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The Hyphen in the Theological-Political: Spinoza to Mendelssohn, Heine, and Derrida

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Abstract: Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* introduced the unique catchphrase of the theological-political. While commanding popular currency, the full implications of the phrase is rarely considered in terms of modern Jewish thought. This paper examines how paying close attention to the hyphen helps us better understand the critical role of the hyphen in Spinoza and its significance for Mendelssohn, Heine, and Derrida's critical agenda of rethinking the theological-political.

Keywords: hyphen; theological-political; Spinoza; Moses Mendelssohn; Heinrich Heine; Derrida

In modernity, whether Judaism qualifies as a religion, or more pointedly, how Judaism fares when considered as a religion has been an uneasy question, at least as far as the Jewish experience is concerned. With the invention of the concept of religion in early modernity, Jewish existence was put in a precarious situation. In the wake of the reformation, the Westphalian peace formalized the process of confessionalization transforming religion into a political category. More exactly, with the birth of the Westphalian state and its understanding that religion, rather than a living tradition, was an article that could be trucked, bartered, or exchanged like any other property, the question of conforming with the concept of religion became politically a matter of confessionalization. In this paper, I argue that Spinoza's use of the hyphen in the phrase "theological-political" marks the erasure through which the modern, confessionalized concept of religion emerges. The hyphen and its different iterations in authors such as Mendelssohn, Heine, and Derrida allows modern Jewish thought to resist the conceptual erasure as it critically reinscribes Jewish tradition at the interface whose suppression the hyphen indicates.

Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* confronts the reader with a hermeneutic challenge already with its title. But the title does so in a seemingly innocuous and silent way by employing a sign that remains unspoken yet marks the fundamental nexus the book examines and demarcates: the problem of the relationship that the hyphen stakes out between the Theological and the Political.

As strong and divided as the reception of this deeply controversial book was, its most radical message, hidden in plain sight, seemed to bypass scrutiny. For all to see right on the title page, the hyphen became at the same time the silent symbol and reminder of the blind spot shared by both those who denounced this book as monstrous product of evil and those who celebrated it as modern breakthrough to a new understanding of religiosity. Resistant to hermeneutic assimilation, the hyphen expressed the problem of a nexus that would define the challenge of modernity in such a profound manner it remained a risk to spell it out in explicit terms. Representing modernity's challenge to renegotiate the terms of the nexus between the Theological and the Political the hyphen came to visualize both the urgent need to rethink this relationship and the blindness to this urgency as the sign seemed to remain confined to the silence of the unspoken it signaled. Glossed over if not completely ignored, the hyphen's critical significance returns however with undiminished force today as current concerns about the postsecular condition return the hyphen's critical thrust with the force of the repressed.

Addressing the hyphen in the title of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* becomes a critical task and not just in the context of Jewish tradition. The issues the hyphen raises point well beyond the confines of Jewish thought and tradition. The need to reimagine the relationship between the Theological and Political has assumed new urgency at the current juncture where the postsecular presents more than just a relapse into premodern forms of theological—or for that matter political—thinking.

While Spinoza's hyphen seems to have eluded wider attention, it plays a central role in the thought of Jewish philosophers from Mendelssohn to the present. In fact, the tradition of modern Jewish thought suggests that the hyphen has served as a critical catalyst for negotiating Jewish tradition in the face of the double bind of the secular and theological challenges of modernity. In this paper, I will focus on a few instances that represent different approaches to negotiating this challenge that highlight Spinoza's critical significance for modern Jewish thought's response of rethinking modernity differently.

Moses Mendelssohn, Heinrich Heine, and Jacques Derrida are all strong readers of Spinoza. Their thought profoundly resonates with Spinoza and it is especially through the interventions of Mendelssohn and Heine that rendering Spinoza's hyphen legible becomes a central part and fixture in modern Jewish thought.¹ It is indicative that the first *History of the Philosophy of Judaism* squarely identifies Spinoza's thought as the blueprint of Jewish thought. While its author Julius Spiegler does not address the question of the hyphen in explicit terms, his account reflects its critical purchase in eloquent fashion as he argues for the significance of Jewish thought's contribution for philosophy (Spiegler 1890).

Let us then explore what appears at first as a simple connecting line and punctuation mark: the hyphen in the Theological-Political. It seems curious that while the label "theological-political" has assumed near-universal currency, the genealogy of the term has remained a one-stop affair that has decontextualized Spinoza where the issue has received any consideration at all. Recent efforts at revisiting the problem of secularization theories in the face of the (re-)emergence of the postsecular are marked by a striking absence of any attention to the particular way in which Spinoza introduced and theorized the hyphenated double term.² As we know, Spinoza wrote a whole treatise about this. But somehow along the way, it seems to have been forgotten that Spinoza's odd oppositional coupling presents a complex figuration subversively suggestive of that other famous comedic coupling by Cervantes, i.e., Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

In Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*, the hyphen indicates the pressure point where the "Theological" and the "Political" collide and mark their difference. The hyphen functions to combine two incompatible if not contradictory terms into a double term while it highlights at the same time the uneasy tension between them. The "Theological" and the "Political" emerge thus as deeply intertwined and yet profoundly conflicting terms. The hyphen demarcates the contested no-man's land in between the two opposites that unites and divides them: the silent, unspoken sign that paradoxically interconnects what is otherwise so disparate. But the hyphen also marks the difficult and contested territory where Jewish thinkers find themselves, as it were, written out, excluded, and disenfranchised. The hapax legomenon, i.e., the singular occurrence of the double term "Theological-Political" which occurs only this one time in its title, presents a hermeneutic challenge that poses the question of interpretation in open and direct fashion. It seems curious that a treatise devoted to rethinking the basic function of interpretation and hermeneutics, a book that sets out to examine the tenets of theological and political claims of his time, introduces the unique coinage of its title's hyphenated double term only to pass it over in silence: the explanandum—what needs to be explained—to which the treatise as a whole suggests answers to those readers attentive to the critical gesture of the unspoken

¹ For this point see (Goetschel 2004b, 2019).

² For an exception where Spinoza is given some consideration see Hent de Vries' (de Vries 2006).

hyphen's silence. As a sign of a particular instance of difference, the hyphen indicates the blind spot, as it were, where theological and political concerns and claims clash but at the same time constitute each other.

This aspect of the legacy of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* plays a critical role in the formation of the critical trajectories in Mendelssohn, Heine, and Derrida. In other words, Mendelssohn, Heine, and Derrida share the concern of recognizing the central challenge of modernity to be the way the theological-political complex is addressed, a complex that informs the discourse and frames the terms of modernity that call for examination in the first place. Examination of their respective ways of addressing this issue at the end of the eighteenth century, the first half of the nineteenth century, and the turn of the twentieth to the twenty-first century highlights a central aspect of Spinoza's legacy and its critical role for modern Jewish thought. Highlighting the challenge of thinking the interface between the Theological and Political as the difficult intersection for theorizing difference and alterity, the hyphen articulates the identity troubles that Jewish philosophers face as the dominant discourse relegates their concerns and sensibilities to the margins of conceptual erasure. Condemned to disappear in a discursive void, the hyphen reclaims the space where silence has been imposed. Critical attention to Spinoza's hyphen then allows us not just to delineate a decisive lineage of critical responses to such attempts at obfuscation but appreciate the articulation of Jewish difference as a critical move in rethinking the terms of modernity in a more open and inclusive way.

Read attentively, Spinoza's hyphen calls our attention to this task as it anticipates the exploration that follows programmatically with its title, i.e., what it means to read, understand, make sense, and act accordingly. Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* explores how to philosophically ground a consistent hermeneutics of how to read, understand, and make sense of the singular in a world where universals are only tentative constructions. Besides, and in addition, to a radical critique of theology and political philosophy, the *Theological-Political Treatise's* critical turn consists in highlighting the concern of how to theorize the singular and individual as the underlining central concern theology shares not just with political philosophy and philosophy in general but also with science. Reading means, Spinoza argues, always reading the singularity of a particular constellation.³ How to situate singularity in the larger context of the order of things is the task of interpretation Spinoza provocatively and at the same time perceptively equates with prophecy and translation.⁴ For Spinoza, reading is an act with local and particular contexts defined by hermeneutic practices determined by the interplay of tradition and social order in which and through which meaning is constituted; an act that is defined by particular contexts and their theological-political parameters.

The question of how to read a hapax legomenon thus becomes the quintessential theological-political challenge, the test case that makes or breaks the claims of a hermeneutic practice. The short answer to the question how to read it is that, for Spinoza, reading the *Theological-Political* for its dynamic complex will produce an open-ended, infinite loop of interpretative activity resting on, and consistent with, his epistemological and ontological views, made possible by a theory of interpretation that no longer allows for any privileged access to textual understanding and truth by approaches with perceived theological privileges but sets the level playing field for all interpretational practice whether or not it is accompanied by any form of theological or political cachet. As a result, the *Theological-Political Treatise* theorizes the act of interpretation as an open and recursive loop with regard to both the interpretation of Scripture and, consequently, texts in general as well as with regard to Nature. In a striking passage Spinoza asserts:

³ This is the implication deriving from the opening lines of chapter 1 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* and is worked out through the course of the book's unfolding of its argument. See (Spinoza 2007, p. 13).

⁴ For a discussion of Spinoza's theory of interpretation see the chapter "Spinoza's Smart Worm and the Interplay of Ethics, Politics, and Interpretation" in (Goetschel 2013, pp. 133–49; Goetschel 2016).

