ (E IV P18 sch, 556).

⁵ (E IV P36 dem, 564).

reason then, people are able to come together and develop the arts, skills, and materials necessary to support and preserve themselves.⁶

On Spinoza's view, while it is ideal that *each citizen* act out of reason, it is unlikely that this could ever happen. In fact, if all people did act out from their own reason, laws would not be necessary at all.⁷ What is imperative is that people act for the common good, whether they do so from their own reason or coercion of the government (for example, from the hope of reward or, when necessary, the threat of punishment). In other words, society needs laws to control and restrain the lusts and urges of the people.⁸ In this way, people are compelled, whether they will it or not, to act in the interests of the common good.

Notice that on Spinoza's account, reason can only develop in the context of society. Therefore, the decision to leave the state of nature and join the social contract is not one made by reason. It is motivated by the desire to preserve oneself and passions associated with that desire. Hobbes' view, on the other hand, is that humans develop reason in the state of nature and use that reason to determine that joining the state of nature is the best way to preserve oneself. Of course it is important to mention that underlying this difference are very different epistemologies and accounts of reason. While Hobbes views reason as mental reckoning, that is the analyzing and synthesizing of concepts from the elements of language, Spinoza's concept of reason involves much more than the reckoning of signs, it is the comparing and contrasting of properties common to all things.

⁶ (TTP chap 5, 338).

⁷ (TTP chap. 5, 438).

⁸ (TTP chap. 5, 438).

Another point on which Hobbes and Spinoza agree is that people in the state of nature have the right to do whatever they perceive to further their self-preservation to the extent that they have the power to do so.⁹ Further they both agree that as long as people do not use reason to determine what will best preserve themselves (that is, peace or the formation of the state) they will live in a state of constant war with one another.¹⁰ However, Spinoza differs from Hobbes in not characterizing people as free in the state of nature. For Hobbes, people in the state of nature are free in the sense that they have no obligation to refrain from doing what it in their power.¹¹ For Hobbes, freedom is an absence of external impediment, in this case, laws preventing one from doing what they desire. Hobbes characterizes obligation to civil laws as ‘artificial chains’.¹² Spinoza on the other hand, does not see living according to one’s passions and inclinations as a form of liberty, but rather the worst kind of bondage. A person in the state of nature is a complete slave to his passions and therefore unable to see what is truly in his self-interest. For Spinoza, civil law is not a type of bondage to endure in order to preserve oneself. Rather, it is a necessary (but not sufficient) means to escape the chains of the passions.

A third difference between Spinoza’s and Hobbes’ philosophies is the difference between their notions of self-preservation. Hobbes is concerned with the physical preservation of the body while Spinoza is ultimately concerned with the preservation of the mind, which he sees as importantly related to knowledge of God.

⁹ (Leviathan, chapter XIV, p. 98.)

¹⁰ (Leviathan, XIII, 95).

¹¹ (Leviathan XXI, 157).

¹² (Leviathan, XXI, 159).

The “Spinozist” adaptations to Hobbes’s concepts are in Dutch Radical Cartesian writings that predate Spinoza’s *Theological Political Treatise*. Spinoza was familiar with these writings and close friends with some of the authors.

Dutch Radical Cartesianism

Radical Cartesian politics is a phenomenon unique to Holland. As its name suggests, its proponents considered themselves Cartesians and tried to apply Descartes' new philosophy to particular political problems of the day. This fact may seem surprising and even counter-intuitive; after all, one would be hard-pressed to find political philosophy within Descartes' writings. However, we should note that the term ‘Cartesian’ was often used at this time in a much broader sense, to include the New Philosophy in general, not just the particular ideas of Descartes. The Dutch Radical Cartesians consciously incorporated the ideas of *many* thinkers, especially Hobbes. They took an eclectic approach to fighting the traditional Aristotelian, Calvinistic, and humanistic political theory taught in the Dutch schools. Their ‘Cartesianism’ is actually a particular mixture of ideas from both Descartes and Hobbes. From Descartes they derive a commitment to understanding the psychology of the passions and the conviction that the passions can and ought to be kept in line with reason. The most important idea taken from Hobbes is that the drive for self-preservation is universal and fundamental to an understanding of human society. However, they understand this drive in terms that go beyond mere physical or material survival and understand the ultimate self-interest as preservation of the soul. While they appealed to philosophical theories, their aim was of a practical nature, namely to support De Witt's republican leadership, to try to prevent the

