

“He was in the world, and the world did not know him”.
Spinoza’s Christ and the Freedom of Philosophy

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Scholars have studied the figure of Christ within the Theological-Political Treatise for quite some time, as a symbol of the riddle that runs through Spinoza’s reflection on freedom of thought. Christ is placed by Spinoza at the centre of a specific problem in the Treatise, also reflected in the Ethics, which is: if freedom consists in adequately understanding our nature and the nature in which we are included, why is this understanding so difficult to reach for most of mankind? What kind of philosophical and political obstacles stand in the way of reaching intellectual perfection? As we shall see, Spinoza’s Christ incarnates this riddle, which is individual and collective at the same time, and corresponds to the distinction between the philosopher and common people.

Keywords: *Spinoza, Christ, Freedom of Philosophy, Imagination, Intellect.*

Introduction

In this contribution I will deal with the problem of freedom of thought, taking Spinoza as my starting point. I would like, however, to choose a specific and perhaps unusual perspective: the thesis I will set out is that the tension between imagination and intellect, expressed by the figure of Christ, lies at the root of Spinoza’s philosophical research. What’s more, it reflects the distance between common people and those who can gain access to the truth of philosophy.

In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza does not propose in any way to subordinate theology to philosophy, but indicates them as two separate and legitimate paths towards salvation, each operating in its own realm¹. And things could not be otherwise, considering the “uncertain and risky” conditions that dominate the everyday life of men, as Spinoza writes in chapter fifteen of the *Treatise*².

¹ Cfr. *Tractatus theologico-politicus* [TTP], 5, 15, *Opera*, 4 vols., III, ed. C. Gebhardt, Heidelberg, 1925 [G.], pp. 77, 188; [*Theological-Political Treatise*, in E. Curley (ed.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2 vols., II, Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016] [C.].

² Cfr. TTP, 15, G. III, p. 187: “Quare hoc totius theologiae et Scripturae fundamentum, quamvis mathematica demonstratione ostendi nequeat, sano tamen iudicio amplectimur. [...] Quasi vero ad vitam sapienter instituendam, nihil tamquam verum admittamus, quod