I hold that the method of interpreting Scripture, does not differ from the [correct] method of interpreting nature, but rather is wholly consonant with it.⁵

Spinoza's point is not to impose a particular protocol or method of how to proceed when we read but to remind us that the hermeneutic situation remains the same regardless of the nature of what the object of our interest is. For whatever it represents, its interpretation is predicated by the hermeneutic interest that predicates its knowledge as a form of interpretation, and interpretation is ultimately always a form of translation with and into our own terms. As a consequence, Nature in general, Deus sive Natura, can give us knowledge only in the specific context of the particulars that we bring to the process of knowledge. Just as there are no universals in absolute terms in Spinoza's universe but only individual things depending on the particular function of the order of nature that determines them, there is no singular privileged viewpoint that would allow a universal point of view from which to survey and determine nature, i.e., is what exists as a whole—at least not from a human point of view, however theologically or agnostically grounded it might be. Spinoza's principle "ab ipsa natura" therefore presents just as an equally open-ended challenge as the principle "sola scriptura". The analogy between the method of interpretation of Scripture and Nature that Spinoza introduces in chapter 7 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*—"On the Interpretation on Scripture"—is therefore anything but a fixation of a unified protocol of reading. Thinking through the tacit implications of this analogy opens the method of interpretation to an infinitely open ended practice that, to remain true to its epistemological protocol, must remain an unfinished work in progress. Or as Spinoza notes in succinct shorthand in a sentence so central it occurs both in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and in the *Ethics*:

The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God.⁶

Spinoza's move to present the hermeneutic circle of the interpretation of Scripture as an infinitely open interpretative practice resisting any translational closure has not escaped his readers. But this move is repeated in the way that Spinoza frames the interpretation of Nature as an open-ended project that we can approximate but resists complete consummation. Unlike the epistemological models of Bacon and Descartes that advance an instrumental view of human reason as nature's master, Spinoza theorizes knowledge as an infinite process that defies closure. Spinoza's approach rests on a view of nature that includes a resolute departure from any dualistic understanding of the mind-body problem. For him, the production of knowledge is a complex and infinite process that involves a dynamic notion of the economy of the affects as constituent for the formation of reason. This difference that informs the way in which Spinoza negotiates and redefines philosophical terms from the bottom up allows him to cast the hyphen as the decisive site to initiate the project to critically rethink the terms of modernity.

In order to understand the critical importance of the double term of the "theological-political" and its hyphen we have to trace this difference as it runs through even the seemingly most straightforward terms of Spinoza's rethinking of the relationship between philosophy and religion, reason and faith, and the political and theological spheres. Upon closer examination, it becomes no surprise that the "theological-political", so suggestive in its coinage, turns out to complicate the matter. Rather than simply denoting imprecision, this complication represents the problem that the treatise sets out to address, think through, and redefine: the play between the "theological" and the "political" that the hyphen exposes as the underlying condition of their conflicted relationship. If the hapax legomenon of the double term highlights the radical challenge of interpretation and forces recognition of the profound political implications that define every instance of interpretation, the play between the two parts of the double term raises the stakes of the challenge.

⁵ See (Spinoza 2007), p. 98. For a discussion of the passage and Spinoza approach to reading the two books of Scripture and Nature with the same method see (Goetschel 2013, pp. 140–43).

⁶ See (Spinoza 2007, p. 59) and *Ethics* E5P24, in (Spinoza 1985–2016, vol. 1, p. 608).

The question how to read this hapax legomenon then becomes the question how to read the play or interrelation of the two terms. Does the hyphen serve the function of an eventual uncoupling of the spheres of authority or does it indicate a deeper form of irreducible linkage? What is the vector or maybe the vectors that the hyphen indicates? With this question we have literally arrived at the question of how to read a line, a line that connects and links two spheres, claims, or forms of reasoning: two spheres of discourse, authority, tradition, and forms of legitimation. Bringing the question how to read to the point of the title phrase, Spinoza shifts the attention to the hyphen as the site that opens rather than short-circuits a new space. This space is projected as a reconstruction of the theological-political as a constellation that is yet to be reimagined, a project the treatise sets out to put in motion. The way the title sets up the hermeneutic situation pushes the reader beyond the task of simply reading the lines—the line of the argument and the line of the hyphen—pressing beyond that to reading between the lines, thus opening the doorway to an emancipatory engagement with the text that confronts the reader with what cannot be read out aloud, i.e., towards a reading that attends to what theology and politics have silenced and made illegible but what looms behind their projects of discursive domination: what can be retrieved, addressed, and articulated only by way of a double term and the hyphen that makes legible what has been erased.

1. Moses Mendelssohn

In 1754, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, at that point a young playwright and critic, introduced his readers to a young anonymous Jewish author poised to take his place among the ranks of the foremost philosophers of his time. To emphasize his superb intellectual qualities Lessing described him as “a second Spinoza” distinguished from Spinoza only by the lack of his errors.⁷ With this emphatic note, Lessing’s provocative praise of a young Moses Mendelssohn ushered the newly emerging author onto the literary scene with a fanfare that set the tone for the way Jewish philosophers would be received in years to come. But Lessing’s move was no coincidence and might well have had much to do with the sympathies for Spinoza that Lessing and Mendelssohn had shared from the start of their friendship. Lessing’s pointedly provocative gesture spoke to the problem of the theological-political commitments of the period’s public intellectual discourse that would not allow consideration of a self-confidently Jewish interlocutor, a discourse that was also cautiously defensive when it came to what was perceived as the radical challenge of Spinoza’s critical thought.

