

**Leibniz' Marginalia on the Back of the Title of
Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus***

Ursula Goldenbaum, Emory University

The following brief piece of writing by Leibniz was unknown until 1997 when I first presented it to a Leibniz conference in Potsdam. It was handwritten on the back of the title page of his copy of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. I found it in November 1994 in the remains of the former Boineburg Library, at that time a part of the Special Collections of the City of Erfurt (meanwhile belonging to the University Library of the University Erfurt). Its Latin transcription was published in the conference proceedings *Labora diligenter*, edited by Hartmut Rudolph in 1999 (*Studia Leibnitiana, Sonderheft 29*, Steiner: Stuttgart, pp. 61-127). This publication has also a facsimile of this piece as well as transcriptions and facsimiles of other small marginalia of Leibniz in the book.

Although it is short enough, it is not easy to read and I talked about it with many colleagues as well as with my daughter Ina Goldenbaum. Thus I want to thank all of them who took such a great interest in it and helped me with the difficult transcription (and translation) of these 16 lines. Also, as it now turns out, the first transcription has a few misreadings – though none that change the meaning dramatically. Of course, I take full responsibility for the result. I am very grateful to my former colleague Rüdiger Otto (Leipzig) and the senior editor of the *Akademieausgabe* Heinrich Schepers (Münster) who discussed the piece at length with me when I worked on the initial transcription in 1995. When I was asked to publish the piece in *The Leibniz Review* with an English translation, I had the wonderful opportunity to discuss some tricky passages again with my current colleagues at Emory University, Steve Strange (Philosophy) and Garth Tissol (Classics), and also with my daughter who made great suggestions for a correct reading. I am especially grateful to Steve for revising my English translation.

The finding of these marginalia is not a minor event given the longstanding resistance of Leibniz scholars (since the 19th century) against any influence of Spinoza on Leibniz. As I showed recently (see “Why shouldn't Leibniz have studied Spinoza? The Rise of the Claim of Continuity in Leibniz' Philosophy out of the Ideological Rejection of Spinoza's Impact on Leibniz”, in: *The Leibniz Review*, December 2007, 107-138), one main argument against any Spinoza-influence was the claim that Leibniz had developed his own metaphysics as early as 1670-1671

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– when he had allegedly not yet read Spinoza. Thus, the need to avoid any impact of Spinoza on Leibniz gave rise to the widespread thesis that Leibniz arrived at his metaphysics early and that it developed continuously throughout his life. Leibniz’ marginalia in his copy of Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise* from the Boineburg Library, show that he did in fact study Spinoza in 1670 – when he had not yet published his own metaphysics (i.e. prior to the publication of the *Hypothesis physica nova* or the *Theoria motus abstracti*). Indeed, he studied Spinoza’s *Theological-political Treatise* with a pen in his hand. And nobody who knows this work can deny that it includes main arguments of Spinoza’s philosophy and is not at all restricted to theological and political topics.

Thus, given the marginalia, an early influence of Spinoza on Leibniz is at least possible. This does not mean that Leibniz was a Spinozist at any time of his life. But there are also other ways that one philosopher can influence another – by provocation or stirring someone up, thus causing him/her to work on alternative solutions.

Transcription

Contra eos, qui Canonem Scripturae Sacrae V.T. ab Esdra repetunt, fortissimum hoc argumentum videtur: Certum est Hebraeos omnes ex Captivitate Babylonica non rediisse Hierosolyma; sed magnam eorum partem toto oriente Babylone inprimis inque Persia, Media, et Mesopotamia et Aegypto ac caeteris Imperii Babylonici ac Persici partibus, dispersam remansisse. Quare etsi Esdras libros suos, quos non pro suis utique, sed veterum libris venditabat, obtrudere potuisset eis apud quos cum summa autoritate morabatur (Quanquam ne inter hos quidem credibile sit nullum fuisse, qui traditionum veterum memoriam et M[anu]s[cript]orum reliquias servasset) totam tamen gentem in tam dissitis terrarum locis in confingendam novam Legem, imo et novam scribendi legendique rationem, si et puncta Esdrae debentur conspirasse, nec dissensiones inde aut schismata in gente tam superstitiosa et minutiarum praesertim quo tempore misera, captiva, dispersa erat, uti nunc quoque est, observatrice orta esse, nondum mihi persuaderi potest. Interpolari quaedam, et in recensendo insensibiliter immutari ferunt homines: nova condi non ferunt. Certe jam temporibus Esdrae, et seculis ad Christi salvatoris nostri apparitionem usque seculis non multis, toti genti per Asiam universam (quam ubique Judaeis etiam ante alteram destructionem templi reffectam fuisse, ex Actis Apostolorum constat) firmissime impressam persuasamque fuisse genuitatem ac divinitatem

