

A Diagnosis of Cartesian Atheism

Petrus van Mastricht's Critique of Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes Petrus van Mastricht's (1630–1706) critique of Baruch Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* found in his *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena* (1677). The paper shows, first, that Mastricht regarded Spinoza's atheism as the inevitable outcome of the Cartesians' denial of philosophy's subordination to theology. Second, Mastricht, in refuting Spinoza, revised his earlier critique of Cartesianism. In his previous work, Mastricht had already pointed out the atheistic implications of Cartesianism, but in the *Gangraena* he could now clearly identify Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* as the atheistic consequence of Cartesianism. He was thus able to confirm his distinctive diagnosis of Cartesianism as a gangrene that would gradually worsen and eventually destroy the entire body of theology.

Keywords

Petrus van Mastricht – Baruch Spinoza – René Descartes – Christoph Wittich – Cartesianism – Reformed Theology – atheism – early modern philosophy

1 Introduction

In the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, the philosophy of René Descartes (1596–1650) provoked intense controversy regarding the relationship between

philosophy and theology. Descartes's followers argued for the independence of philosophy from theology to defend their master's innovative ideas against oppressive orthodoxy. Conversely, the Utrecht Calvinist theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) and his followers upheld the traditional view that philosophy was the handmaid of theology and condemned the Cartesians for denying it.¹

The controversy entered a new phase with the publication of Baruch Spinoza's (1632–1677) *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1670. Both Cartesians and Voetians began criticizing Spinoza. Cartesians, on the one hand, found that Spinoza agreed with them in rejecting philosophy's subordination to theology, but he defended it in an unacceptable manner. Spinoza asserted that philosophy and theology had nothing in common because theology did not teach truth, only morality. Against this radical thesis, the Cartesians Lambert van Velthuysen (1622–1685) and Regnerus van Mansvelt (1639–1671) wrote refutations of the *Theological-Political Treatise* as early as 1671 and attempted to distinguish Cartesianism from the heretical ideas found in that work. On the other hand, Voetians also immediately recognized the danger of Spinoza's book and succeeded in having it banned in the States of Holland in 1674. As part of the public campaign against Spinoza, the first Voetian refutation of the *Theological-Political Treatise* appeared in 1677: Petrus van Mastricht's *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena*.²

Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706) was one of the most acclaimed disciples of Voetius. Upon the publication of the *Gangraena*, he taught at the University

- 1 On the controversy, see especially Rienk Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans: The Reception of the New Astronomy in the Dutch Republic, 1575–1750* (Amsterdam, 2002); Alexander X. Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism: Philosophy and Theology* (Oxford, 2015); Kai-Ole Eberhardt, *Christoph Wittich (1625–1687): Reformierte Theologie unter dem Einfluss von René Descartes* (Göttingen, 2018); Kai-Ole Eberhardt, *Vernunft und Offenbarung in der Theologie Christoph Wittichs (1625–1687): Prolegomena und Hermeneutik der reformierten Orthodoxie unter dem Einfluss des Cartesianismus* (Göttingen, 2019). On an overview of early modern Dutch Cartesianism, see now Tad M. Schmaltz, *Early Modern Cartesianisms: Dutch and French Constructions* (New York, 2017).
- 2 On the early reactions to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, see Wiep van Bunge, "On the Early Dutch Reception of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," *Studia Spinozana* 5 (1989), 225–251; Jonathan Israel, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: Foreshadowing the Enlightenment's More General Spinoza Reception?," in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge, Eng., 2010), 72–100; Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton, 2011), 215–240; Albert Gootjes, "The First Orchestrated Attack on Spinoza: Johannes Melchioris and the Cartesian Network in Utrecht," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 79 (2018), 23–43; Jetze Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology in the Dutch Republic, 1660–1710* (Oxford, 2018), 76–123.

of Duisburg, and soon succeeded Voetius as professor of theology at Utrecht University. Mastricht's *Gangraena*, as its title indicates, is a critique of Cartesianism. Characteristically, he compared Cartesianism to "gangrene." Just as gangrene begins as a minor symptom, but meanwhile spreads throughout the body, and finally destroys it, so too Cartesianism has appeared as some insignificant novelties, but stealthily spread throughout the body of theology, and finally destroyed it completely. Mastricht identified one such novelty as the rejection of the traditional view that philosophy was the handmaid of theology, finding that the Cartesian Spinoza explicitly supported it. Mastricht thus set out to criticize the *Theological-Political Treatise*, especially Chapter 15, in which Spinoza denied philosophy's subordination to theology.³

Mastricht's criticism of the *Theological-Political Treatise* deserves special attention for two reasons. First, it opposed not only Spinoza's arguments but also the Cartesians' attempt to distinguish Cartesianism from Spinozism. Therefore, the first question of the present paper is as follows: How did Mastricht identify the teaching of the *Theological-Political Treatise* as an inevitable outcome of Cartesianism?