Mendelssohn’s position was more complicated than Lessing’s because as a Jew merely “tolerated”—as the technical legal term of Mendelssohn’s terms of his status of residency spelled it—he was advised to be cautious expressing any views in public that could be construed as implying any theologically or politically adverse connotations. For the first generation Jewish philosopher of the 18th century Enlightenment Spinoza had paradigmatic significance. Yet any public recognition of this would put a person, not to mention a Jew, in danger as the sudden persecution and eviction of the prominent philosopher Christian Wolff had demonstrated three decades earlier and the Spinoza dispute would so painfully prove three decades later in 1785.⁸ Spinoza, on the other hand, seemed to lend a sort of legitimacy that could position Jewish philosophers as philosophically genuinely equal to their Christian interlocutors. When Lessing used the phrase that Mendelssohn appeared to be a “second Spinoza” just without his “errors,” his description presented a carefully directed jab at critics who had no time for any notion of Jewish emancipation; critics who in Lessing’s view were susceptible to all that challenged their exclusionary theological-political agenda. Lessing’s preemptive strike was a circumspectly formulated provocation that slyly prepared the public for the recognition of a philosopher that had so resolutely been vilified and whose writings had been banned. And this was

⁷ Letter to Michaelis, 16 October 1754, in (Lessing 1987–1994), vol. 1, p. 58.

⁸ For the context of Christian Wolff’s expulsion, who was among other allegations also suspected of Spinozist leanings, see Michael Albrecht’s introduction to (Wolff 1985), pp. IX–LXXXIX, esp. pp. XLVI–LIII.

the philosopher who Mendelssohn was about to introduce in the opening pages of his *Philosophical Dialogues*, a publication that Lessing had anonymously and without Mendelssohn's prior knowledge published and that marked Mendelssohn's entry onto the scene of the German Enlightenment with the bold claim that the best of Leibniz's philosophy owed itself to Spinoza. Mendelssohn's argument was an act of tightrope walking that cautiously signaled a qualified alliance with a thinker who was otherwise widely shunned and whose followers were relentlessly persecuted. The calibrated balancing act of Mendelssohn's intervention reflected the critically explosive potential of Spinoza's hyphen. Lessing's daring literary brinkmanship set the stage for Mendelssohn to cross the line that the theological-political complex seemed to impose and that barred Jews from a meaningful participation in the project of modern philosophy but that Spinoza's hyphen had made possible to expose. Mendelssohn's move to place Spinoza at the heart of Leibnizian philosophy suggested that Jewish thought was already a formative part of modern philosophy and that the exclusion of Jews undermined the project of the universal aspirations of philosophy itself.⁹

In his *Jerusalem or on Religious Power and Judaism*, Mendelssohn takes up the theme and makes balancing the theological and political spheres its critical agenda. The book's title telegraphs the agenda of examining the distinction between religious and political power. Mendelssohn presents religion as a soft and persuasive form of a power that is distinguished from the coercive character of political force and Judaism as a religious tradition that requires us to rethink the classic distinction between church and state that drives early modern political theory. The title poses the question how exactly the "and" is supposed to be understood by the way that it connects but also juxtaposes Judaism to "religious power". Most importantly, the term "religious power" implies its opposite "political power" and further the fact that "power" is a correlative effect that does not exist in and of itself but appears only in adjectival specificity, i.e., in specific contexts of particular relations.

If we read the "or" as a Spinozan "sive" suggesting an equation or balancing act in the title, or if you wish as an explication of the meaning of "Jerusalem", we can read Mendelssohn's title *Jerusalem* as a variation of Spinoza's hyphen pitting the prophetic Jerusalem of Zechariah over and against the rarefied heavenly Jerusalem of Christian theology. For Mendelssohn, as for Jewish tradition in general, the distinction is not between Athens and Jerusalem, as the consequential Patristic distinction would have it, but between two different visions of Jerusalem, the prophetic versus the heavenly, or if you wish, two different visions of the Messianic that iterate the difference between two opposite ways to understand the theological-political nexus. These connotations are underlined in the book's closing lines quoting side by side Luke 20:25 and Zechariah 8:19:

If we render unto *Caesar* [Kaiser] what is *Caesar's*, then do you yourselves render unto *God*
what is *God's*! Love truth! Love peace!¹⁰

In between the title and the closing line, Mendelssohn advances a critique of political philosophy that profoundly resonates with Spinoza's line of argument in his *Theological-Political Treatise*.¹¹ As Mendelssohn's move to rethink the theoretical framing of political theory allows for accommodating Jewish difference, his *Jerusalem* becomes legible as an attempt to flesh out the theoretical implications that Spinoza's critical hyphen signals. Mendelssohn articulates the issue in direct and frank fashion in the opening lines of *Jerusalem*:

State and religion—civil and ecclesiastical constitution—secular and churchly authority—how to oppose these pillars of social life to one another so that they are in balance and do not, instead,

⁹ For a discussion of Mendelssohn's discussion of Spinoza's significance for Leibniz in his opening dialogues see (Goetschel 2004b, pp. 89–93).

¹⁰ See (Mendelssohn 1983b), p. 139. For the German see (Mendelssohn 1983a), vol. 8, pp. 99–204, p. 204. I refer to this edition as Jub A followed by volume and page number.