reinstatement of stadholder-rule and to argue for religious and philosophical tolerance. They were not only against monarchy [and they saw the role of Stadholder as monarchical], many of them even went so far as to argue for democracy. Their writings were rarely systematic and were often written in the form of Dutch pamphlets meant to persuade the people. Today I will focus on three voices within Dutch Radical Cartesianism: Lambertus van Velthuysen, the De la Court brothers, and Fransiscus van den Enden. Spinoza owned works by both van Velthuysen and the De la Courts. Further he was a correspondent with van Velthuysen and a close associate of Van den Enden's.

The beginnings of Radical Cartesian politics are found in the writings of Lambertus van Velthuysen. Van Velthuysen was a physician, Utrecht politician, and a devout Calvinist in the Walloon (or Belgian) Church. Van Velthuysen was dedicated to showing that the New Philosophy was consistent with the Reformed faith and to applying the New Philosophy, especially the ideas of Descartes and Hobbes, to politics. He was largely responsible for bringing the debates about Cartesianism taking place in the universities to the public's attention, and more importantly for the purposes of this paper, Van Velthuysen was the first in The Netherlands to publish a reaction to Hobbes writing.¹³ There are two factors that contribute to his willingness and ability to defend Cartesianism and the highly unpopular ideas of Hobbes. First, he was not a professor and therefore was not limited by the many edicts restricting what could be taught in the universities.¹⁴ Second, as a member of the Walloon congregation, he was not subject to the jurisdiction of the Dutch Reformed council. In this way, he doubly escaped the oppressive power of his opponent, Gisbertus Voetius. However, when members of

¹³ Schoneveld *Intertraffic of the Mind*, p 36.

¹⁴ Verbeek, T. (1997), 'La Philosophie Cartesienne à travers la littérature pamphletaire.' *XVIIe Siecle* 196 no. 2, 240.

Voetius' Second Reformation began to question Van Velthuysen's faith, he felt compelled to dissociate himself from the Dutch Radical Cartesian movement. He was highly distressed that other Radical Cartesians, Spinoza in particular, had used principles from his own writings to draw conclusions that went against his orthodox beliefs. He dedicated the latter part of his career to arguing against what he saw as their atheistic conclusions.

Johan and Pieter De la Court represent a new chapter in Dutch political theory. They were businessmen, members of the States-Party, and strong supporters of De Witt's Republican government. Johan was a political theorist who opposed the Aristotelian and humanist political tradition taught at the schools. He offered an alternative approach that was influenced by Hobbes, Descartes, and Machiavelli and yet had democratic leanings. We don't know many particulars about Johan's life other than that he died young and his brother Pieter (1618-1685) later edited and published his writings. Pieter left his brother's words in tact, but added many details and polemics, turning Johan's theoretical treatises into political pamphlets. It is difficult to separate the ideas of the brothers and for the purposes of this paper, I will treat them as one voice. They do not base their theories on classical authorities like Aristotle or their Christian interpreters.¹⁵ Rather, they found it on an understanding of human nature that, like van Velthuysen's writings, combined elements from the new philosophies of Hobbes and Descartes. Their writings were neither systematic nor theoretical in nature, and yet, they present all the major political ideas that will become parts of Spinoza's politics. Their writings had a very practical aim, they wanted to justify De Witt's regime and to make policy recommendations for reform.¹⁶

¹⁵ Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, p. 28.