Second, Mastricht's refutation of the *Theological-Political Treatise* is a revised version of his earlier critique of Cartesianism. He began his literary career with the publication of *Vindiciae veritatis et auctoritatis Sacrae Scripturae in rebus philosophicis* (Utrecht) in 1655, in which he defended the thesis that philosophy was the handmaid of theology against the Cartesian theologian Christoph Wittich (1625–1687).⁴ In the *Gangraena*, Mastricht made the same claim, but this time in confrontation with Spinoza. Therefore, the second question of the present paper is as follows: How did Mastricht develop his criticism of Cartesianism by refuting the *Theological-Political Treatise*?

Aza Goudriaan and Yoshi Kato have provided the most comprehensive analysis of the *Gangraena* to date. Focusing on Mastricht's portrayal of Cartesianism as a gradually worsening gangrene, Goudriaan points out that Mastricht regarded Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* as "the advanced stage of a development in which philosophy increasingly distanced itself from theology."⁵ Kato also notes that Mastricht regarded Spinoza's philosophy "as the final and

3 On Mastricht, see Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706). Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden, 2009); Adriaan C. Neele, ed., *Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706): Text Context, and Interpretation* (Göttingen, 2020).

4 On the *Vindiciae*, see Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 171–173.

5 Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen* (Leiden, 2006), 58.

truly cancerous form of Cartesianism.”⁶ However, they do not clarify how Cartesianism, according to Mastricht, gave birth to Spinoza’s philosophy. They thus fail to answer the first question above. In addition, they do not examine Mastricht’s critique of Spinoza in detail and consequently are unable to assess it in relation to his earlier *Vindiciae*, thus failing to address the second question.

The present study therefore analyzes the criticism of the *Theological-Political Treatise* found in the *Gangraena*. First, it will clarify how Mastricht placed Spinoza, whom he called an atheist, within the development of Cartesianism. Second, it will examine how Mastricht revised his criticism of Cartesianism by incorporating the refutation of Spinoza. The analysis will focus on Part 1, Chapter 3 of the *Gangraena*, “On Philosophy Not Being the Handmaid of Theology.” However, where necessary, it will also refer to other parts of the *Gangraena*, as well as to his earlier work, *Vindiciae*, and his later work, *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (1st ed. Amsterdam, 1682–1687; 2nd ed. Utrecht, 1698).

2 The Cartesian Consensus: Philosophy, No Handmaid of Theology

Mastricht begins Part 1, Chapter 3 of the *Gangraena* by identifying two foundational novelties of Cartesianism. The first is “universal doubt,” which he had already refuted in the previous chapter.⁷ The second novelty that he sets out to repudiate is the assertion that philosophy should never be subordinated to theology. As a primary example, Mastricht refers to the following passage from Chapter 15 of Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*: “On the other hand, those who make reason and Philosophy the handmaid of Theology are bound to admit as divine teachings the prejudices of the common people of long ago.”⁸

Mastricht acknowledges that Descartes himself subordinates philosophy to theology. He confirms this by consulting Part 1, Section 76 of the *Principles of Philosophy*, in which Descartes argues that even if reason seems to sug-

6 Yoshi Kato, “Petrus van Mastricht and Descartes’s New Philosophy,” in *Petrus van Mastricht*, ed. Neele, 127–141, there 135. For other studies on the *Gangraena*, see Ernst Bizer, “Die reformierte Orthodoxie und der Cartesianismus,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 55 (1958), 306–372, there 357–362; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), 215–216; Hoon J. Lee, *The Biblical Accommodation Debate in Germany: Interpretation and the Enlightenment* (Cham, 2017), 48–50.