¹¹ This has been detailed in (Goetschel 2004b, pp. 147–69) and Goetschel, Mendelssohn and the State in (Goetschel 2013, pp. 189–209).

become burdens on social life, or weigh down its foundations more than they help to uphold it—this is one of the most difficult tasks of politics.¹²

The opening three pairs “state and religion” (*Staat und Religion*), “civil and ecclesiastical constitution” (*bürgerliche und geistliche Verfassung*), and “secular and churchly authority” (*weltliche und kirchliches Ansehen*) circle around the hyphen as they explicate the predicament Spinoza describes with the double term of the “theological-political”. As Mendelssohn suggests, the problem of the tension, if not conflict, between the institutions of politics and religion—state and church—are reiterated with regard to their constitution and authority, or as Mendelssohn’s German suggests status (*Ansehen*). In a remarkable stylistic move, Spinoza’s hyphen disappears only to be replaced by three dashes to showcase the three decisive iterations of the conflict that defines the theological-political complex.

Mendelssohn’s answer is to signal the critical thrust of Spinoza’s hyphen by proliferating it into three dashes as he sets out oppositional pairs noting that in practice solutions might suggest themselves but that the problem might be theory that too easily deals with the presumption of pre-existing divisions and distinctions which in the end might prove questionable.

For centuries, men have strived to solve [this difficult task], and here and there enjoyed perhaps greater success in settling it practically than in resolving it in theory. Some thought it proper to separate these different relations of societal man into moral entities, and to assign to each a separate province, specific rights, duties, powers, and properties. (33; Jub A 103)

But, as Mendelssohn continues, these conceptual separations and distinctions might be the problem rather than a solution after all:

But the extent of these different provinces and the boundaries dividing them have not yet been accurately fixed. Sometimes one sees the church move the boundary stone deep into the territory of the state; sometimes the state permits itself encroachments which, according to accepted standards, seem equally violent. Immeasurable evils have hitherto arisen, and still threaten to arise, from the dissension between these moral entities. When they take the field against each other, mankind is the victim of their discord; when they are in agreement, the noblest treasure of human felicity is lost; for they seldom agree but for the purpose of banishing from their realms a third moral entity, *liberty of conscience*, which knows how to derive some advantage from their disunity. (33; Jub 8, 103)

This is the point where Mendelssohn’s inquiry and reframing of political philosophy diverges from Hobbes and Locke whom he critically names in the first part of his draft for *Jerusalem*:

Church and State. Borderline disputes between them have caused immeasurable evils—Hobbes—Locke—The latter limits the state to the care of temporal welfare.—A makeshift intended for the protection of dissidents against persecution.—But wrong, for the temporal cannot be separated from the eternal, and ineffective—for the Church employs the secular arm.—The true dividing line is compulsory duties and persuasion. The former belong to the state, the latter is the privilege of religion.—When the church arrogates to itself property and coercive rights, it usurps them. (247; Jub A 95)¹³

Mendelssohn’s reinscription of Jewish difference in the discourse of philosophy, and political philosophy in particular, returns to the interface between these “border disputes” (*Grenzstreitigkeit*)¹⁴ or more precisely, investigates the lost space the hyphen represents, a space that has been written out and erased by the dominant conceptual constructions in political philosophy.

¹² Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*, 33; Mendelssohn, Jub A 8, 103.

¹³ For a discussion of Mendelssohn’s view regarding Hobbes and Locke while omitting any mentioning of Spinoza whose prominent tenets Mendelssohn’s approach nonetheless reflects see (Goetschel 2004b), pp. 149–56.

¹⁴ Mendelssohn Jub A 8, 95.

Mendelssohn's alliance with Spinoza set the pattern for a guarded engagement that sought appropriation of Spinoza's critical tenets on terms of concealment. By taking the blows that any expression of disagreement with the theological-political regime of Enlightenment thought would attract, Spinoza's notoriety enabled Mendelssohn to emerge safely under the cover of his shadow. Under the guise of the public rejection of Spinoza that Solomon Maimon so greatly came to resent in Mendelssohn, Mendelssohn embraced a number of Spinoza's critical theological-political concerns. As a result, central tenets of Spinoza's theological-political thought inform Mendelssohn's philosophy and, as a consequence, would go on to define the project of rethinking Jewish tradition in modernity. When Jacobi instigated what was to become the dispute over Spinoza, Mendelssohn's efforts at redeeming a sort of "refined" Spinozism was not simply a tactical retreat as is often claimed but rather a genuine reminder that Spinoza's outlook was in many ways closely aligned with Mendelssohn's own critical project of philosophy. For Mendelssohn, there could be no doubt that Jacobi's challenge was at the end of the day about theological-political commitments that were just as offensive to Spinoza as they were to Mendelssohn, and anybody else excluded by Jacobi's theological agenda.

Jacobi's efforts to present Lessing and Mendelssohn's legendary friendship as a lie was his attempt to use Spinoza to delegitimize any form of philosophy that would oppose the theological-political order that Jacobi's religious commitments imposed; commitments that Spinoza, Lessing, and Mendelssohn had taken such great care to expose as spurious and incompatible not only with philosophy but also with any kind of genuine religiosity, and, for that matter, Christian charity.

