

**THE LEGACY OF SPINOZA.
THE ENLIGHTENMENT ACCORDING TO JONATHAN ISRAEL
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Abstract. The aim of the paper is to present and analyze the interpretation of the Enlightenment which has recently been proposed by Jonathan Israel, with the focus on its philosophical aspect as opposed to the historical one. The paper consists of two parts. The task of the first part is reconstructive: it attempts to explore Israel's most characteristic statements concerning the Enlightenment. The second and more extensive part has a polemical character: it endeavours to furnish the reader with an answer to the question of the degree to which the understanding of the Enlightenment proposed by Israel can be considered a satisfying interpretation of this period. The paper suggests that the main problem which may undermine Israel's account of the Enlightenment is associated with the unduly selective interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy and its position in the intellectual society of that time.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Spinoza, historiography, naturalism, pantheism, atheism, human nature.

The Enlightenment is, without any doubt, one of the most important periods in the history of European thought – and, at the same time, one of the most controversial. It has provided the subject for numerous debates concerning its profile seen from the viewpoint of the history of ideas as well as its value. On the one hand, the Enlightenment is sometimes presented as one of the crucial eras in the history of humankind and the most important stage in the process of shaping the values we cherish, however, on the other hand – many circles consider it to be a period which deserves nothing short of condemnation due to its radicality, subversivity, and cosmopolitanism. Over the course of more than two centuries, the Enlightenment has been variously characterized and, despite the existence of many works on the subject, no consensus has been reached. This paper has been written with the view to scrutinizing the interpretation of this period which has recently been proposed by Jonathan Israel. Israel's interpretation is the first attempt, in a couple of decades, to create a novel synthetic account of the Enlightenment in both its historical and systematic aspect. The paper consists of two parts. The objective of the first one is reconstructive: in it I undertake an attempt to present Israel's most characteristic statements concerning the

Enlightenment. The second and more extensive part has a polemical character. However, I will not discuss all the problems concerning Israel's interpretation of the Enlightenment – after all, many of them have been the subject of interesting and insightful analyses in the recent years.¹ I will concentrate on Israel's view on the role of Spinoza and Spinozism in the genesis and development of the Enlightenment.

I.

Although some authors are not certain whether Israel's proposal deserves acknowledgement,² what does not lend itself to doubt is that in the past decade his books – I have in mind especially his three works: *Radical Enlightenment* (2001), *Enlightenment Contested* (2006), and *Democratic Enlightenment* (2011)³ – have given an impulse for a wide debate over the specificity of the thought of the Enlightenment as well as over that period's possible merits for the formation of the European culture.⁴ Obviously, each of the three books has its own specific aim. The first one discusses, generally speaking, the historical-philosophical context of the rise of the radical wing within the European Enlightenment in the years 1650–1750. The second one attempts to show that the process of fashioning the key thoughts of the Enlightenment in the years 1670–1752 was under the essential influence of “the internal struggle between the opposing tendencies which from beginning to end always fundamentally divided it into irreconcilably opposed intellectual blocks.”⁵ The principal subject matter of the third book is the development of the Enlightenment's ideas in the years 1750–1790. From the viewpoint of these considerations, however, what is most important is that Israel's books are not only an encyclopedic recount. In spite of their richness and diversity of the problems which they tackle, each of them presents an important argument which, in Israel's intention, should justify the view that the interpretations of the Enlightenment which have previously been proposed

¹ Stuurman [2002] pp. 227–235; La Vopa [2009] pp. 717–738; Lilti [2009] pp. 171–206; van Bunge [2012] pp. 189–209; de Dijn [2012] pp. 785–805; Jacob [2012] pp. 26–27.

² La Vopa [2009] pp. 717–738; Moyn [2010] pp. 25–29.

³ Apart from that, I am going to refer to the book *A Revolution of the Mind. Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*, published in 2010, and many papers, especially those concerning the reception of Spinoza's philosophy.

⁴ Of course, Israel was not the only author who contributed to resuming the debate on the value of the Enlightenment. In this context, one cannot omit the works of Robert Darnton, especially his book *George Washington's False Teeth*, published in 1997.

⁵ Israel [2006] p. x.

require a radical revision ranging over nearly all the basic theses concerning this period.

Of course, Israel does not only argue that we should forsake the simplified views on the European Enlightenment which still can be found in the handbooks on that period, i.e. cease to look at the Enlightenment only in the light of the opposition against the religious system prevailing at that time and the aversion to *ancient régime*. His objection to the hitherto accepted ways of interpreting the Enlightenment's thought goes much further: it is directed, in the first place, at the interpretation which has been fashionable over the past decades, according to which there was not one Enlightenment but rather different "Enlightenments," which, as some authors claim, can be seen properly only through the lenses of national conditions⁶ or, as others maintain, through the lenses of social and political factors.⁷ An extensive part of Israel's exposition is devoted to proving that despite an important role played in the research on the roots of Enlightenment by scholars emphasizing the national, social or political factors, according to Israel, it is more correct to hold the view that the European Enlightenment constituted, firstly, "a single highly integrated intellectual and cultural movement, displaying differences in timing, no doubt, but for the most part preoccupied not only with the same intellectual problems but often even the very same books and insights everywhere from Portugal to Russia and from Ireland to Sicily;"⁸ secondly, it was, originally, a philosophical project which subsequently influenced political, social and economic existence.⁹

⁶ Baker and Lukas [1987-1988]; Pocock [1985]; Jacob [1991].

⁷ Porter and Teich [1981]; Koselleck [1988]; Scott [1990]; Venturi [1991].

⁸ Israel [2001] p. v. In *Democratic Enlightenment* Israel points out two reasons why the concept of distinct 'national' Enlightenments cannot be acknowledged: "first because in most countries, including Russia, Scandinavia, the Austrian empire, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and post-1720 Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Spanish America, the primary intellectual influences were predominantly foreign – mostly French, British, or German, though before 1720 the Dutch factor was also crucial. Secondly, while there was never any basic unity to the local enlightenment in any given country, including Britain, America, and France where the Enlightenment was always divided between competing factions drawing inspiration from different sources both national and international, the rifts were characterized less by plurality than duality. Nowhere did these divisions point to a high level of fragmentation." Israel [2011] p. 6.

⁹ It is true that in the preface to *Enlightenment Contested* Israel asks whether the Enlightenment was "in essence a social or an intellectual phenomenon" and states that both these factors "must be seen to be genuinely interacting in a kind of dialectic" (p. v), in fact he insists that "the Enlightenment was primarily a philosophical phenomenon:" "it was philosophers who were chiefly responsible for propagating the concepts of toleration, equality, democratic republicanism, individual freedom, and liberty of expression and the press, the batch of ideas identified as the principal cause of the near overthrow of authority, tradition, monarchy, faith, and privilege. Hence, philosophers specifically had caused the revolution" (p. vii). See also Israel [2011] p. 7.

These two convictions, of which the former stresses the unity of the Enlightenment and the latter its philosophical dimension, undoubtedly guide the whole profile of Israel's discourse on the Enlightenment. They explain why, according to Israel, philosophical ideas, even though they were not the only factor responsible for the genesis and development of this period, have to be treated as the most significant factor to be taken into consideration in the Enlightenment studies.