¹⁶ Prokhovnik, R. (2004), *Spinoza and Republicanism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 97.

Franciscus van den Enden was a close associate of Spinoza's and a leading figure of what has come to be known as the Amsterdam Circle. The Amsterdam Circle was a group of educated Cartesians, mostly academics from the Medical faculty at the University of Leiden, which, at least in the beginning, centered around Franciscus Van den Enden and his school. Van den Enden's school served as an alternative to the conservative Reformed schools of the day. Here students learned Latin, classical literature and philosophy, as well as the New Philosophy and Science. We know that Spinoza was living with Van den Enden by 1656 and that he earned his keep by teaching. Further we know that Van den Enden taught Spinoza Latin and introduced him to the works of Grotius, Machiavelli and Hobbes.¹⁷

Van den Enden was interested in and involved in the political life of Holland. This interest precedes his opening of the school, for he was publishing and printing political pamphlets as early as 1650¹⁸ and fulfilled several political missions during the 1650's.¹⁹ This interest in politics continued into the next decade. For example, in 1662 he wrote a letter to De Witt with suggestions for improving the effectiveness of Dutch ships in war.²⁰ A year earlier, van den Enden was approached by a group, led by Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy, wishing to form a democratic colony based on Collegiant principles in the New Netherlands (on a section of land along the Delaware River). Van den Enden wrote a series of letters to the city of Amsterdam on their behalf from October 1661 to May 1662. These seven letters, one including a proposal for the colony's constitution,

¹⁷ Nadler, *Spinoza: A life*. p.111.

¹⁸ Titled *Korte verthoeninghe van het recht by den ridderschap, edelen ende steden van Hollandt ende West-Vrieslant* (Short exposition of the Right of the knighthood, patricians and states of Holland and West Friesland.)

¹⁹ Klever, M. (1991), 'A New Source of Spinozism: Franciscus van den Enden,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 no. 4, 628.

²⁰ Nadler, *Spinoza: A life*, p.105.

were published together with an introduction to the land in question and a critique of the Aristocratic nature of the current Dutch government. This work was published in 1662 and titled *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlandts* (A Short Narrative of the New Netherlands). The colony was founded in 1663 but only survived for a year, after which it, along with the rest of the New Netherlands, became New England. During this time, Van den Enden was also working on his second main political work, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen* (The Free Political Propositions),²¹ which was published in 1665.²² He remained interested in politics for the remainder of his life. From 1665-67 he attempted, unsuccessfully, to sell a secret naval weapon to De Witt.²³ In the early 1670's he moved to France where he was involved in a plot to overthrow the monarchy.

Hobbes in Van Velthuysen

Van Velthuysen's first publication, the *Epistolica dissertatio* introduced Hobbes to the Dutch Republic. While its full title (see handout 3a) suggests that it is an apology for Hobbes, this is not the case. While it is very sympathetic with Hobbes' philosophy, the work actually presents van Velthuysen's own views, which were influenced by the English philosopher. Van Velthuysen agrees with Hobbes that the principle drive of every person is self-preservation, but he understands this drive to be a moral duty proscribed by natural law within a teleological system. According to van Velthuysen, God created the world, humans in particular, for some purpose. In doing so, He also

²¹ The full title is *Vrye Politijke Stellingen, en Consideratien van Staat, gedaen na der ware christenens even gelijke vryheits grondern; strekkended tot een rechtschape, en ware verbeteringh van staat, en kerk* (The Free Political Propositions and Considerations of the State, done after the true Christian principles of even equal freedom, serving to a just and true improvement of state and church).

²² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* p. 174.