2. Heine

For Heine, Spinoza was first and foremost "mein Unglaubensgenosse"—"my fellow unbeliever"—as Freud reminds us.¹⁵ Tellingly, this characterization occurs in the *Travel Pictures's* installment *The North Sea. Part Three* in the context of a reference to the notorious passage in Spinoza's *Political Treatise* that equates right with might.¹⁶ But in the very spirit of Spinoza's argument, the reference is used subversively to undermine the spurious rights of a decrepit aristocracy no longer capable of sustaining its claims with the ability to exercise them meaningfully. For Heine, the political and the theological are inseparably interlocked in a complex that required rethinking. This critical impulse informs Heine's writing in consistent manner. It lies at the heart of his engagement with Spinoza. In other words, Heine's literary project can be addressed as the eloquent staging of the dialectical play at work in the hyphen of the Theological-Political; a hyphen that punctuates, links, and divides the two opposite and yet so profoundly intertwined spheres of the theological-political complex.

Heine's *Travel Pictures* offer insights into his more humorous scrutiny of the theological-political nexus, and the problems of erasure that Spinoza's hyphen exposes on the narrator's stops in the *Baths of Lucca* and *City of Lucca*.¹⁷ There the cheerful crisscrossing between political and theological territories performs a trespassing that addresses the theological-political complex with provocatively subversive verve. While critical exposure of the theological-political complex twists its way in various iterations through the *Travel Pictures*, it is in chapter 14 of *City of Lucca* where Heine brings the discussion to a head turning to

that abortion [Mißgeburt] termed the religion of State [Staatsreligion], that mockery of a creation, which was born of the lewd love of the worldly and the spiritual powers. (L 3, 312)¹⁸

¹⁵ See (Freud 1960), p. 76.

¹⁶ See (Heine 1906), vol. 2, p. 249. I refer to this translation of the works of Heine by L followed by volume and page number. The passage is in Spinoza's *Political Treatise* chapter 2, paragraph 3. See (Spinoza 1985–2016), vol. 2, p. 507. For a discussion of the passage see (Goetschel 2019), pp. 198–200.

¹⁷ See L 3, 126–42 and 243–329.

¹⁸ For the German see (Heine 1997), vol. 2, p. 517: "jene Mißgeburt, die man Staatsreligion nennt, jenes Spottgeschöpf, das aus der Buhlschaft der weltlichen und der gesitlichen Macht entstanden." I refer to this edition henceforth as B, followed by volume and page number.

Staatsreligion or the religion of the State, Heine suggests, is that monstrosity that short-circuits the difference between theology and politics erasing the precious interspace that makes each possible as a discourse marked by its difference to the other.

A fragment with the title “Staatsreligion” that did not make it into the *Travel Pictures* gives pointed expression to this concern:

If you want to prevent the dismal consequences of positive quarrel and elevate the most respectable of the existing religions to the status of religion of the State, which ruling over the others commands quiet, there arises an unpredictable harm to the world, a great danger for the privileged religion itself and in no way any kind of advantage for the state.¹⁹

Heine’s succinct summary of the central concern of Spinoza’s treatise reads like a free translation of the *Theological-Political Treatise’s* subtitle “that the State can grant freedom of philosophizing without harming its peace or piety and cannot deny it without destroying its peace and piety,”²⁰ a point that chapter 14 develops in playful fashion as a call for free competition to curb theology’s system of monopoly:

The monopoly of system is as injurious to religions as to trades; they are only strong and energetic by free competition, and they will again bloom up in their primitive purity and beauty so soon as the political equality of the Lord’s service, or, so to speak, so soon as the trades-freedom of the divinities, is introduced. (L 3, 315)²¹

While these passages in Heine’s *Travel Pictures* present so many articulations of the silent thrust of Spinoza’s hyphen, it is *On the History of Religion and Philosophy* and its particular act of tracking the interlocking dynamics between the political and the theological that Heine spells out the implications of the hyphen more explicitly.²²

In his *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany*, Heine’s famous insertion of Spinoza at the heart of German philosophy that connects primordial paganism with modern German philosophy, he takes great pain situating Spinoza at the interface of the philosophical developments between Hobbes and Locke on the one hand and between Descartes and Leibniz on the other, respectively between materialist and idealist tendencies, i.e., in Heine’s terms, between sensualism and spiritualism. Framing his narrative this way, Heine stakes out the absence of Spinoza as defining feature of the standard narratives of the history of philosophy. His critical reinscription of Spinoza emphasizes that recovering Spinoza for the history of philosophy requires a strategy that acknowledges the specific form of repressive theological-political regime that erased him from history as its dybbuk: a haunting ghost that represents the return of the repressed. For Heine, Spinoza enters the discourse of modern philosophy at the precise point where the various projects of philosophical modernity in Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz intersect at the juncture demarcated by the hyphen between the Theological and the Political.

