

Transcript

Introduction by Dan Taylor

Dan Taylor:

Hello, my name is Dan Taylor. I'm a Lecturer in Social and Political Thought at The Open University. Now in March 2021 I co-organized a conference titled "Spinoza's TTP: Politics, Power and the Imagination". My co-organizer was Marie Wuth at the University of Aberdeen. Our conference marked the passing of the 350th anniversary of the TTP and it was gratefully supported by the British Society for the History of Philosophy. In this short video I'm going to introduce the TTP and a little bit about the conference as part of this webpage of recordings

In 1670 Spinoza published the "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus" - which is a long name, we'll call it the TTP; in English it's the "Theological-Political Treatise". In 1670, Spinoza published the TTP anonymously under a false imprint. Written in Latin the book set out to defend the freedom to philosophize in the Dutch Republic. But it did much more than that. Spinoza set out in a way never done before to undertake an historical and philosophical analysis of the nature of religious belief and politics. Spinoza argued that prophecy was an inadequate form of knowledge, but in the right hands a socially useful one. He argued that miracles were impossible. He argued that the first five books of the bible, the Pentateuch, were not written by Moses but probably by the scribe Ezra. Spinoza set out to naturalize religion, and in the process, he scandalized a heavily religious European society of his time. One contemporary called the TTP a book "forged in hell by the devil himself".

Yet the TTP also sets out to restore the value of religion, arguing that the truth of prophecy and religious scripture lies in its ability to teach us socially useful lessons about how to live well together in a peaceful, cooperative fashion. Spinoza makes bold arguments for democracy, free speech and toleration. He re-establishes the Hobbesian state of nature and social contract, but he presents it in terms of a fear of solitude and a need to cooperate in order to survive.

Now, even up to the year 1994 the master translator of Spinoza in English Edwin Curley described the TTP as a 'forgotten masterpiece'. In the last 25-30 years things have fortunately changed a lot. There's been a flourishing of scholarship in Spinoza's politics. The rationale for our conference was to bring together leading and new scholars looking at the TTP. We are very fortunate to bring together researchers working from across Europe, North America, South America, even Asia and Australia. On this conference web page, you can download the program. You can look at abstracts and you can also watch most of the presentations that we recorded. I'll now give you a short outline of what these presentations are.

Our conference began with Antonio Salgado Borge and Emanuele Costa looking at the concepts of nature and prophecy in the TTP respectively. Jimena Solé gave a wonderful longer outline of how the TTP brings together politics and philosophy in this unusual link between truth and obedience. I join Mogens Laerke and Martin Saar to discuss democracy, the imagination and public reasoning. Then we have Beth Lord giving us a wonderful keynote on Spinoza and Hobbes's concepts of equality. We also had a number of papers looking at possible influences and legacies of the TTP. Demetris Vardoulakis explored the possible influence of Hermarchus, a now- overlooked Epicurean philosopher in terms of Spinoza's account of social formation. Ahmad Bostani and Matthieu Angevin looked at the

possible influences of Al-Farabi and Hippocrates respectively. Yifan Song looked at the philosophy of action in Moses Hess and Karl Marx to think about a possible connection with Spinoza there.

We were also very keen to develop and explore new approaches to this classic text so Ki-m Young Kim and Gil Morejon both gave new readings of classic problems in the TTP on the status of miracles and the universal faith. Steph Marston meanwhile looked at modern theories of rebellion and recognition to look at politics of collective identity and power. Nicolas Lema Habash drew on Walter Benjamin to explore a concept of sovereign interruption in the TTP. And Marie Wuth gave a barnstorming paper on hatred and collective identities in the TTP with some fascinating comparisons to George Orwell's 1984. Our last keynote was given by Hasana Sharp. She drew widely on Terence and broader concepts of political domination to think about the interconnections between truth, lies and power. Overall, we hope that you will enjoy these recordings as much as we did at the conference.