Editors’ Introduction
Mapping the global receptions of Spinoza’s thought

Henri Krop* & Andrea Sangiacomo**

Abstract
This short introduction presents the background context from which this special issue originated. It briefly sketches how the Dutch Spinoza Society (Vereniging het Spinozahuis) organized two conferences, one in 1997 and one in 2023, with an increasing focus on reflecting on the spreading of Spinoza’s thought in different countries. The papers published here are mostly derived from the 2023 conference, although they are continuous with the longer-term project already initiated in 1997.

Keywords: Spinoza, global receptions, history of scholarship, Vereniging het Spinozahuis, historiography

Spinoza’s philosophy has always been influential. Since his lifetime, Spinoza’s works provoked a number of reactions, although their dissemination was not always simple and linear. This special issue of the Journal of Spinoza Studies takes the geographical diversity of the reception of Spinoza’s thought as its starting point. How have the specific geopolitical and cultural conditions of certain national areas shaped, constrained, fostered and still affect the development of Spinoza studies? Who or what are the main actors, events, cultural and social infrastructures or networks that support the thriving of academic and non-academic Spinozism in different countries around the world?

The contributions published in this special issue, originating from two conferences organized by the Dutch Spinoza Society, attempt to provide some initial answers to these and related questions, each one taking as a case study a different national, linguistic, or geographic area. The goal is not primarily to judge the values of specific interpretations of Spinoza’s thought, but rather to uncover the wider (and often hidden or neglected) socio-political and cultural background in which different interpretations or even ‘schools’ of Spinoza studies are embedded. Moreover, each contribution witnesses something of the style, preoccupations, and academic attitudes with which Spinoza studies are addressed in different countries. To provide more context about how they have been assembled, it might be worth offering a short sketch of the background history that led to their composition.

* Erasmus University Rotterdam: krop@esphil.eur.nl;
** University of Groningen / Erasmus University Rotterdam: a.sangiacomo@rug.nl; ORC-id: 0000-0001-7529-9826

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The Vereniging het Spinozahuis was established in 1897. Its main objective was (and still is) the maintenance of the house where Spinoza lived during the early 1660s and its arrangement as a museum. To celebrate its first centennial, the Society organized in 1997 a two-day multilingual conference. The festivities ended after the conference, on Saturday 17 May, with two public lectures. The first address, entitled ‘Spinoza and the Dutch Golden Age. A European perspective’, was delivered by Jonathan Israel, who announced his (by then) upcoming research on Spinoza, and the second was given by Leiden professor of French literature Sem Dresden, who spoke about Spinoza as a teacher. At the end of the centennial, the new Dutch translation of the Tractatus theologicopoliticus was presented to the mayor of Amsterdam.

In the opening lecture of the conference, Siebe Thissen outlined the Spinoza Renaissance in the Netherlands during the second half of the Nineteenth Century. For the rest of the conference, the discussion was divided into four topic-areas, where nine scholars dealt with the influence of Spinoza on philosophy, artistic life, political sciences and ‘theology’ in the Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Belgium. The latter section did not trace Spinoza’s influence on theology strictu sensu but on three confessional groups in the Netherlands: orthodox-Protestantism, Roman-Catholicism and Judaism.

The last section of the conference was devoted to ‘the revival of the interest in Spinoza outside the Netherlands’. Thomas Cook outlined ‘Spinoza’s place in Twentieth century’s Anglo-American philosophy’, while Filippo Mignini did the same for the place of Spinoza in Italian ‘culture’. Both papers are now published in this volume of the Journal of Spinoza Studies. Manfred Walther contributed with a paper about the state of Spinoza studies in Germany, situating them in their historical and social context. This contribution was printed in an elaborated form as chapter 2 of the third volume of his Spinoza Studien, with the title ‘Spinoza in Germany’. Curiously, the significant French tradition was not addressed, although it influenced many Dutch Spinozists from the 1970s onwards. We were unable to determine the reason for this omission, since the main organizer of the 1997 conference, Theo van de Werf, to the utmost regret of the Spinoza Society, died in 2023, although it is possible that this gap was due to linguistic barriers. Seven addresses delivered during the conference were prepared for printing but until now they did not reach publication.