Heine’s counternarrative of the history of philosophy describes this battle as the dialectic of sensualism and spiritualism, a development in which Spinoza assumes the role of the philosophical visionary who points beyond a dualist approach between sensualism and spiritualism. In Heine’s presentation, Spinoza is the forgotten eccentric at the heart of modern philosophy: the Dutch Jewish philosopher who enables modern German philosophy to find its bearings. For Heine, Spinoza figures,

¹⁹ For the German original of the fragment see (Heine 1973–1997), vol. 7.1, p. 345: “Will man den trüben Folgen eines positiven Gezanks vorbeugen und die anständigste der vorhandenen Religionen zur Staatsreligion erheben, die herrschend den übrigen Ruhe gebietet, so entsteht ein unberechenbarer Schaden für die Welt, eine große Gefahr für die bevorrechtete Religion selbst und auf keinen Fall irgend ein Vortheil für den Staat.”

²⁰ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 1. Translation modified.

²¹ For the German see B 2, 518.

²² For the critical implications of Heine’s “Jewish Comedy” see (Prawer 1983). For a further discussion of *The Baths of Lucca* and *The City of Lucca* see (Goetschel 2004a).

as it were, as the critical force that drives the hyphen in the emancipatory direction of a critical rethinking of the theological-political from the bottom up. It is this critical concern that drives the emancipatory vision in Heine's *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany* as a counterhistory that returns the hyphen's liberating force to the forefront of his critical project.

Heine's bold embrace of Spinoza provocatively asserts Jewish sensibilities and traditions as a constitutive part of modernity. Calling Spinoza "that providential man" whose philosophy provides the theoretical foundation for the struggle of emancipation that pagan pantheism and a Christian inflected Saint-Simonism intend but can only gesture toward, and whose philosophical truth, as it were, receives its liberating formulation in Spinoza, Heine features a Spinoza who, as neither renegade nor champion of his heritage, reimagines the hyphen's function in a way that reconfigures the Theological-Political with a critical difference.

With Heine the hyphen becomes legible as the eloquent but silent sign that opens the doorway to rethinking a very different vision of the theological-political nexus; one where biblical language and imagery, the prophetic tradition, and the Marrano experience appear in the light of emancipatory liberation. As a result, Heine reconnects Spinoza not only explicitly with the sources of Jewish tradition but combines this move with a unique description of Spinoza's thought delivered in a biblical style that invokes the "deus sive natura" motive in a manner that suggests the often noted effect of Spinoza's *Ethics* on the reader's affects while underlying the interconnectedness of all that exists:

When we read Spinoza, we are seized with a feeling like that of seeing nature at its grandest in most vigorous repose: a forest of thoughts, tall as the sky, whose blooming tree-tops sway back and forth, while imperturbable trunks stand rooted in the eternal soil. (Heine 2007, 50f; B 3, 561–62)

But the full power of this passage will strike the reader only as Heine continues driving home the point that highlights how the hyphen can become the interspace to reconfigure the way we conceptualize both theology and politics from the bottom up:

There is a certain soft breeze in the writings of Spinoza which is inexplicable. It stirs the reader with the winds of the future. The spirit of the Hebrew prophets still rested perhaps on their late descendant. At the same time, there is a seriousness to him, a self-confident pride, a grandeur of thought which also seems to be an inheritance, since Spinoza belonged to one of those families of martyrs which had been expelled from Spain by those most Catholic kings. (51; B 3, 562)

Resonating with the full register of connotations Heine's text so suggestively invokes, the portrayal of the trees swaying back and forth produces a powerful image of nature "in most vigorous repose" that highlights the way Heine advances his argument. In a striking way, this passage communicates the notion of immanence in both registers, conceptually and imaginatively, thereby explicating Spinoza's thought in conceptual terms while staging it performatively with the evocative release of the affects. The passage is typical of the way in which Spinoza resonates in Heine's writing not just on the conceptual level but also by demonstrating the critical role of the affects. In Heine, the relationship between the Theological and the Political emerges in playfully liberated fashion as the interface where the hyphen's silence becomes legible as the signature where Spinoza's *hapax legomenon* allows Jewish difference to return opening the possibility to give voice to all other differences as well that the theological-political complex seeks to erase.

3. Derrida

In his lectures in the 1980s examining the relationship between philosophy, national languages, and national identity, Derrida explored the thought of German Jewish thinkers like Franz Rosenzweig, Walter Benjamin, and Gershom Scholem. In the context of this discussion Derrida turns to Spinoza and notes:

Here, for one time, I won't start from a modern German Jewish text but from one of the great texts of the philosophical tradition entirely dedicated to this dimension of the Theological-Political and in which the example of the Jewish people as chosen people takes a central role. I will talk, you have guessed it, about Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*.²³

In the context of these lectures, Derrida engages in a discussion of the *Theological-Political Treatise* to analyze the peculiar challenge that we confront when we address Jewish identity in the face of a theological-political situation that stacks the cards to result in a foregone conclusion. Derrida sums up the way Spinoza understands the "Theological-Political" as that "instance" or "as it were construction of the Theological-Political" as "the way in which the Theological and the Political articulate themselves in relation to each other" (*la manière dont le théologique et le politique s'articulent l'un sur l'autre*).²⁴

Derrida's lectures "The Theological-Political" present not only a striking declaration of a philosophical kinship that stresses a remarkable affinity between the two philosophers. Derrida's explicit Spinoza references in his later texts present a few rare but emphatic pointers that suggest more than just a casual relationship. These few but telling Spinoza references make the hyphen legible as a crucial and conflicted connecting line or, in Derrida's French, "trait d'union" between the two spheres the hyphen links and contrasts in an uneasy interlocking.²⁵