²³ Van Bunge, W., H. Krop, B. Leeuwenburgh, H. van Ruler, P. Schuurman, and M. Wielema (eds.), (2003), *The Dictionary of Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Dutch Philosophers*, Volume 1. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, s.v. 'Enden, Franciscus van den (1602-74)' by F. Mertens, p. 297.

willed the means necessary to that end, those means being reason and the natural appetites that are part of human nature. Therefore, humans are completely justified in using these means. People have the natural right to defend themselves and their property as well as the right to punish those who injure them. However, they do not have the right to take away the natural (God-given) rights of others. To do so would be unjust in that it goes against God's purpose in the world.²⁴

For van Velthuysen, self-preservation is the basis of morality²⁵ and particular moral rules are deduced from this fundamental law of human nature.²⁶ This natural instinct is universal and is therefore a moral guide that is accessible to people of any faith.²⁷ It does not depend on Scripture (or any particular interpretation of it.) In this way, van Velthuysen moves morality from the realm of theology to that of natural philosophy. This teleological egoism will become the basis of his arguments for religious tolerance and philosophical freedom.

Religious freedom is important for both the welfare of the people and the security of the state. Therefore, the sovereign must not be empowered to take it away.²⁸ Every subject has the right to withhold obedience to the ruler if such obedience jeopardizes his own salvation.²⁹ After all, salvation is the ultimate goal of the fundamental drive to self-preservation, the very drive that holds the state together. This idea combines Hobbes' egoism with the Dutch spirit of resistance born out of the revolt against Spanish rule.

²⁴ Van Velthuysen, L. (1995), Des principes du juste et du convenable: Une apologie du De Cive de Hobbes (1651-1680), Catherine Secretan (trans.) Caen: Université de Caen, pp. 68-70.

²⁵ Van Velthuysen, Des principes du juste et du convenable, p. 55.

²⁶ Secretan, C. (1999), 'Une Moral Pour le Siecle d' Or Hollandaise: Le Traite de Principes du Juste et du Convenable (1651) de Lambert van Velthuysen'. Bulletin de la Societé de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français 145 no. 1, p. 17.

²⁷ Van Velthuysen, Des principes du juste et du convenable, p. 67.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124-5.

²⁹ Kossman, Political Thought in the Dutch Republic, p.15.

Another consequence of van Velthuysen's approach is that it shows that a utilitarian perspective does not contradict Christian morality. This move makes permissible many merchant activities traditionally condemned by the Reformed Church, such as speculation.³⁰

Self-preservation plays a central role in van Velthuysen's political theory as well. It is the basis of sociability because one helps another best by helping oneself. While there is an element of Hobbes social contract here, van Velthuysen's political philosophy is importantly different. First, van Velthuysen's notion of self-preservation goes beyond mere physical survival—he is concerned with the wellbeing of the soul. He links self-preservation with reaching the knowledge of the order of the world, which one calls 'Divine Will' or 'Providence'. This knowledge can be acquired through reason or through revelation.³¹ Second, while van Velthuysen believes that a sovereign was necessary to maintain the proper functioning of the state, he thought that a sovereign body could do this better than an individual ruler because a sovereign body can better accommodate the divergent needs of the people.³² Third, he does not agree with Hobbes that the transference of rights to the ruler should be absolute or that power is in essence indivisible.³³

Hobbes in the De la Court Brothers

³⁰ Secretan, 'Une Moral Pour le Siecle d' Or Hollandaise', 21-24.

³¹ Ibid., 17-20.

³² Blom, H.W. (1995), *Causality and Morality in Politics*. Utrecht: University of Utrecht, p. 191.

³³ Schoneveld, W. (1983), *Intertraffic of the Mind: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Anglo-Dutch Translation With a Checklist of Books Translated from English to Dutch, 1600-1700*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, p. 37.

The De la Court brothers came by Hobbes in the same way they came by Descartes, through their teacher and brother-in-law Heereboord. In the 1660's, Hobbes had more influence in Leiden than in van Velthuysen's Utrecht. Heereboord and his fellow Leiden professor Johannes De Raey were very interested in Hobbes' philosophy and passed this interest on to their students.³⁴

There are two common Hobbesian themes found throughout De la Courts' writings: absolutism and the view that self-interest is the primary motivation of humans and therefore foundational to political theory. While the De la Courts takes some fundamental elements of absolutism and self-preservation from Hobbes' philosophy; they use these elements to draw very different conclusions.

