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Alfred Schaefer, *Spinoza. Philosoph des europäischen Bürgertums*, (*Hochschulschriften Philosophie*, Band 26), Traude Junghans Verlag, Cuxhaven & Dartford 1996, 192 p., ISBN 3-926848-71-5.

This book is a reprint of the 1989 edition, which was published by Berlin Verlag, Arno Spitz, under the same title. The author, born in 1907, witnessed important events of this century. He participated in the political theatre of Piscator and Brecht, was an active member of the KPD in the 1930s, was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned for many years; he succeeded in escaping to China, where he learned of the stalinist terror, which alienated him from communism. He emigrated to Australia in 1951, where he studied philosophy and political science. His promotion followed in 1960 in Berlin. He earned his money as a teacher and as an independent writer. He wrote books on Hume, Schopenhauer, Lenin, Nietzsche, Hegel, Hobbes and on ethico-political matters. Against this background, it is not surprising to see him present Spinoza's philosophy as a politico-historical event.

The main thesis of the book is that Spinoza, breaking with scholastic thought, proposed a new understanding of metaphysics. Metaphysics should not present us a static picture of the universe, but must open it up to reason. In this respect, metaphysics entails a political mission at the same time because science and philosophy cannot flourish without freedom of speech, guaranteed within a stable state. In flourishing, reason will allow the individual to overcome his natural inclination to maximizing utility, i.e. his egoism, and become a genuine member or *citoyen* of a republic. But what is more, it also enables him to acknowledge also his participation in nature as a whole. At the same time, the human search for insight into the laws of the universe will keep state power within boundaries. The natural science of politics will produce a relativization of the state and its ability to rule human beings. In this expansion of the horizon - exploring the world in a scientific as well as an economic sense, but at the same time binding state power by drawing attention to its partnership in the universe - Schaefer sees

the connection between Spinoza's thought and the rising European citizenry (Bürgertums).

Unfortunately, this connection only serves as a rhetoric element. The author never gives his thesis a genuine historical basis. And apart from this, what is to be understood by the "europäischen Bürgertum" in the seventeenth century? Of course, there are important characteristics that the citizens of the most mercantile cities in Europe could have had in common, characteristics which might have had a great impact on the modern world: capitalism, natural science and states linked to civil societies. In this general sense, however, there are many more philosophers who deserve the name of "Philosoph des europäischen Bürgertums". Schaefer, however, does not go into details in order to unravel the complex relationship between Spinoza's thought and the specific character of the Dutch *bourgeoisie* or, more general, the citizenry in seventeenth-century Holland. In Schaefer's socio-historical view there is no space for such differentiations. Spinoza's theoretical plea for a *disciplined* exploration of the newly conquered freedom seems enough to make him the "Philosoph des europäischen Bürgertums" *par excellence*.

Unfortunately too, the book is not well composed. The text jumps from one theme to another, mixing citations from different sources, Spinoza's works and that of other philosophers, with the author's own comments - all without any inner logic. At least, I did not find any. The book is rather an account of a very personal, politically inspired, reading experience than an original exposition of new research. Moreover, the author does not build too much upon secondary literature, not even those texts that relate most to his central thesis (as, to name just a few, the works of Matheron, Negri, Balibar or Tosel), nor does he discuss the main controversial issues. To give just one example: he treats Spinoza, without any hesitation, as a common social contract theorist.

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