7 Bizer, “Die reformierte Orthodoxie,” 359; Kato, “Mastricht,” 131–134.

8 Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, in *Opera*, 4 vols., ed. Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg, 1925), 3:180, trans. Edwin Curley, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1985–2016), 2:272.

gest something different from revelation, we should trust in revelation.⁹ In contrast, Cartesians disagree with their master and deny the subordination of philosophy to theology. As a leading proponent of this view, Mastricht names “Johannes [*sic*] Spinoza, an atheist but a Cartesian,” quoting the following from the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

I conclude finally that revealed knowledge has no object but obedience, and indeed that it is entirely distinct from natural knowledge, both in its object and in its foundation and means. Revealed knowledge has nothing in common with natural knowledge, but each is in charge of its own domain, without any conflict with the other. Neither ought to be the handmaid of the other.¹⁰

Spinoza attributes different objects to theology and philosophy. Theology preaches obedience to God, whereas philosophy teaches truth. They also rely on different principles. Theology is based on revelation and philosophy on reason. Therefore, they have “no dealings, or no relationship” with each other.¹¹ Consequently, neither could be subordinated to the other.

Mastricht continues that the same claim is made in *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (1666). He names its author an atheist and a Cartesian, suspecting that he is Spinoza. From the *Philosophia*, he quotes the following passage:

From what has been said it can readily be seen how worthless is the opinion of those who hold that, in respect of certainty, nature is subordinate to grace, science to revelation, truth ordinarily revealed to truth extraordinarily revealed; and not merely subordinate, but opposed. Each of these should be regarded as on an equal footing.¹²

The *Philosophia*, like the *Theological-Political Treatise*, denies subordinating philosophy to theology. Unlike the *Theological-Political Treatise*, however, it

9 Petrus van Mastricht, *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena* 1.3.2. (Amsterdam, 1677), 34–35.

10 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, in *Opera*, 3:10–11, trans. Curley, 2:73.

11 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, in *Opera*, 3:179, trans. Curley, 2:271; Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.16, 48.

12 [Lodewijk Meyer], *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* 5.7. (Eleutheropolis [Amsterdam], 1666), 43, trans. Samuel Shirley, in *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* (1666) (Milwaukee, WI., 2005), 111; Roberto Bordoli, *Ragione e scrittura tra Descartes e Spinoza: Saggio sulla “Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres” di Lodewijk Meyer e sulla sua recezione* (Milan, 1997), 147–148.

bases this claim on the premise that both philosophy and theology teach truth. Despite the difference between the two works, Mastricht suspects that both were written by Spinoza, believing that they take different paths only to reach the same atheistic conclusion.

Mastricht goes on to show that all Cartesian philosophers and theologians deny the subordination of philosophy to theology. Regarding philosophers, he initially refers to a disputation held at Leiden University on January 31, 1671, according to which “it is absurd to state that philosophy is the handmaid of theology, for both depend on their proper and sufficient principles.”¹³ He also mentions the Cartesian philosopher Johannes De Raey (1622–1702) who argued similarly in a disputation held in Leiden in 1665. De Raey states, “philosophy should not be accommodated to theology, nor should it allow itself to be corrected by theology.”¹⁴ Mastricht notes that the same claim has also been made by Cartesian theologians, referring first to Petrus Allinga (d. 1692), a pastor of Wijdenes, whom he regards as “the most vigorous defender” of the novelties of Cartesianism.¹⁵ In 1675, Allinga published *Een korte verhandeling* (Utrecht) against the Voetian theologian Leonardus Rijssenius (1631–1716). In this work, he devotes a chapter to the question of whether philosophy is the handmaid of theology and answers it negatively.¹⁶ Lastly, Mastricht quotes the following passage from Wittich’s *Theologia pacifica*:

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- 13 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.3, 36: “Citra absurditatem dici non potest Philosophiam Theologiae ancillari, cum utraque propriis nitatur ac sufficientibus principiis.” Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678) reported that this disputation was chaired by the Cartesian philosopher Theodoor Craanen (1633–1688). See Abraham Heidanus, *Consideratien* (Leiden, 1676), 89. This point is confirmed by S. van der Woude’s card catalog of the special collection at the library of the University of Amsterdam. It lists a booklet entitled *Exercitationum philosophicarum prima, quae est De praecognitis philosophiae* as a record of the disputation that Craanen presided over on January 31, 1671. The catalog indicates that this booklet is in the library of the University of Erlangen. Unfortunately we have not yet been able to consult it. We thank the anonymous reviewer for informing us of Heidanus’s report. On Craanen, see Davide Cellamare, “Medicine and the Mind in the Teaching of Theodoor Craanen (1633–1688),” in *Descartes in the Classroom: Teaching Cartesian Philosophy in the Early Modern Age*, ed. Davide Cellamare and Mattia Mantovani (Leiden, 2022), 199–230.
- 14 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.3, 36: “Philosophia non debet accommodari Theologiae, nec pati ut ab ea corrigatur”; Johannes De Raey, *Disputatio philosophica, de forma substantiali et anima hominis* corollary 5 (Leiden, 1665), sig. b4v; Douglass, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism*, 41.
- 15 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.2.3, 18.
- 16 Petrus Allinga, *Een korte verhandeling*, in *Van de Voldoeninge Jesu Christi* (Utrecht, 1675), 223–225. On the controversy between Allinga and Rijssenius, see Ernestine van der Wall, “Orthodoxy and Scepticism in the Early Dutch Enlightenment,” in *Scepticism and Irreligion*