De la Court was a political absolutist in two senses. He denied that people had the right or power to do anything other than obey the lawful rulers and he argued against mixed government. In other words, he rejected any constitution that combined monarchical, aristocratic, and/or democratic elements. De la Court agreed with Hobbes that sovereign power must be indivisible or the disintegration of the body politic would follow.³⁵ Take, for instance, the need of a state to enter into treaties with foreign powers. In order for such treaties to work, it must be clearly stipulated who will maintain that treaty, whether it is one person (monarchy), a small assembly (aristocracy) or everybody (democracy).³⁶

When we consider their Dutch context, it is not so surprising that the De la Courts used Hobbesian absolutism to argue *against* monarchy. The De la Courts' goal was to show how the Dutch Republic should be governed without a stadholder. They

³⁴ Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, p. 37.

³⁵ Velema, "That a Republic is Better than a Monarchy", p. 15.

³⁶ De la Court, *Consideratien van Staat*, pp.23-26.

characterized stadholder-rule as a monarchical element that functioned alongside and above the aristocratic and democratic elements found in the States General and the States of Holland. They reject such mixed rule out of hand. It was their opponents—the Orangists—who associated themselves with mixed republicanism, in order to distinguish their view from both oppressive monarchies and “stubborn regents”.³⁷

The De la Courts also used natural law arguments against monarchy. Humans are equal in nature. Nobody is made to rule or to be ruled. He concludes from this that democracy is the most legitimate form of government. For a government that is ruled by one or a few is only legitimate if all of the people have given that power to them. While it is conceivable that a democracy would entrust power to a few, it would never give it to one man and his descendents. The origins of monarchy could only be violence and fraud.³⁸ Further, democracy is the most natural, rational, and equitable form of government. Since everyone pursues his own interests, when the majority supports a decision, it is because the majority of people have concluded that that decision is in his own interests. Such a decision will necessarily result in a decision that is in the interest of the people as a whole.³⁹

At the time, most people felt that democracy was an uncertain and unreliable form of government because it was subject to the whims of an immature and irrational populace. The De la Courts agreed that the masses were ignorant, but they believed this ignorance was a result of poverty and lack of education. Since humans are equal in nature and the intellectual potential between individuals did not vary greatly, such ignorance

³⁷ Blom, *Causality and Morality in Politics*, p. 52.

³⁸ De la Court, *Consideratien van Staat*, pp. 36-39.

³⁹ Kossman, *Political Thought in the Dutch Republic*, p. 69.

could be overcome with prosperity and education.⁴⁰ That is not to say that the De la Courts were arguing that Holland should become a popular democracy. They were not looking to destroy the current government and start over. Rather, they were trying to interpret Dutch tradition and the Union of Utrecht, which served as a vague constitution, as advocating an aristocratic form of government. The De la Courts' arguments for democracy should be seen as 1) part of their argument against monarchy / stadholder rule and 2) part of his attempt to break up the regents oligarchy that was gaining power in Holland. The De la Courts felt the need to point out that aristocracy led by the regent class is only legitimate *because* it serves the needs of the people. This perspective guides their arguments against the guilds and monopolies of the regents and in favor of free trade.⁴¹

The De la Courts use the Hobbesian notion of self-interest to argue for economic and religious freedoms. Like Hobbes, the De la Courts accept the view that self-interest is the dominant natural drive in human nature. Further, they agree with Hobbes that sociability derives from this egoistic drive. In the state of nature people live in a perpetual state of war and in constant fear of each other. The state of nature is so bad that it is worse than living in the worst kind of state.⁴² Anyone living in the state of nature therefore desires to leave it and does so by joining in the social contract. Society therefore arises because of the self-interested desire of individuals to escape the state of nature.