LEIBNIZ' MARGINALIA ON SPINOZA'S TRACTATUS

horum librorum ex Nehemia, Esdra, Zacharia, Haggaeo, Maccabeis, Evangeliiis, Actis, Thalmude denique constat. Coetaneos autem ac prope coetaneos non sensisse tam manifestam novitatem, non contradixisse, ne suspicatos quidem de incohaerente factura artificii tam palpabilis tam crassi, credat qui volet, ego mihi nondum persuadere possum. Sane nulla est religio in qua non tractu temporis pseudermeneiae per ignorantiam publicam succrescere possint: et nova prorsus sine omnium motu sensuque apud homines antiquitatis tum maxime tenaces cum habent cur tempora sua deplorent, inauditum. Judaeos prope annis bis mille ab Esdra tradita tanto studio servasse; septuaginta annis Babylonicae captivitatis omni anteriorum memoria excidisse probabile non est. Cum contra appareat Jeremiam in Aegypto, et Baruchum huius jussu in Chaldaea omni conatu in id incubuisse, ut in populo et memoriam priorum conservarent, et spem meliorum excitarent.

Translation

Against those who claim the Canon of the Old Testament of the Holy Scriptures for Ezra, this seems the most powerful argument: It is certain that not all the Hebrews returned from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem; but that a large part of them remained dispersed throughout the East, especially Babylon, as well as Persia, Media, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other parts of the Babylonian and Persian Empire. Therefore, if Ezra could have imposed his books (which he did not present as his books but the books of the ancients) on those among whom he remained with greatest authority (although it is not even credible that there was no one among them who had not preserved the memory of the ancient traditions and the remains of manuscripts) – that the whole people in places on earth so far away from each other had agreed in inventing a new law, even a new way of writing and reading, if even the points [punctuation] were due to Ezra, and yet no disagreements and schisms arose in a people so superstitious and meticulous in observing even tiniest things, especially at a time when it was miserable, caught, and dispersed, as it still is – I cannot persuade myself. It is said that humans interpolate things and corrupt them imperceptibly by passing through but it is not said that they invent new things. It is certain that, already in the times of Ezra and in the centuries till the appearance of Christ our savior, the origin and divinity of these books from Nehemiah, Ezra, Zachariah, Hagar, the Maccabees, the Gospels, Acts, and finally the Talmud, were firmly impressed upon the whole people and that they were persuaded in just a few centuries throughout the whole Asia (which was settled by the Jews even before

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the second destruction of the Temple, as is clear from the Acts of the Apostles). But that the contemporaries and the near-contemporaries had not felt such a manifest innovation, had not contradicted it, that they had not even been suspicious about the incoherent make-up of such an obvious and crude forgery let him believe who wishes to – I can never persuade myself. Certainly, there is no religion in which could not arise pseudo-interpretations, in the course of time and through public ignorance: but that new things arose, without any disturbance or sensation of any of them is unheard of, especially among humans attached even more to antiquity when they had reason to deplore their times. That the Jews so eagerly preserved for almost two thousand years what was transferred to them by Ezra would lose all memory of the ancestors within 70 years of Babylonian captivity is not at all likely. On the contrary, it is evident that Jeremiah in Egypt and Baruch by his command in Chaldea strived with every effort to preserve the memory of the ancestors and to excite hope for better [times] in the people.

Ursula Goldenbaum
Emory University
Department of Philosophy
214 Bowden Hall
561 S. Kilgo Circle
Atlanta, GA 30322
ugolden@emory.edu