One could think that this emphasis put by Israel on the unity of Enlightenment shows that the interpretation proposed by him is, in some sense, an attempt to restore, though maybe in a slightly changed historical-philosophical context, the thought defended by Ernst Cassirer and Peter Gay, who, similarly to Israel, stressed the unity of the Enlightenment and shared the view that the core of this period was constituted, in the first place, by philosophical reflections. There is much to be said for this suggestion. Nonetheless, there are important differences between Israel's position and the interpretation of the Enlightenment provided by Cassirer and Gay. In the first place, one should consider the fact that for both Gay and Cassirer the Enlightenment appeared as quite a uniform set of positions and views belonging to a relatively consistent intellectual movement – whereas the central point of Israel's statements concerning the Enlightenment is that, in fact, during that time there were two rival types of the Enlightenment: radical and moderate Enlightenment, between which no compromise was really possible.¹⁰ Whilst radical Enlightenment had its roots in metaphysical monism, moderate Enlightenment referred to a greater or lesser extent to a dualistic and hierarchical vision of reality. It is true that both types shared the most general convictions characteristic of the Enlightenment: they agreed that the program of bringing human existence to the state of perfection can be achieved only in the process of improving human thinking (cognition). To some extent, they also shared the opinion “that Nature and everything shaped by Nature is the sphere of philosophy and that ‘philosophy’ is the key debate with regard to everything.”¹¹ Nonetheless, one has to notice that these types of the Enlightenment differed in important respects. Whilst the representatives of radical Enlightenment (Diderot,

¹⁰ Israel [2010] pp. 17–18. Cassirer claimed that the conceptual coherence of the Enlightenment was, in the first place, a consequence of the attachment to Newton's scientific frame (mechanics) and the conviction that the laws discovered by Newton should be transferred to the area of social life: this way, social life would become not only cognitively accessible but also predictable and easier to set in order. According to Gay, however, the coherence of the Enlightenment was grounded in the attempts at secularization. In this sense, the Enlightenment was a uniform movement, managed mainly from Paris.

¹¹ Israel [2011] p. 7.

d'Holbach, Helvetius, Paine) started from the assumption that the program of making life perfect requires a complete break with the past, it is possible to achieve only by means of reason and assumes a complete separation from religion – the representatives of the Enlightenment's moderate branch (Voltaire, Turgot, Hume, Smith, Wolff) represented a more conservative approach and avoided extreme solutions; their opinion was that the project of perfecting life does not rule out the cooperation with religion and, what is more, cannot be achieved only by reason but requires the contribution of emotional states, different from, and sometimes even independent of, reason. Therefore, unlike the representatives of the radical Enlightenment, they did not postulate breaking with the past. They were of the opinion that departing completely from tradition is not needed and that, in addition, it would endanger many spheres of human existence¹².

Israel claims that this basic conviction that there is an essential difference between a radical and moderate type of the Enlightenment is the proper key to understanding and presenting the Enlightenment's legacy. What is more, it provides foundation to the thesis that the widespread view, according to which the origin of the Enlightenment should be sought in the intellectual and cultural changes which took place at the turn of the 18th century in France or in the English thought, especially Locke's empiricism and Newton's mechanics, should be rejected or at least much weakened. According to Israel, accepting the view that the Enlightenment came into being and acquired its ideological character during the conflicts and in the confrontation between radical and moderate vision of the Enlightenment prompts a fundamental revision of the opinions on the Enlightenment's genesis.

Providing that this is right, where should we look for the roots of the Enlightenment – the roots which would allow us both to explain important dimensions of the Enlightenment's worldview and express the division into the two antagonistic camps which came into being in this period. According to Israel, there is only one answer to this question: the roots of the Enlightenment should be sought in the philosophical works of Baruch Spinoza.¹³ It is in his doctrine that we

¹² Ibidem, pp. 9–10. However, according to Israel, what is more important is that the division into radical and moderate Enlightenment cannot be identified with the division into atheists and theists (deists). "Many 'atheists' and thoroughgoing skeptics – including Thomas Hobbes, Julien Offray de la Mettrie, Hume, and the marquis de Sade – were not at all 'radical', in the sense the term is employed here, since they did not base morality on reason alone, or on the principle of equality, or link their conception of Progress to equity and democracy." Israel [2010] pp. 19–20.

¹³ To be precise, I should add that, according to Israel, Spinoza, even though he played the most important role in the fashioning of the Enlightenment – especially when it comes to its radical variety – was not the only thinker of the 17th century who contributed to its genesis. Besides him, essential contributions were made by Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Bayle, and Leibniz, "all of whom,"

find, in the first place, almost all main ideas characteristic of the radical Enlightenment¹⁴ – i.e. the type of Enlightenment which, contrary to the hitherto prevailing view, was not something marginal and peripheral but, just the opposite, constituted “an integral and vital part of the wider picture and was seemingly even more internationally cohesive than the mainstream Enlightenment.”¹⁵ In the second place, it was Spinoza that became the main source of inspiration for such thinkers as Pierre Bayle, Denis Diderot, Baron d’Holbach, Bernard de Mandeville and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, who were especially opposed to Church authorities, pre-ordained social hierarchies, religious intolerance, and the restriction of expression. What is more, in Israel’s opinion, one should not forget that Spinoza, and not Hobbes, Locke or even Hume, was the first major thinker who, on the one hand, defended the freedom of expression and press as distinct from the freedom of conscience, and, on the other, championed political tolerance. His thesis that freedom is the condition of “the peace of the republic and piety itself” belongs to the most daring thoughts of this period. Israel argues that, because of all this, one cannot understand the debates which took place at that time, both these held in secret in the first half of the 18th century and those held publically from its second half, without connecting the Enlightenment with Spinoza’s philosophy.¹⁶

I consider the above-mentioned claims to be the most crucial and characteristic elements of the interpretation of the Enlightenment proposed by

in Israel’s opinion, “to a greater or lesser degree shared the ‘revolutionary’ tendency of all Enlightenment to sweep the past aside and lay down new premises.” Israel [2011] p. 9.

¹⁴ In Israel’s opinion, the doctrine of Spinoza gave rise to the following convictions of the radical Enlightenment: (a) the belief in revelation, miracles and thus Church authorities should be rejected; (b) philosophy, science and morality should be separated from religion; (c) reason should be the only guide of human life; (d) improving human existence depends, above all else, on the increase of rational thinking; (e) the principle of equality must be the basis of the society. Cf. Ibidem, p. 10.

¹⁵ Israel [2001] p. vi. It should be observed that Israel is not the first scholar who turned the readers’ attention towards the meaning of the radical current in the formation of the European Enlightenment. A similar view (though probably on a lesser scale) is expressed already in the 1981 work by M. Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*. More about the mode of understanding of the radical Enlightenment by M. Jacob and about the difference between Israel’s interpretation of the radical Enlightenment and the interpretation proposed by Jacob can be found in Stuurman [2002] pp. 230–232.

¹⁶ According to Israel, one should not conclude from this that atheism was a condition of belonging to radical Enlightenment. *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, published by Spinoza in secret, did not completely condemn religion – rather, it objected to theological and homiletic attacks on the independence of reason and the freedom of philosophy. What is more, Spinoza was convinced that all the major Churches had in fact departed from the Christ’s teachings, which in themselves constitute the highest form of moral instruction. Apart from that, one should remember that the circle of Spinoza’s closest friends included Collegians (Balling, Jellesz, Rieuwertsz), who shared the philosophical views of Spinoza but remained deeply believing Christians.