Humans continue to be driven by self-interest, so the only way for society to keep from slipping back into the state of nature is to be set up in such a way that the interests

⁴⁰ Kossman, *Political Thought in the Dutch Republic*, p. 69.

⁴¹ De la Court, *The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republic of Holland and West-Friesland*. pp. 60-61.

⁴² De la Court, *Consideratien van Staat*, pp. 13-23.

of all members of the state, including the ruling elite, be linked by common interest. The *Interest of Holland* argues that under De Witt's rule (see quote #1), “the inhabitants of Holland, being in a state of freedom, are by a common interest wonderfully linked together....”⁴³ The De la Courts understand the common interest largely in economic terms. They point out that Holland is a populous province that supports itself on fishing and trade. It is in the interest of both the people and the rulers (who are merchants) to have a large population with profitable occupations and thriving markets.⁴⁴ They describe the situation as follows (see quote #2):

One man being a god to another under a good land, that there are so many people in it, who according to the nature of the country are honestly maintain'd by such suitable or proportionable means, and especially that the welfare of all the inhabitants (the idle gentry, and foreign soldiers excepted) from the least to the greatest, does so necessarily depend on one another: and above all, it is chiefly considerable, that there are none more really interested in the prosperity of this country than the rulers of the aristocratical government, and the persons that live on their estates.⁴⁵

The reason that the current republic works so well is that the well- or ill-being of the rulers depends on or is joined with the well- or ill-being of the fisherman, the manufactures, and those that convey those goods by land and sea.⁴⁶ This joining of interests happens in two different ways. First, the rulers in Holland cannot support themselves on wages from their official positions. They therefore must rely on other means of support, such as fisheries, etc. Second, even those that are independently wealthy are interested in fisheries and trade because that is how their families acquired

⁴³ De la Court, *The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republick of Holland and West-Friesland*. p. 31.

⁴⁴ Blom, *Causality and Morality in Politics*, p. 91.

⁴⁵ De la Court, *The True Interest and Political Maxims of the Republick of Holland and West-Friesland*. p. 36.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

the money and they want to marry their children to rich merchants. In these two ways the prosperity of Holland benefits its republican rulers.⁴⁷

This work was written during the height of the Dutch Golden Age. Holland had never seen such prosperity and the De la Courts warned that this happy situation could be ruined by one mistake in government (see quote #3):

However, this excellent and laudable harmony and union may be violated, even to the ruin of all the inhabitants, none excepted but courtiers and soldiers, and that by one sole mistake in government, which is the electing one supreme head over these inhabitants, or over their armies....God preserve Holland from the fury of a monarch, prince, or one supreme head.⁴⁸

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

Anyone who has read Spinoza's political works will recognize many of Spinoza's ideas in the pamphlets of van Velthuysen and the De la Courts. We must remember that these pamphlets were published eight to nineteen years *before* Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise*. (The TTP was written between 1650-1670 and published in 1670). These ideas were circulating in Holland and were of particular interest to Van den Enden, Spinoza's close associate.

Hobbes in Van den Enden

Van den Enden read⁴⁹ and was inspired by the De la Courts' writings but he felt that they did not go far enough. Like the De la Courts, Van den Enden thinks that the passions and self-interest are the driving force of politics and that religious and

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 318-320.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁹ Mertens, F. (1994), 'Franciscus van Den Enden: Tijd Voor Een Herziening Van Diens Rol in Het Ontstaan van Het Spinozisme?' *Tijdschrift voor filosofie* 56 no. 4, 720.

philosophical freedoms are necessary for a well-run state. While Van den Enden appreciates the De la Courts' arguments against monarchy, he does not feel that the De la Courts went far enough in the direction of democracy and equality. This is a key difference between the De la Courts and Van den Enden. The former spends a great deal of time providing arguments against monarchy, while the latter focuses on providing what he sees as the necessary preconditions for overcoming monarchy (as Jonathan Israel lists them in *Radical Enlightenment*): "reforming education, advancing equality, and enlightening the people."⁵⁰