In 2020 the Spinoza Society set up a committee to organize the celebration of its 125th anniversary. The members were Paul Juffermans, Nanne Bloksma, Piet Steenbakkers, Bouke Posthuma

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1 This address became part of his thesis, De Spinozisten. Wijsgerige beweging in Nederland (1850-1907), dis. Erasmus University Rotterdam (The Hague: SDU, 2000).
2 Wiep van Bunge’s address had the title “Spinoza in de naoorlogse Nederlandstalige filosofie”. It can be read in English adaptation in Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
5 An exception is Marin Terpstra’s paper on the reading of Spinoza by Dutch Roman-Catholics. It was published in 2021 as Number 75 of the Mededelingen vanwege het Spinozahuis, the Society’s series of publications.
and Henri Krop. Andrea Sangiacomo joined the committee in 2022. The committee decided to split up the conference into a national part, held on 15 October 2022, which sought to display the topicality of Spinoza’s political thought, focusing on the *Tractatus Politicus* and by inviting six Dutch Spinoza scholars of the younger generation to discuss this work (the publication of these papers is planned for the end of 2024)—and an international part that had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The conference then took place on 27 and 28 July 2023 at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

With the organization of these conferences the Spinoza Society wanted to realize its main aim, which is that of keeping the spiritual legacy of the Dutch philosopher alive and demonstrating the significance of his thought for contemporary society. The committee invited thirteen speakers in order to reflect on the history of Spinozism and Spinoza scholarship in their respective countries and to explore the international dimension of Spinoza’s legacy.

On the one hand, the goal was to expand on the historical reconstruction of Spinoza studies in the Dutch, and Anglo-American world, Italy, and Germany that the 1997 conference already began. This is now witnessed in the contribution that appears in this special issue. Henri Krop discusses not only the history of the *Vereniging het Spinozahuis* in terms of its goals and the instruments to attain them, such as publications and conferences, but also the rival organization, the *Societas Spinozana*, which between the World Wars clearly outshined the *Vereniging*. While Thomas Cook covered the Anglo-American reception of Spinoza until 1997, Justin Steinberg provides a discussion of the more recent developments in the last three decades. Similarly, Andrea Sangiacomo, building on the 1997 paper by Filippo Mignini, offers an outline of Italian Spinozism between 1997 and 2023. Martin Lenz, president of the German Spinoza Society, presented at the conference a talk on the state of Spinoza studies in Germany, but unfortunately this contribution won’t be published in this special issue.

However, remedying a lacuna of the 1997 program, Jean-Jaques Lantoine offers now a rich reconstruction of French Spinozism in the last 125 years. At the conference, Mogens Laerke also addressed the participants with a paper titled ‘Spinoza in Paris 1675: A Moment in the First European Reception’ (which is not included in this special issue). Transcending the scope of the 1997 conference, Spain was integrated into the map of European Spinoza receptions thanks to the contribution of María Luisa de la Cámara and Javier Espinosa, who reconstruct the role played by Spinoza’s philosophy in the transformation of Spanish society and university after Franco’s death.

On the other hand, the 2023 conference paid attention to Spinoza studies and Spinozism outside Europe and North America. In the last twenty-five years the emergence of a ‘global Spinozism’ became somewhat obvious. In 1989, for example, the Spinoza Society of Japan was established and the committee was very pleased that Osamu Ueno, a lifelong board member, accepted the invitation to present a paper (published here) on Spinoza studies in Japan. Looking at the Middle-East, the conversation on the global receptions of Spinoza is also enriched by attention to the Spinoza scene in Israel, where there was a Spinoza organization, the *Spinozaeum* at Haifa, already since 1950. Gideon Katz outlines how Spinoza gained acceptance in Hebrew culture long before the establishment of Israel and helped Jews, who lost their ‘religious life style’ to formulate a viable alternative. Moving to Iran, Ali Fardowsi, the translator of the TTP into Farsi, outlined the Spinoza reception in Iran and the four images of the philosopher that took shape in that context. South America is also represented through a reconstruction of Spinoza studies in Brazil, offered by Márcio A. Damin Custódio and...
Francisco Ferraz. They document the growing presence of Spinoza in the Brazilian universities. Both their paper and the one by De la Cámara and Espinosa show that even linguistic communalities did not preclude that Latin America and Europe went their own ways in adapting Spinoza to their own intellectual needs and preoccupations.

The papers collected here evince the rapid expansion and recent diffusion of Spinoza studies throughout the globe and how Spinoza’s thought continues to be a unique device for facing the intellectual challenges of our age. These contributions also reflect the varieties of styles, angles, philosophical presuppositions and cultural interests that drive different national communities, but also their mutual exchanges and interconnections. What appears is a still incomplete but increasingly richer and more interesting sketch of a genuinely global and diverse network of Spinoza studies that promises to grow, expand and thrive even more in the upcoming decades.

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References