Israel. As can be seen, the core of his proposal consists of four interconnected theses. The first of them concerns the ideological unity of the Enlightenment; the second one declares that the Enlightenment was, above all else, a philosophical project, whilst the third one shows that the Enlightenment's genesis and development were under the essential influence of the opposition between radical and moderate Enlightenment; the fourth and, according to Israel, most important one says that "Spinoza and Spinozism were in fact the intellectual backbone of the European Radical Enlightenment everywhere, not only in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and Scandinavia but also Britain and Ireland."¹⁷

In Israel's view, only an interpretation along these lines allows one to grasp the characteristic features of the Enlightenment, i.e. not only to list some views but also point out the connection between various threads and discussions inside the whole of the Enlightenment. This can be done neither through the lenses of the interpretation looking at the Enlightenment from a "'French' perspective, seeing the wider European phenomenon as projection of French ideas and intellectual concerns," nor within the interpretation perceiving "the Enlightenment as an intellectual reorientation inspired chiefly by English ideas and science," nor, especially, by trying to force the Enlightenment "into the constricting strait-jacket of 'national history.'"¹⁸

Another advantage of the above described interpretation pattern is that it allows one to withdraw numerous accusations levelled at the Enlightenment. According to Israel, the objections raised against this period by representatives of various groups (especially particular forms of postmodernism, the Frankfurt school, and a wide range of attitudes appearing under the name of Christianity) were usually the result of an erroneous interpretation of the program of this period. Most often they were based on a false premise that the Enlightenment thinkers fostered a naïve or even utopian view on bringing human life to perfection, whereas the conceptions of such improvement – contrary to the view of the critics – were restrained by strong pessimism and consciousness of the difficulties which the implementation of this program is bound to encounter. In reality, the philosophers of the Enlightenment were fully aware of the problems involved in promoting tolerance, constraining fanaticism, introducing laws or improving life conditions. The underlying cause of their relative optimism was an increasing ability of humanity to produce goods, boost production, make technical inventions and improve the stability and efficiency of social institutions. In Israel's

¹⁷ Israel [2001] p. vi.

¹⁸ Ibidem, pp. v-vii.

opinion, this is well illustrated e.g. by a statement of Baron d'Holbach, who, at the close of his *Système social* (1773), argues that in spite of numerous difficulties, "the evidence shows, without question, that human reason does progress. We are manifestly less ignorant, barbarous, and ferocious than our fathers."¹⁹

Apart from that, Israel claims that a definite advantage of this interpretation pattern is that it allows one to transfer the historical principles of the Enlightenment to the context of contemporary problems, and thus to prove that the Enlightenment's program, especially read in the spirit of the radical Enlightenment, is very much a justifiable program, serving best the purpose of promoting worthwhile values. Israel makes it clear that, according to him, the Enlightenment was "the most important and profound intellectual, social, and cultural transformation of the Western world since the Middle Ages and the most formative in shaping modernity."²⁰ The Enlightenment's merits do not end with dismissing the old social order, i.e. negating monarchy, hierarchical social relations, privileges of aristocracy, authority of the clergy and subordination of women to men. The main achievement of the Enlightenment was the introduction of the principles of universalism, equality, democracy and autonomy of human affairs. Thus man obtained the status of a creator and maker, and worldly matters acquired an autonomous value. According to Israel, this task was best accomplished by the representatives of the radical Enlightenment. Their superiority over representatives of the moderate Enlightenment consisted in the fact that they had a more coherent and viable system of ideas.²¹

II.

As already mentioned, I do not intend to refer to all the problems concerning Israel's interpretation of the Enlightenment. Instead I will focus on Israel's view on the role of Spinoza and Spinozism in the Enlightenment's genesis and development. However, before that, I am going to state my position on a couple of assumptions defining the conceptual framework of Israel's standpoint.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 4. Besides this, one should keep in mind that "the quest for human amelioration," the most essential distinguishing feature of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, found diverse expressions in the views of the Enlightenment thinkers and was not confined to only one style of thinking encountered in this period. On the contrary, we can find the postulate of bringing perfection (progress) in the thought of Christian thinkers as well as deists and atheists. Thus, it is not accidental that this postulate can be perceived "as endorsing or opposing the existing order of society, as being reversible or irreversible, God-ordained or purely natural." Israel [2010] p. 8.

²⁰ Israel [2011] p. 3.

²¹ Israel [2006] p. 867.

I agree with Israel that the key to understanding the Enlightenment lies in the area of philosophy. It by no means does it signifies that one can become acquainted with the Enlightenment without a proper amount of information concerning the social circumstances or political life of the 17th and 18th centuries. The emergence of the Enlightenment, a complex and polymorphic movement, was undoubtedly inspired by a numerous reasons. In spite of this, there are grounds to believe that philosophy was a particularly significant factor, which influenced the form of this movement to a considerable degree. This represents one of the most fundamental differences between the Enlightenment and other important periods of the European thought. As it has repeatedly been noticed, the role of philosophy in the Enlightenment is hegemonic. Literature and science, history and economy, political pamphlets and treatises – they were all philosophical, “and philosophy itself did not leave out any area of intellectual work, employing for its purposes all literary genres from dissertation and treatise to tragedy and philosophical parable.”²² That is why Israel’s decision to place the history of philosophy in the center of his reflections on the Enlightenment should be regarded as entirely appropriate.

Israel’s writings, however, do not fit into the model of the history of philosophy conceived as a part of the study of intellectual history. It is true that such research features prominently in his books: as already emphasized, they contain an enormous amount of in-depth historical analysis concerning the origin of philosophical ideas, different forms of their popularization, and the way in which they were utilized in both social and political life. Nonetheless, the core of Israel’s investigations resembles rather a model of history of philosophy which can be described, following Richard Rorty, as a rational reconstruction or philosophical history of philosophy.²³ The essence of this type of study consists in treating past ideas, intellectual currents, and non-living philosophers as contemporary with the researcher. As a result, this means that philosophical texts written by historical philosophers are given the form they would have if they were published nowadays and, what is more, set in the context of the contemporary and not past conceptual framework.²⁴

Undoubtedly, a philosophical history of philosophy has many advantages. Thanks to it, the history of philosophy becomes a specific laboratory of philosophical experiences and can be instrumental in solving current problems.

²² Baczeko [1961] pp. 8–9 (translation – P.G.).

²³ Rorty [1984].

²⁴ La Vopa [2009] pp. 722–723.

Moreover, by employing this model of research, we can take a stance on earlier solutions to particular problems, assess their value, establish connections between conclusions and their premises, state our own view on philosophical problems more precisely and extract from texts written in the past true statements, enabling cognitive progress in philosophy. In addition, the above-described plan of research does not make the history of philosophy an arena for constantly changing views, does not lose sight of common themes and theoretical connections – nor does it connect the transformations of philosophy solely with social or cultural changes.

Unfortunately, a philosophical history of philosophy generates numerous difficulties, some of which are more acknowledged than others. One of them lies in the fact that an account of the past in the concepts taken from contemporary considerations not only does not fully grasp the specificity of historical doctrines but also, to a certain degree, distorts them. Another difficulty is that excessive “presentism” may result in putting into entire oblivion the meaning of the category of historicity, without which it is difficult to see a historical investigation as meaningful. However, the greatest problem with a philosophical history of philosophy is that it might lead (at least in some of its forms) to the ideologization of history and, as a result, to the distortion and adulteration of the actual state of things.²⁵

Has Israel managed to steer clear of these difficulties, especially the last one? It seems to be rather doubtful. The problem is not the unavoidable presence of the subjective element²⁶ but the tendency of Israel to assess the doctrines and currents of the Enlightenment from the perspective of his worldview and of his personal social and philosophical program. It is hard to deny that in his books Israel does not appear to be an impartial historian confining himself to clarifying the meaning of historical views but rather an adherent of one of the Enlightenment’s currents, namely, the radical Enlightenment, whose superiority

²⁵ Williams [1994] pp. 19–28.