In his work, the *Free Political Propositions*, Van den Enden describes the common best, or the well-being of a people as a whole, as nothing more than the mathematical sum or aggregate of each individual's particular best interest.⁵¹ Further, the will of the people as a whole will necessarily be what is in the true best interest of the state.⁵² There are two important aspects of Van den Enden's notion of common best: 1) equality of all people, that is, no one person's interest is to weigh higher than any one else's and 2) the form of government that best yields the common best is a democracy.

All individuals are driven by passions and self-interest. These drives naturally lead people to mutual sociability. This occurs first from their basic needs and their desire of comfort, but later involves the enjoyment of enhanced pleasures that are only available within a community. In the state of nature, people are equal and free, but are unable to meet their needs and desire. Self-interest naturally leads individuals to form the

⁵⁰ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p.176.

⁵¹ Van den Enden, F. (1665), *Vrye Poltijke Stellingen, en Consideratien van Staat, gedaen na der ware christenens even gelijke vryheits gronden; strekkended tot een rechtschape, en ware verbeteringh van staat, en kerk*. Amsterdam, p. 6.

⁵² Van den Enden, F. (1665), *Vrye Poltijke Stellingen, en Consideratien van Staat, gedaen na der ware christenens even gelijke vryheits gronden; strekkended tot een rechtschape, en ware verbeteringh van staat, en kerk*. Amsterdam, p. 6.

commonwealth, which Van den Enden defines as an association of people, based on the foundation of equal liberty, which incorporates laws so that each member will not be weakened but strengthened through the common benefit.⁵³ In joining the common wealth, individuals do not give up their equality. On the contrary, a good commonwealth takes great measures to ensure the equality of its people. In fact, the first article of Van den Enden's constitution states that (see quote #4):

The principle basis or foundation for this society will be an equality for which purpose every man over 24 years of age who wishes to enter the society must seriously and earnestly promise that he will never strive for any special power, nor will allow anyone else to make the least efforts in that direction, but resist this with all possible means.⁵⁴

Since each individual is driven by passions and self-interest, care must be taken in the state to ensure that no individual attempts to supersede the will of the people, that is, to create inequality. Public affairs must be arranged so that it is very difficult for any member to profit at the disadvantage of the community.⁵⁵ Further, the state must institute countermeasures so that appointed leaders, out of fear of personal harm, will not become arrogant or violent against the will of the people.⁵⁶ On penalty of death, laws must forbid people from acting or teaching anything contrary to the equality between citizens and common best as the people's council determines it to be.⁵⁷

⁵³ Van den Enden, Vrye Poltijke Stellingen, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Van den Enden (1665), Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants Geleentheit, Deughden, Natuerlijke Voorrechten, en byzondere bequemheid ter bevolkingh: Mitsgaders eenige Requesten, Vertoogen, Deductien. Amsterdam, p. 50; English translation from Leland and Harder, Plockhoy from Zurik-zee: The Study of a Dutch Reformer in Puritan England and Colonial America. Newton: Kansas, 1952, p.189. (The latter work mistakenly attributes the KVNN to Plockhoy).

⁵⁵ Van den Enden, Vrye Poltijke Stellingen, p.16.

⁵⁶ Van den Enden, Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants pp. 31 and 35; Klever, 'A New Source of Spinozism,' p. 624.

⁵⁷ Klever, The Sphinx, p. 150.