Thus, it is commonly claimed that philosophy is the handmaid of theology, and, for this reason, philosophy is very much underestimated. It is as if philosophy cannot argue anything on its own and should simply be subservient to the command of theology. This is absurd, for every discipline is autonomous in itself. Even if a discipline offers something useful to another, the former should not be considered the handmaid of the latter. If this were the case, theology itself could be called the handmaid of philosophy because it offers something useful to philosophy. Disciplines advise each other. They help each other. However, every discipline has its own integrity in its own sphere. No discipline depends on another in its entirety.¹⁷

Wittich, like Spinoza, maintains that philosophy should not be subordinated to theology. Unlike Spinoza, however, he conceives that philosophy and theology are still useful for each other. Philosophy, for example, instructs theologians to form clear and distinct perceptions. Conversely, theology teaches philosophers that God created the world out of nothing.¹⁸

Mastricht concludes, "From all this, we can see indubitably that it is now a common view, accepted by all Cartesians, that philosophy is by no means the handmaid of theology."¹⁹

3 Philosophy, Theology, and "Being Handmaid"

Before proceeding to the critique of the Cartesians, Mastricht clarifies the meaning of three related terms: philosophy, theology, and "being handmaid" (*ancillari*).

in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, ed. Richard H. Popkin and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leiden, 1993), 121–141, there 133–139.

17 Christoph Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.15 (Leiden, 1671), 12–13: "Sic vulgo statuunt Philosophiam esse ancillam Theologiae, qua ratione nimis deprimunt Philosophiam, ac si nihil ex semet ipsa posset agere et tantum debeat dependere a Theologiae nutu, quod est absurdum. Quaelibet enim disciplina se sola subsistit, et quamvis altera alteri possit usum praebere, non tamen propterea ea quae usum praebet, tanquam ancillans debet considerari. Sic enim etiam ipsa Theologia, cum usum praebet Philosophiae, ejus ancilla posset appellari. Consulunt sibi mutuo disciplinae, et se mutuo juvant, quaelibet tamen in suo genere suam perfectionem obtinet, neque ab altera tota dependet;" Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 233.

18 Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.16, 13; 2.24, 19; Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 234–236.

19 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.3, 36: "E quibus omnibus indubitato manet, esse nunc communem et receptam Cartesianorum sententiam, Philosophiam nequaquam ancillari Theologiae."

Regarding philosophy, Mastricht makes three distinctions. The first is “reason” (*ratio*), which forms philosophy. The second is “created things” (*creaturae*), from which reason forms philosophy. The third is “claims” (*effata*), which are “formed by reason from created things, and ultimately constitute philosophy.”²⁰

Mastricht calls attention to two points concerning reason. First, he emphasizes that reason must not be equated with philosophy. He characterizes reason as “the organon by means of which the human being forms philosophy out of natural things.”²¹ Hence, reason is an instrument, and philosophy is its product. He acknowledges that people often identify reason with philosophy but regards this as an inaccurate understanding, for it calls the product (i.e., philosophy) by the name of its cause (i.e., reason). Second, Mastricht refers to the imperfect state of reason after the Fall. It is “completely blind in divine and spiritual matters, and in matters of nature it is blind in one eye and damaged.”²²

Mastricht explains what happens when imperfect reason forms philosophy:

Such [imperfect] reason examines and explains the objects, that is, created things. Created things certainly carry within themselves certain and infallible truths. But created things, strictly speaking, do not yet constitute philosophy. For it is from created things that reason forms philosophical claims. This takes place more perfectly or imperfectly depending on whether imperfect reason engages created things more perfectly or imperfectly. Therefore, the truth and certainty within created things themselves should never be confused with the truth and certainty of philosophy.²³

Because reason is imperfect, it often examines created things inadequately. Hence its claims (i.e., philosophy) could contradict the truth in created things.