²⁶ Everyone actively engaged in the history of philosophy knows perfectly well that there is no such thing as the only right way of investigating the sources, which usually have the form “The statement X was delivered by the philosopher Y at the time *t* in such-and-such circumstances of a particular kind W.” The method of the analysis of the sources, which includes the whole set of descriptive, explanatory, classificatory and assessive statements (whose choice and proportions depend on a particular position) results from many factors. The most significant among them are: (1) the conception of philosophy, (2) the view on history, (3) the view on the relation between philosophy and its history. From this point of view, one cannot speak about the only, entirely neutral or absolute history of philosophy.

over the moderate Enlightenment he tries to substantiate in both historical and systematic aspects.²⁷

What would be the nature of this superiority of the radical variety of Enlightenment over its moderate type? According to Israel, the principal advantage of radical Enlightenment is its coherence, and its roots can be found in Spinoza's metaphysics. In Israel's opinion, it is thanks to this coherence that the philosophical program worked out as part of the radical Enlightenment became the most justified position, offering a substantial basis for the struggle with dualism, supernaturalism, and irrationalism, as well as an efficient tool enabling its followers to discover and develop "a package of basic concepts and values," the most significant of which are:

- (1) adoption of philosophical (mathematical--historical) reason as the only and exclusive criterion of what is true; (2) rejection of all supernatural agency, magic, disembodied spirits, and divine providence; (3) equality of all mankind (racial and sexual); (4) secular 'universalism' in ethics anchored in equality *and chiefly stressing equity, justice, and charity*; (5) comprehensive toleration and freedom of thought based on independent critical thinking; (6) personal liberty of lifestyle and sexual conduct between consenting adults, safeguarding the dignity and freedom of the unmarried and homosexuals; (7) freedom of expression, political criticism, and the press, in the public sphere; (8) democratic republicanism as the most legitimate form of politics.²⁸

Israel argues that, using this as the starting point, one can rightly claim that the Enlightenment's program, conceived in the spirit of radical Enlightenment, became the most valuable one and was instrumental in making human existence perfect.

The weakness of moderate Enlightenment, in turn, consisted in: limiting the role of reason, making concessions towards the social and political order of the time, and, in the first place, accepting dualism. According to Israel, these are the reasons why the program of moderate Enlightenment turned out to be unable to generate universally conceived values, serving the purpose of social, legal and political revival in an efficient way.²⁹

²⁷ This is the main reason why many historians adopt a skeptical attitude towards Israel's proposal.

²⁸ Israel [2006] p. 866.

²⁹ Israel [2011] p. 7-8; A separate question is whether the division of the Enlightenment's doctrines proposed by Israel is reasonable. Many difficulties raised by it can be pointed out. In the first place, one can argue that the above division is not exhaustive, as in cases of many authors it would be impossible to state unambiguously whether they were radical or moderate thinkers. This has been

Is the conception described above tenable? There are numerous reasons to deny it. The first, and probably not the most important, set of reasons relates to the question whether a complex philosophical system can be assessed in the light of such criteria as coherence or generation of useful ideas. Even if such criteria play a part in the choice of philosophical conceptions, they certainly do not completely determine this selection and cannot indicate the only entirely accurate philosophical theory among the many.³⁰ Apart from this, one should not forget that these criteria create a possibility of various interpretations of the coherence of the content as well as the meaning of the usefulness of a particular idea. What is more, one can argue that the loss of coherence on the metaphysical level does not have to be an obstacle to generating and implementing fundamental existential values.

Another problem concerns the coherence of the very philosophy of Spinoza, which, according to Israel, constitutes *par excellence* a reason for the radical Enlightenment's coherence. There has been an ongoing discussion on the consistency of Spinoza's system for many years. It has frequently been argued that Spinoza's philosophy is a philosophy internally torn between naturalism and individualism, i.e. between two contradictory aspirations: the aspiration to man's full integration with nature, on the one hand, and the aspiration to the affirmation of man's individual existence, on the other.³¹ This objection, however, is not conclusive. In another place an attempt was made to show that neither Spinoza's acceptance of monism, nor the fact that he defines man's essence in terms of *modi* justifies the conclusion that the problem of the individuality of a human being cannot be solved within his philosophy. Thus, if we were to accept Israel's view that the coherence of radical Enlightenment is a consequence of the coherence of Spinoza's philosophy, he would have to point out the way of proving that the metaphysical scheme of the philosophy of Spinoza does not contradict his anthropological doctrine. Simply stating that this is so does not prove anything.

Nonetheless, the main problem concerns the nature and range of the influence of Spinoza's philosophy upon radical Enlightenment. Even if we were to

shown in an interesting way by La Vopa with the example of Hume ([2009] pp. 733–134, see also Jacob [2012]). Is this a sufficient reason not to apply the division into radical and moderate Enlightenment as a category in historical considerations? I do not think so. In spite of many difficulties, I believe that the opposition between radical and moderate Enlightenment is a relevant category helpful in understanding the Enlightenment itself.

³⁰ Szubka [2009] p. 239.

³¹ The view that even though in Spinoza's thought man is restored to nature, he is somehow melted and annihilated in his specifically human existence, belongs to the most common objections against Spinoza.

agree with Israel that the philosophy of Spinoza was widely discussed both at the end of the 17th century and in the first decades of the 18th century among the Dutch, French, German and English thinkers and that, in this case, one should reject the view, still held by some historians, that the writings of Spinoza were practically unknown until the year 1780 – there still remains an open question which tenets of Spinoza’s philosophy played a crucial role in the genesis and development of radical Enlightenment and what was the real degree of their influence.

According to Israel, the underlying thought of the entire philosophy of Spinoza is naturalism, which says that all the elements of reality are governed by the same laws of nature and are subject to one and the same principle of causality possessing universal range and applicable to every area of reality.³² In Israel’s opinion, it is this thought and a closely related theory of one substance that had a significant impact on the rise and formation of the naturalistic as well as materialistic attitude in the Enlightenment. This view is grounded in facts. Naturalism, without any doubt a distinctive trait of Spinoza’s philosophy, surely contributed to disseminating naturalism in the 18th century. Also, it is hard to disagree with Israel’s claim that Spinoza’s naturalism should not be understood only as a negation of the existence of the transcendental being but also as a view that questions almost everything constituting the intellectual orientation stemming from antiquity and consolidated in the scholastic tradition. By assuming that the entire world can be traced back to one substantial foundation and is governed by the same laws, Spinoza invalidated not only the questions concerning the existence of the transcendental being but also those concerning providence and the principle of the ontological hierarchy governing the world. What is more, by means of this conception Spinoza disposed of the teleological version of the relation between world and man. “God, or Nature” – Spinoza writes in the Preface to the fourth part of the *Ethics* – “exists for the sake of no end, he also acts for the sake of no end. Rather, as he has no principle or end of existing, so he also has none of acting.”³³ In relation to this one should agree with Israel’s thesis that naturalism, by eliminating revelation, miracles and providence, thus became the main premise in the argumentation (put forward as a part of social and political

³² Israel [2001] p. 244, [2006] p. 37, [2011] p. 405. In the *Enlightenment Contested* Israel writes that Spinoza’s thought “is best understood as a comprehensive and consistent system of naturalism, materialism, and empiricism, eliminating all theism, teleology, miracles, and supernatural agency” (p. 37).

³³ Spinoza [1988] p. 544.

views) supporting the freedom of expression, the equality of social classes and disseminating democracy.³⁴

However, taking into consideration Spinoza's whole doctrine, one can argue that Israel's view is too narrow. In the first place, Spinoza's naturalism cannot be identified with the materialistic interpretation of reality. Although all things are parts of nature, in Spinoza's system they are not characterized as purely material. Reality can be considered with reference to the attribute of extension as well as the attribute of thought. Thus, Spinoza's naturalism cannot be associated with the idea of the reduction of man to a material being. In this respect it differs from the naturalism of such philosophers as Diderot or d'Holbach, according to whom man is nothing more than a material body. For Spinoza it was clear from the outset that man is a being composed of mind and body and that both of these dimensions are conceptually distinct, which does not allow one to reduce the mental to the physical.³⁵ Of course, this does not mean that for Spinoza the human mind was a distinct substance, as had been suggested by Descartes, or that it constituted an exception from what can be explained on the basis of the laws of nature. In Spinoza's view, the mind, even though it cannot be explained in terms of spatial extension, is extensionally contained in the natural world. What is important, however, is that Spinoza in his philosophy does not argue against the dualistic vision of man or the conception of the reduction of thought to material features,³⁶ not to mention the theory negating the existence of thought and mind.