In his critical reading of Gershom Scholem's characterization of the Hebrew language and the problem of secularization, Derrida refers to Spinoza as a corrective alternative to Scholem's linguistic nationalism.²⁶ (Derrida 2002). Similarly, he takes Hermann Cohen to task for his naive parading of Jewish philosophers to demonstrate the significance of the contribution of Jewish thought to modern culture but omitting "a great rationalist philosopher, Jewish in his own way, and precisely a critic of Maimonides: Spinoza."²⁷ This silence, Derrida notes,

is a feature that [Cohen] will have in common with Heidegger in what is for both a meditation on the *logon didonai* and on the Principle of Reason. There would be a great deal to say about this common silence. (163)²⁸

To stress his point, Derrida continues: "All the more so since Cohen talks abundantly about Mendelssohn. This is particularly difficult to do without mentioning the man who for Mendelssohn was a master, a disputed one, no doubt, but still a master." (163) Taking Cohen to task for his willful silence on Spinoza, Derrida comments Cohen's stance to demonstrate a rejection "of a certain Spinozism without naming Spinoza, as if to excommunicate it from the Jewish-German psyche." (163)²⁹ Derrida's rebuttal is followed by a short digression on the *Theological-Political Treatise*, this time reminding his audience that this omission of Spinoza

seems all the more blatant since Cohen speaks of a religion and a morality founded upon the love of God and on Pauline law: these are also the essential motifs of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. (164)

²³ Jacques Derrida, "Théologico-Politique" (1): p. 6. Ms. at the Department of Special Collections, UCI Libraries, University of California Irvine. All translations of this manuscript are mine.

²⁴ Derrida, "Théologico-Politique" (1): p. 19f.

²⁵ Derrida, "Théologico-Politique" (1): p. 12.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, "The Eyes of Language: The Abyss and the Volcano" in (Derrida 2002), pp. 191–227, p. 212 and p. 215f.

²⁷ Derrida, "Interpretations At War: Kant, the Jew, the German" in (Derrida 2002), pp. 135–188, p. 163.

²⁸ For a resumption of the discussion on Heidegger's silence on Spinoza see (Derrida 2005).

²⁹ For Cohen's initially more sympathetic view of Spinoza in his 1867 essay "Heinrich Heine und das Judentum" see (Cohen 1924). In his introduction to the three volumes of Cohen's *Jüdische Schriften* Franz Rosenzweig calls this essay Cohen's "Spinozising sin of youth," an attitude that stands in stark contrast to Cohen's later categorically negative view of Spinoza (Cohen 1924), vol. 1, pp. xiii–lxiv, p. lv. For Cohen's later position see for example his 1915 essay (Cohen 1924), vol. 3, pp. 290–372. On Cohen's view of Spinoza see besides Rosenzweig, *ibid.* pp. lv–lvi also Ernst Simon, "Zu Hermann Cohens Spinoza-Auffassung" in (Simon 1965; Nauen 1979).

Of course, Derrida's critique of Cohen here also addresses however tacitly Levinas who, we could say, did not go exactly silent on Spinoza either but whose acrimonious tirades on Spinoza come close to a willful omission in their own right.³⁰

For Derrida, Spinoza's double term of the Theological-Political articulates the dialectic of the conflicted relationship in which the Political and the Theological remain irreducibly engaged and intertwined. But he also shares with Spinoza, Mendelssohn, and Heine the vision that the hyphen marks an opening to reimagine it no longer as symbol of closure and erasure but as one that punctuates it, announcing with the inclusion of Jewish and other differences the possibility to rethink the nexus of the Theological and Political otherwise.

Rather than affirming a problematic notion of religion whose theological-political ramifications result in the recognition of Jewish tradition as religion at the expense of its particularity that ultimately resists any such categorization, the hyphen articulates a response that recognizes the concept of religion as the function of a preset theological-political order that calls for examination in the first place. But this alternative approach that the hyphen articulates does not argue for or against any particular form or definition of religion but understands the limits of the discourse on religion to consist in being itself already marked by theological-political assumptions that not only distort our understanding of Jewish and other non-Christian traditions but in no less problematic ways the confessionalized forms of Christian faith as if the concept of religion were impervious to the social and political contexts from which its multiple varieties of religious experiences arise.

With the marking of the hyphen Spinoza began the critical work of rethinking the claims of religiosity at the moment confessionalization began to take hold in modern political thought. The critical concern the hyphen signals informs modern Jewish thought from Spinoza, Mendelssohn, and Heine to Derrida as a distinctive feature whose wider significance Mendelssohn expressed when he noted: "It will be our good fortune if this cause [the struggle for human rights] also becomes our own, assuming that we cannot urge the rights of mankind without simultaneously reclaiming our own."³¹

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³⁰ For Levinas on Spinoza see ([Montag 2011](#)).

³¹ Moses Mendelssohn, preface to Manasseh Ben Israel's *Vindication of the Jews*, in ([Mendelssohn 2011](#), pp. 39–52, p. 40).

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