Van den Enden denies the possibility that an individual might know the interest of the state better than the collective wisdom of the people.⁵⁸ (see quote #5)

...for the people's best there can't be shown or given any more faithful advice nor any more certain judgment and decision than the ordinary deliberation, judgment and resolution of the people itself. And for which reason it will everywhere appear to be clear and true that the voice of the people for the same people truly has to be in full considered and hold for the voice of God.⁵⁹

Perhaps what is most striking about Van den Enden's notion of equality is how far he extended it, much further than De la Court before him or Spinoza after him (see quote #6):

I therefore understand, on the foregoing basis of equal liberty, the common best of a community of people to include a correspondingly equal measure of orders, laws and mutual help between more or less reasonable, more or less well-to-do people, male and female, parents and children, servants and served or ruler and ruled, as discovered through reason and experience.⁶⁰

All people, despite the variations in intelligence, social status, and gender have equal rights. Van den Enden condemns the current situation in The Netherlands where, in his view, the magistrates manipulate poor and simple people and neglect their interests.⁶¹ In the current Stadholderless government, as in De la Court's writings, the interest of the state has come to mean the interest of the merchants, not of the people as a whole. A government of the few leads to the disadvantages of the many. Such an aristocracy could never maintain the natural equality of people. A true democracy is needed.

The natural place of power and judgment concerning the common best is the citizens themselves. We should note that Van den Enden is not talking about a

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Van den Enden, *Vrye Poltijke Stellingen*, p.17; English translation from Klever, Sphinx, p. 152.

⁶⁰ Van den Enden, *Vrye Poltijke Stellingen*, p. 5; English translation in Gullen Whur, pp. 130-1. The same sentiments are expressed in Van den Enden, *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants*, pp. 30-31.

⁶¹ Klever, W. 'Conflicting "Consideration of State,"' p. 9.

representative democracy, but rather a state where citizens themselves run local government. His constitution provides that public servants should be elected by the colonists (i.e., by free men twenty-four years of age who have no debt to the community).⁶² The elected officials are to work under the supervision and control of the citizens. Further, all laws and ordinances are to be enacted by a two-thirds written vote.⁶³

Like the De la Courts, Van den Enden is very critical of mixed government. Monarchy and aristocracy both have a character that violates freedom, they clash with the power of the people. Pure democracy, on the other hand, “when not roguishly and slyly undermined by a variant of monarchy and aristocracy” only perishes from external causes.⁶⁴ Further, mixed government legitimizes the dominance of some citizens over others, as though some are determined by nature to be masters.⁶⁵ Like the De la Courts, Van den Enden considered it dangerous to have power in the hands a few who will be easily corruptible, and if not tempered by a power of the people, tend toward their own personal desires (see quote #7):

All bodies political which are infected with some kind of high authority, let alone above the authority of the people, are to my judgment, for the above mentioned reason and on account of the natural and essential insatiableness of the human desires afflicted with a languishing moral disease.⁶⁶

When a mixed government appears to do well, it is on account of the democratic element and in spite of the monarchic and aristocratic ones.⁶⁷

⁶² Van den Enden, *Kort Verhael van Nieuw-Nederlants*, p.52 (article 11).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 51 (article 5).

⁶⁴ Klever, W. (2001), ‘Imperium Aeternum. Spinoza's Critique of Machiavelli and Its Source in van Den Enden’. *Foglio Spinoziano*, [Online] Available at: <http://www.fogliospinoziano.it/artic14.htm>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Van den Enden, *Vrye Poltijke Stellingen*, p. 167; English translation in Klever, *Imperium Aeternum*, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Van den Enden, *Vrye Poltijke Stellingen*, p. 163.

Conclusion

We have seen that while elements of Hobbes' political philosophy become central for that of Spinoza's, Spinoza significantly alters these elements. I hope that by providing some instances of similar alterations of Hobbes ideas that are found within the Dutch Radical Cartesian politics, I have provided some context for understanding Spinoza's work. Spinoza was very much influenced by these views. Examining this context shows us that Spinoza's adaptations of Hobbes' ideas was not so original. His contribution was, rather, to provide them with philosophical foundations and place them within a philosophical system.

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