³⁴ Not every Enlightenment scholar would agree with the above claim. For instance, Dan Edelstein in his book *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution*, published in 2009, proves that it was just the cult of nature developed in the Enlightenment that was, to a large extent, responsible for the reign of terror during the French Revolution. See also Moyn [2010] p. 28.

³⁵ This aspect of Spinoza's naturalism draws the attention of many scholars. Some of them perceive it as the main advantage of this naturalism, which makes it more attractive than the contemporary form of naturalism – for instance, Donagan writes that “Spinoza's seventeenth-century form of naturalism does not fall short philosophically as today's varieties of it do. Today's naturalism is materialist; his is not. Yet the research programme of materialism – either to analyse thinking, the distinctive human activity, in terms of the concepts of the physical sciences, or to replace the concept of thinking with those of activities that can be so analysed – has led nowhere. More importantly, except in treating the discoveries of modern natural science, perhaps the greatest of the achievements of the human mind, today's naturalism is culturally barren. To questions about why human life matters and how it should be lived its answers are either evasive or contemptible. Spinoza's non-materialist naturalism not only provides answers to those questions that extort respect if not assent, but it incidentally lays the foundation of an historical explanation of the pre-naturalist answers to them that were accepted in the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of his own European culture” ([1988] pp. xi–xii).

³⁶ In the 17th century, the concept of thinking matter was advocated by many. For instance, Gassendi, a critic of Descartes, mentioned it with appreciation, arguing that the idea of mind as an immaterial substance different from body is neither clear nor distinct, which means that there is

His position is rather based on the idea that thinking has a universal range and, because of that, everything in nature has its mental or “intellectual” aspect. One of the most fascinating features of Spinoza’s philosophy is based on, as aptly formulated by Garrett, “his seeking to explain such crucial elements of human life as intentionality, desire, belief, understanding, and consciousness as already present in their most rudimentary (and perhaps even initially unrecognizable) forms throughout all of nature, so that humanity can be seen as a complex and sophisticated expression of nature rather than as something arising from the introduction of non-natural elements.”³⁷

Another characteristic element distinguishing Spinoza’s naturalism from reductionist naturalism (materialism) is its attitude towards the role of consciousness in human life. It is true that, according to Spinoza, all kinds of human activity are determined by natural law and aimed at preserving one’s own existence, but in Spinoza’s system it does not imply that the consciousness is only a non-significant addition or epiphenomenon without an essential influence on human actions. What is more, the interpretation of ethics adopted by Spinoza does not have much in common with the attempts of limiting human endeavours to prolong the temporal existence of human beings. Of course, human life does not have any external sense – its sense exists only in relation to life and the cognition of nature – but, in Spinoza’s understanding, it does not mean that the only value of man is his temporal existence.³⁸

a possibility that mind is only a subtler kind of body. An entirely materialistic conception of mind was presented by Hobbes, who considered the existence of an immaterial substance not only improbable from the viewpoint of reason but even internally inconsistent. The only comprehensible kind of substance is body, so it should be acknowledged that thinking is produced by matter.

³⁷ Garrett [2008] p. 19. Because of this, Spinoza’s concept of the origin and nature of thinking is called panpsychism. It is worth noting that the range of positions currently named panpsychist is quite broad. It is generally emphasized that panpsychism is a doctrine considering everything to have a mental aspect or, in a slightly different formulation, to possess mental life. However, the majority of the defenders of panpsychism, following Spinoza, point out that it does not lead to the conclusion that all things have a mind similar to the human mind or that everything possesses mental life of the same intensity as that of human beings; rather, all the existent things are considered to have such aspects of mentality and mental life as consciousness and self-consciousness. Thomas Nagel, one of the contemporary proponents of this position, understands panpsychism in the following way: “By panpsychism I mean the view that the basic physical constituents of the universe have mental properties, whether or not they are parts of living organisms.” Nagel [1979] p. 181.

³⁸ This aspect of naturalism is aptly summarized by De Dijn [1990] pp. 341–342: “Spinoza’s naturalism is of a very peculiar kind. It sees all activity, also all human activity as forms of life produced by an unbounded Life-force, acting without any end in view. But the force of life typical for human nature is not understood here as a drive for pure ‘biological’ survival, taking the concrete form of a drive for pleasure. It is understood as a force trying to produce a concatenation

If the above remarks are correct, they show that the view of Israel, according to whom the materialistic naturalism of the Enlightenment was inspired by Spinoza's thought, can be held only with significant reservations. Whatever might be said about Spinoza's naturalism, it is certainly not a kind of naturalism that goes hand in hand with materialism and reductionism, as was the case with the views of many Enlightenment authors.

Another important element of Spinoza's philosophy which, in Israel's opinion, must be considered while discussing the influence of his thought on the Enlightenment is associated with the subject of religion. According to Israel, Spinoza represented the most radical and, at the same time, most convincing form of atheism of the Early Enlightenment.³⁹ Partly because he undermined faith "in revelation, divine providence, and miracles, and hence ecclesiastical authority"⁴⁰ to a much greater extent than any of the other authors of the 17th century and partly because he offered the most elaborated and best designed critique of theistic thought. Thus, it is not accidental that Spinoza's view on religion became a significant point of reference. At the beginning it triggered negative reactions marked by hostility towards its originator, but later it found many followers, especially among the representatives of the French Enlightenment. Israel argues that, taking all of this into consideration, one can rightly say that the Enlightenment views on religion were, to a large extent, determined by the views of Spinoza.

The interpretation of Spinoza's views on religion is, of course, another matter. According to Israel, the attempts, still present in historiography, to see some indications of theism in Spinoza's system should certainly be rejected. Also,

of internally related 'rational' activities (including highly 'moral' and 'religious' feelings and desires). Although the truth of the human conatus is the endeavour of rationality, this does not imply that there was an end in Nature after all; i.e. to produce this marvelous organism capable of taking everything in its own hands in function of a glorious future where man will be god to man. The rationality of human beings is seen here as just one of the many life-forms of Nature's purposeless and center-less production. The unselfish caring for one's own rationality is as it were the experiential counterpart to this naturalistic truth. What seems most typical for Spinoza is not that he was the first to develop a radical naturalistic philosophy as a worldview best adopted to the new sciences; nor that he made rational understanding into the center of a new morality [...]; but that he intertwined these two so as to create a morality of rationality as the origin of all real virtues and even of a kind of religiosity. This morality and religiosity are fundamentally different from the traditional Christian picture of morality and religiosity, interpreted in terms of freedom of the will as separated from and at the same time structured by transcendent Value. The Spinozistic notion of freedom, blending so well with his naturalism, reminds one of the non-Christian moral-religious traditions, which never made rational understanding as such occupy the center of moral and religious practice."

³⁹ Israel [2006] p. 45.

⁴⁰ Israel [2011] p. 10.

in Israel's opinion one should not call Spinoza a deist or interpret his philosophy as pantheistic.⁴¹ All these interpretations are false – Spinoza's thought displays no such features, characteristic for a theistic, deistic or even pantheistic attitude. Spinoza was an atheist and as such he influenced the way of thinking of many philosophers of the Enlightenment. The legitimacy of this conclusion is confirmed e.g. by the reaction to his *Theologico-Political Treatise* as well as the opinions of many thinkers of the 18th century (Hume and Berkeley among others) who characterized Spinoza's position exactly in this way. All this unambiguously indicates that the theistic or even pantheistic way of interpreting Spinoza is simply not an option.

Israel's view is correct in many respects. Without any doubt, he is right in saying that Spinoza had a significant influence on the form and direction of the analyses of religion undertaken in the Enlightenment. One should also agree with Israel's suggestion that, since in Spinoza's doctrine God is nothing more than a system of the laws of nature, interpreting Spinoza in any religious sense would be difficult. Thus, the problem with Israel's position is not that it suggests an erroneous explanation of Spinoza's system but that his explanation is too one-sided and not very precise.

Above all else, one should remember that when Spinoza criticized the theistic conception of creation, he did not negate all the statements accepted as a part of this conception. For instance, he agreed with the view that the existence of nature requires the acceptance of the cause which brought it into existence; if there were no such cause it would be necessary to accept the existence of something without any cause (without any explanation) – and this, because of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, is impossible.⁴² Also, Spinoza shared the view that the cause in question can be only the being whose essence includes its existence, i.e. God.⁴³ However, contrary to the proponents of theism, he thought that these two statements do not imply that God is a being separate from nature or that God assigned himself some goal for the purpose of which he created the natural world – or, especially, that God, as the cause of the existence of nature, is a being having reason and a free will. He thought that all such descriptions assigned to God as the cause of nature reflect the naivety of human notions and have nothing in common with an adequate characterization of God's nature and of the way in which he

⁴¹ Israel [2001] p. 232.

⁴² Della Rocca [2008] pp. 4-5.

⁴³ Spinoza [1988] pp. 431, 425.

acts.⁴⁴ Therefore, Spinoza argued that the theistic view on creation, though it includes some correct elements, cannot be accepted and requires thorough revision. According to Spinoza, when referring to the established theses concerning the existence of one substance, one has to accept two basic facts: (1) God is the immanent and not transcendent cause of nature, (2) God produces the natural world “not from freedom of the will *or* absolute good pleasure, but from God’s absolute nature.”⁴⁵

The matter becomes more complicated when it comes to pantheism. If we consider the absence of God’s substantial autonomy from the natural world and the negation of the personal nature of God to be the distinguishing features of pantheism, Spinoza’s doctrine fulfills both conditions: the God of Spinoza is neither personal nor separate from nature. Looking at things from this point of view, one can describe Spinoza’s position as pantheistic or maybe panentheistic,⁴⁶ but the tenet of pantheism (*resp.* panentheism) is more complex and cannot be limited to the statement that there is no substantial transcendence in the relation between God and his creation. In the first place, pantheism, if it is to constitute a standpoint with reference to the nature of deity and differ from atheism, has to, in spite of denying the personality and distinctness of the Creator, see the natural world as something sacred or divine, i.e. attribute to it some features which allow it to be the object not only of scientific knowledge but also of contemplation and religious worship. Only then can this position make some sense in religious terms.

⁴⁴ Spinoza [1988] pp. 333–339.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 439.

⁴⁶ The name “pantheism” appeared for the first time in John Toland’s book *Pantheisticon* (1720), where it was used to describe people negating the difference between the Creator and creation and stating that everything constitutes a unity and has a divine character. Afterwards, the term “pantheism” was universally employed by German authors of the Enlightenment, which became one of the primary distinguishing features of their philosophical thought. The term “panentheism,” in turn, was coined by Karl Ch. F. Krause at the beginning of the 19th century. Usually the principal difference between pantheism and panentheism is explained as follows: according to pantheism God is literally identical with the totality of things composing reality, but in panentheism reality emerges from God and exists as his modification, while God is something ontically greater than the totality of things. Many authors share the opinion that the term “panentheism” renders the meaning of Spinoza’s position better, as it takes into consideration God’s ontic, cognitive and causal supremacy over creation, even if God is not different from particular beings. Cf. Gueroult [1968] vol. 1, pp. 220–239; De Dijn [1996] pp. 208–209; Donagan [1988] p. 90. Spinoza’s words from the letter to Oldenburg from 16th of December 1675 are considered a testimony to this: “I entertain an opinion on God and Nature far different from that which modern Christians are wont to uphold. For I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause. All things, I say, are in God and move in God, [...]. However, as to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on the identification of God with Nature (by the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken.” Spinoza [2002] p. 942.

If the word “pantheism” is considered in this broader, religious meaning, the question whether pantheism can be associated with Spinoza’s philosophy arises again.

Throughout history this question has been answered in many different ways. Spinoza was treated primarily as an atheist by the philosophers of the 17th and partly by those of the 18th century. The reasons for such an assessment were diverse. It was usually argued that Spinoza, negating the distinctness of God and especially his ability to act freely and purposefully, by the same token destroys the metaphysical and religious ground for the Divinity, which lies at the basis of the notion of the divine power and glory as well as the meaning of prayer and worship (Leibniz, Malebranche). At the turn of the 19th century (especially in Germany) the opinion prevailed that neither Spinoza’s metaphysical doctrine nor his anthropological views gave a reason to classify him as an atheist. It was argued in many ways that Spinoza’s numerous objections to theism did not aim at negating the deity but rather constituted an attempt to purify religion from the shallow anthropomorphic vision of God. Thus, their purpose was not to attack religion in general but to rehabilitate it by the deification of the natural world and reconciling it with God. It was this interpretation, created by the participants of the *Pantheismusstreit* and repeated sufficiently long by the next generations of the 19th century philosophers, that was the reason why pantheism became the most popular label employed in describing Spinoza’s philosophy. The majority of contemporary historical studies define Spinoza’s thought in exactly this way, and most philosophical dictionaries and encyclopedias mention Spinoza as a paradigmatic pantheist, while many contemporary scholars support the interpretation proposed by the representatives of the German Enlightenment.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, such an approach is not satisfying. For many reasons, the pantheistic interpretation of Spinoza (taking the term “pantheism” in its broader, religious sense) seems untenable. It is true that some expressions used by Spinoza may prompt such a reading, but a broader and more in-depth analysis of the problem gives rise to many doubts concerning the pantheistic interpretation of his philosophy. In the first place, it seems wrong to assume that Spinoza’s goal was to

⁴⁷ For instance, Bennett thinks that there are reasons for describing Spinoza as a pantheist also in a broader sense of the term: “Spinoza had another reason for using the name ‘God’ for Nature as a whole – namely his view of Nature as a fit object for reverence, awe, and humble love [...]. He could thus regard Nature not only as the best subject for the metaphysical *descriptions* applied to God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but also as the best object of the *attitudes* which in that tradition are adopted towards God alone.” Bennett [1984] pp. 34–35. Thus, according to Bennett, we should assume that Spinoza in fact considered pantheism to be a kind of religion.

create some kind of a new religion – an educated religion of reason.⁴⁸ Equally false is the assumption that Spinoza's attack on theism can be reduced to arguing against popular notions of God. Of course, it cannot be denied that in Spinoza's system an important role is played by the idea of the "intellectual love of God" which assumes, as numerous statements in Part 5 of the *Ethics* confirm, displaying some kind of an affective attitude towards God-Nature apart from the effort of reason. Nonetheless, in Spinoza's system this attitude remains largely unconnected to adoration, worship and awe required by religion and not by any stretch of the imagination can be identified with the practice of contemplation described extensively by such writers as Meister Eckhart or John of the Cross or with the disposition of an unusual emotional exultation manifested by Teresa of Avila. To simplify a little, for Spinoza an act of the "intellectual love of God" means exclusively holding true ideas concerning the natural world and oneself as its part in connection with the feeling of joy arising from grasping this truth. Thus, it is essentially a cognitive category and not some kind of a supernatural insight into nature's divinity.

When it comes to Spinoza's view on the relation between reason (philosophy) and faith (theology), contrary to what is sometimes claimed, Spinoza did not unconditionally condemn religion. It is true that he did not have an overly good opinion of the "superstitious character of the folk religion", but it did not lead him to desire the liquidation of religion in general. What he did not accept concerned especially theological and homiletic attacks on the independence of reason and freedom of philosophy. The suggestion that the radicality of Spinoza's position on religion lies in negating the revelation or miracles also misses the

⁴⁸ Spinoza considered it an error not only to subject reason to the authority of the Scripture but also to share the opposite view, according to which the meaning of the Scripture has to be identical with truth and should be interpreted in accordance with some external standard of reason or rationality. In chapter XV of the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza differentiates between two groups of Jewish thinkers "who do not know how to distinguish philosophy from theology." The first group claimed that "Scripture should be subject to reason", while the second maintained that, on the contrary, "reason should be the servant of Scripture." Spinoza calls the representatives of the former party dogmatists, regarding Maimonides as their patron, and to the latter group, represented by Rabbi Jehuda Al-Fakhar (today largely unknown), he gives the name of sceptics. "For whichever position we adopt, we would have to distort either reason or Scripture since we have demonstrated that the Bible does not teach philosophical matters but only piety, and everything in Scripture is adapted to the understanding and preconceptions of the common people. Hence, anyone who tries to accommodate the Bible to philosophy will undoubtedly ascribe to the prophets many things that they did not imagine even in their dreams and will construe their meaning wrongly. On the other hand, anyone who makes reason and philosophy the servant of theology will be obliged to accept as divinely inspired the prejudices of the common people of antiquity and let his mind be taken over and clouded by them. Thus both will proceed senselessly, albeit the latter without reason and the former with it." Spinoza [2007] p. 186.

point. It seems that the core of Spinoza's approach lies in the way he establishes a distinction between reason and faith, philosophy and religion. In Spinoza, the principle of the independence of these two spheres has a specific sense: it is not based on the typical assumption, whose roots date back to Aquinas' thought, that philosophy and religion have different starting points and employ different methods of establishing what is true.⁴⁹ The underlying principle of Spinoza's position is entirely different, expressed by the claim that the revealed religion, including the Scripture, does not have a cognitive dimension and does not disclose any truth.⁵⁰ Because of all this, not only the view subordinating reason to the authority of the Scripture but also the opposite position, according to which the intended meaning of the Scripture must be equivalent to truth, should be read through the lenses of some external standard of rationality or reason. As a result, in Spinoza's opinion, we are justified to conclude that we do not need religious belief (faith) to understand the world or to imbue our life with meaning. All this can be done without referring to any kind of religious notions or transcendence. In this sense, according to Spinoza, religion is unnecessary.

These remarks clearly show that Spinoza's doctrine, seen in the context of his attitude towards religion is more complex than Israel thinks and, because of that, cannot be presented in the following way: (a) Spinoza was not a theist, as he rejected God's transcendence and personal character; (b) Spinoza was not a pantheist, since pantheism is a religion. These statements are clearly too rash. As a result, also the model of assessment of the influence of Spinoza's philosophy on

⁴⁹ This standpoint can be ascribed to many authors of the 17th century. It seems that some version of this position was defended by Descartes: though he abandoned the view of the Scholastics (Thomists) that theology is a negative criterion and assumed that reason can prove some articles of faith better than theology could, he still acknowledged that the Scripture tells the truth. "I have always thought that the two issues of God and the soul were the most important of those that should be resolved by philosophical rather than theological means. For although it is sufficient for us Christians to believe by faith that the human soul does not perish with the body and that God exists, yet it seems certain that unbelievers cannot be convinced of the truth of religion, and scarcely even of any moral values, unless these first two truths are proved to them by natural reason." Descartes [2008] p. 3.

⁵⁰ According to Spinoza, such a conclusion is reached through the analysis of the Scripture's sense and meaning, which implies that, first, the prophets did possess some (but not any) knowledge about God, nature and man, and the descriptions which they give are based merely on vivid imagination, having no connection to cognition. "Consequently those who look in the books of the prophets for wisdom and a knowledge of natural and spiritual things are completely on the wrong track" (Spinoza [2007] p. 27). Secondly, it implies that the stories told in the Scripture have no supernatural sense, so they should be understood solely in historical categories, in the context of the social and political situation of their times. Spinoza believes that this alone shows that the Bible cannot be treated as a book transmitting any kind of truth.

forming the attitudes of the Enlightenment thinkers towards religion requires a more complex characterization than the one proposed by Israel.

My principal objection against Israel concerning the question which particular aspects of Spinoza's doctrine shaped the appearance and character of the Enlightenment, is associated with an entirely different issue. In my opinion, Spinoza's inspirational power (abstracting for the moment from the problem of the range of his inspiration) lies neither in the sphere of metaphysics nor in his opinions on religion but rather in his proposal of a reform of the philosophy of man. In other words, I think that the core reason of Spinoza's influence on the Enlightenment was his conception of the human nature.

There is nothing surprising in this statement. It is, in the first place, a consequence of the fact that for Spinoza the main intellectual goal was to improve knowledge of the human nature. In the second place, it is implied by the fact that one can see the Enlightenment as an attempt at showing that philosophy is the science of man. What is more, one can argue that the motivation which led many of the Enlightenment authors to consider the problem of human nature a central philosophical problem is in many respects akin to Spinoza's motivation.

Spinoza was deeply convinced of the fundamental falsity or even harmfulness of the vision of human nature prevalent in the European philosophy, based on the belief that "man disturbs, rather than follows, the order of nature, that he has absolute power over his actions, and that he is determined only by himself."⁵¹ According to Spinoza, this conviction, accompanied by different kinds of dualism and consolidated by the theological doctrine of the creation of man in the image of a personal God, turned out to be doubly injurious: not only did it become the principal obstacle in making the study of man's nature scientific in the strict sense of the word but it also contributed in the highest degree to the widespread misconception that man achieves his highest ideals only through turning away from his innate nature, which turned them into moral commands entirely useless from man's viewpoint.

Spinoza was of the opinion that these errors and difficulties cannot be removed by means of some conciliatory proposal aiming at improving one or another element or by limiting the tasks of the philosophy of man to the minimum, as had been suggested by Hobbes. He was convinced that their solution must consist in a radical reform of all the basic theses in the philosophy of man, i.e. we have to assume that man is simply a part of nature and that whatever happens to him is a logical expression of his nature devoid of any transcendental

⁵¹ Spinoza [1988] p. 491.

purpose or ontically distinguished features. Spinoza argued that the prize of this diametrical change was not the destruction of all the most important ideals of man – on the contrary, there are some serious reasons to believe that only in the perspective defining man as a part of the natural world is it possible to build a theoretically complete and true theory of the human being, providing the principles for the realization of all the ideals worth following.

Similar opinions can be found in many other 18th century authors, as shown by the numerous statements of thinkers classified by Israel as belonging to the radical Enlightenment – Diderot, Helvetius, d’Holbach, La Mettrie – and those constituting the moderate Enlightenment: Voltaire and Hume. Each of them, in spite of many differences existing between them, was convinced that social, economical, but especially moral and intellectual progress (including liberation from religious superstitions, false theories in the realm of natural sciences, and irrational forms of government) requires, first of all, a thoroughgoing reform in the area of the philosophy of man, a reform, whose key statement should be a view that man is an integral part of nature.⁵² Of course, one may not overlook the fundamental differences between Spinoza’s approach and that of the 18th century thinkers concerning the investigations of nature: whilst in Spinoza the apriori and metaphysical way of investigating the human nature prevails, a characteristic feature of the 18th-century reflection on man is an aposteriori and psychological model⁵³.

As far as the scale and quality of the reception of Spinoza’s philosophy is concerned, Israel provides quite a good deal of information concerning who and when was acquainted with Spinoza’s thought, who considered himself to be his disciple as opposed to a silent adherent, who criticized him or felt aversion to his views, what the reasons why Spinoza and Spinozism became the synonyms of offence and ignominy were, and, finally, why so many authors of the Enlightenment for whom the philosophy of Spinoza was often the main point of reference were silent about its value and avoided defending it publicly. All this

⁵² According to A. Garrett, the 18th-century investigations on human nature concentrated on the following four theses: (1) that the scientific analysis of man is crucial to the success both of science as such and enlightenment; (2) that human activities and human creations are central to the analysis of man; (3) that the human sciences are systematic in intent and universal in scope; (4) and that human nature is everywhere uniform and unites humankind both as objects of study by sciences and as subjects capable of enlightenment. Garrett [2009] p. 160.

⁵³ One should remember that Spinoza understood his demand to investigate human nature in relation to metaphysical considerations in quite a radical way: it is not limited to the statement that answering questions concerning the human condition and mode of existence involves metaphysical knowledge but means that no sphere of human existence can be explained without referring to metaphysical knowledge.

information is quite interesting and shows that as early as in 1670, i.e. on the date of the publication of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza's philosophy became a regular object of philosophical contention.⁵⁴ The legitimacy of this conclusion, however, does not disperse all the problems connected with establishing the quality and scale of the reception of Spinoza in the Enlightenment. Above all else, we should be concerned with the question whether the fact of this extraordinary manifestation of Spinoza in the 17th and 18th centuries is in itself sufficient to accept Israel's view that the majority of the most important theses of the Enlightenment arose either from the inspiration of Spinoza's thought or were the result of polemic against his particular views. The convergence of the views of the Enlightenment thinkers with Spinoza's philosophy can be associated with Spinoza's influence, but it does not have to be the case.

Firstly, one should remember that a vast majority of the debates around Spinoza's writings which took place at that time were quite poor in content and were concerned with slogans rather than with real statements pertaining to Spinoza's philosophical doctrine. Secondly, contrary to Israel's claims, Spinozism was not an unambiguously defined view.⁵⁵ Quite the opposite: it was a cluster of diverse ideas. This fact is visibly confirmed by the amount of different interpretations of Spinozism which we observe in the 18th century: Dunin-Borkowski has found more than fifty of them, even though he took into account only those which, according to him, were best substantiated. Thirdly, Israel's argument that the principal role in the reception of Spinoza was played by Bayle is unconvincing. As La Vopa has shown, it is difficult to call Bayle a "Spinozist."⁵⁶ Moreover, one should remember that the characterization of Spinoza, given by Bayle, has a twofold character. Apart from the appreciation of Spinoza's atheism and of the way in which he broke the connection between religion and morality, it also contains a radical critique of monism. Fourthly, we could argue that the voices of approval or the attempts to nominate Spinoza as a forefather, which we encounter in the writings of Diderot, d'Holbach or La Mettrie, did not result from profound understanding of his thought. The authors in question referred to Spinoza simply for reasons connected with propaganda. Fifthly, one can argue that the reception of Spinoza's thought by the authors of the German Enlightenment, which assumed a form of contention over Spinoza (*Spinoza-Streit*)

⁵⁴ This has also been confirmed by the research of other authors: Van Bunge [1981, 2001]; Kuliniak and Małyszek [2006] pp. 7-58.

⁵⁵ Israel [2011] pp. 10-11.

⁵⁶ La Vopa [2009] p. 726.

or the discussion known as *Pantheismusstreit* was not aimed at Spinoza in the first place: its principal goal arose from the desire to discover a new idea which could fill the notion of “God” with a new meaning, in the context of the onset of deism and materialism. It was thought that the philosophical conception of Spinoza’s God-Nature would best fulfill this desire. It seems that this was the main reason why, for decades, Spinoza became a significant element of the debate on the identity of the German philosophy and why it was Spinozism and not some other system that became the main point of reference for German thinkers. Sixthly, Spinoza was, as Kołakowski rightly put it, quite freely “used in philosophical controversies, in which the opponents charged each other with the connections with the atheist and blasphemer.”⁵⁷

In the end, one’s attention should be directed to yet another problem. According to Israel, looking at Spinoza’s philosophy as a whole prompts one to assume that, paraphrasing the well-known remark made by Marx, Spinoza’s goal was not to interpret the world but to change it.⁵⁸ I believe that this statement constitutes the main flaw of the explanation of Spinoza’s philosophy assumed by Israel and a misunderstanding of its principal value. The exceptionality of Spinoza’s philosophy lies in the conviction that man’s practical success is achieved only through grasping the truth about the human nature more fully, including acquiring the knowledge of the whole *Nature*. That is why, if philosophy is to have real practical significance, it cannot be restricted to investigating everything in the light of how it can contribute to man’s material success. This task can be achieved only by the doctrine based on comprehensive metaphysical and anthropological knowledge. Only philosophy understood in this way is able to discover principal truths necessary for acquiring the understanding of man in his theoretical aspects as well as for establishing the most efficient means of satisfying all personal and collective needs which provide a substantial element of the human nature.

Conclusion

Israel’s books undoubtedly constitute a significant step forward in the research on the Enlightenment. The enormous amount of factual material gathered in them and the range of the problems discussed is quite impressive and exceeds everything which has been written on the subject of the Enlightenment until now. This relates especially to emphasizing the role of the Dutch thought in the 17th

⁵⁷ Kołakowski [1958] p. 591.

⁵⁸ Israel [2001] p. 174.

century genesis of the European Enlightenment, showing that intellectual ferment in Europe at the turn of the 18th century was associated with a much broader philosophical program that was described by Paul Hazard, and directing attention towards the expansion of the Enlightenment ideas outside the European continent.⁵⁹ In this sense, it can be said that Israel performed a radical analysis of almost all the areas relevant for a comprehensive understanding of the Enlightenment, showing the genesis, structure and effects of this period. What is more, contrary to the standard accounts, he pointed out that the genesis and development of the idea of the Enlightenment was under the important influence of the conflict between the representatives of the two conflicting camps – radical and moderate. Additionally, his research demonstrated the unusual significance of Spinoza's philosophy in the process of fashioning the ideas of the Enlightenment. Taking all this into account, it comes as no surprise that Israel's version of the Enlightenment resembles a confrontation of two different conceptions of progress: a radical conception, rooted in Spinoza's philosophy, and a moderate one referring to the philosophy of Locke and Leibniz. This is an interesting interpretation, offering a deep insight into the phenomenon of the Enlightenment. The role of Israel's research in revealing the significance of the Enlightenment for the present day should also be underscored: in this respect, Israel's books can be seen as presenting a fundamental stage in the process of fashioning our way of thought. Of course, Israel's proposal generates some difficulties, which, in a greater or lesser degree, can undermine his account of the Enlightenment. As I have tried to explain above, the problems are connected with the overly one-sided assessment of the basic tendencies present in the Enlightenment as well as the ideologization of historical investigations, often to an unacceptable degree, and the unduly selective interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy and its position in the intellectual universe of the time.

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⁵⁹ The differences between Hazard and Israel have been discussed in detail by Stuurman [2002] pp. 228–229.

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