20 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.4, 37: “*Effata*, canones et theorematum, quae a creaturis Ratio format, et haec demum constituunt *Philosophiam*.”

21 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.4, 37: “[...] pro organo, cujus ope homo e *naturalibus*, *Philosophiam* format.”

22 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.4, 37: “[...] in divinis ac *spiritualibus* caeca; in *naturalibus* lusca et sauciata [...]”; Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy*, 60–61.

23 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.4, 37: “Haec demum Ratio *objecta* seu creaturas lustrat et expendit, quae certas quidem in se gestant et infallibiles veritates; sed quae tamen *proprie Philosophiam* necdum constituunt, quippe a qua [*sic*. we read this as *quibus* referring to creatures], per rationem, *effata Philosophica* formantur, idque seu *perfectius*; seu *imperfectius*, prout ratio imperfecta, perfectius aut imperfectius circa creaturas occupatur. Ut proinde veritas et certitudo quae est in *ipsis creaturis*, cum veritate et certitudine *Philosophiae* nequaquam sit confundenda.”

Even if it investigates created things more adequately and its claims happen to be true, the truth of those claims is still subject to uncertainty insofar as they are the product of imperfect reason.²⁴

Mastricht defines theology as “Scripture itself and its claims.”²⁵ According to this definition, he opposes Wittich on two points. First, he expels Wittich’s fear that theologians would dominate philosophers under the pretext of subordinating philosophy to theology.²⁶ According to Mastricht, it is the Bible, not theologians, that exercises dominion. Second, Mastricht rejects Wittich’s understanding of theology. Wittich narrowly defines theology as treating matters known only by revelation, such as the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. He excludes matters known by both revelation and reason (e.g., the existence of God and his attributes) from theology. He also removes knowledge of natural phenomena from theology.²⁷ Against Wittich, Mastricht adopts a far broader definition of theology, writing that “by the word ‘theology’ we not only refer to matters known solely by revelation, but also to anything revealed by God, regardless of whether it can also be known by reason.”²⁸

Mastricht defines the phrase “being handmaid” as “providing useful things to someone submissively, or according to his/her command.”²⁹ According to this definition, he clarifies the exact point at which Wittich and Spinoza deny that philosophy is the handmaid of theology. Wittich, on the one hand, refuses philosophy’s submission while still acknowledging its usefulness to theology. Spinoza, on the other hand, denies both.

Mastricht gives three reasons why philosophy should be the handmaid of theology. He provides the first reason as the refutation of the Cartesians, who argue that philosophy does not serve theology because they are two separate

24 See also Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.6.5, 78.

25 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.5, 38: “Rursus monemus, nos per *Theologiam* non velle, nisi ipsammet *Scripturam* ejusque effata [...]” This definition is different from the one Mastricht gives in the *Theoretical-Practical Theology*. For the latter definition, see Neele, *Mastricht*, 95–99; Ryan M. McGraw, “Petrus van Mastricht and Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *Petrus van Mastricht*, ed. Neele, 19–36, there 27–28.

26 Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.15, 12.

27 Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.2, 1–2; 1.16, 13; 2.17, 13–14; Antonella Del Prete, “Oltre Descartes: Filosofia e teologia nella *Theologia pacifica* di Christoph Wittich,” in *Immagini filosofiche e interpretazioni storiografiche del cartesianismo*, ed. Carlo Borghero and Antonella Del Prete (Florence, 2011), 25–45, there 30–31; Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 227–228, 235–236.

28 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.5, 38: “Sigillatim tamen voce *Theologiae*, non ea tantum designamus capita, quae SOLA revelatione patent; sed quicquid revelatur a Deo, utcunque etiam *ratione* patere possit.”

29 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.6, 38: “[...] *usum alicui praeberere cum submissione*, seu conformatione ad ejus dictata.”

disciplines. Mastricht denounces this as untenable because the subjects of these disciplines overlap. Many natural phenomena as the subject of philosophy are revealed in the Bible and are therefore also the subject of theology. He confirms this by referring to the works of Girolamo Zanchi (1516–1590), Lambert Daneau (ca. 1530–1595), and Francisco Valles (1524–1592). He considers these authors the leading proponents of “Mosaic physics,” which seeks to build physics on the basis of the Bible. Mastricht agrees with them that the Bible accurately describes natural phenomena and provides sufficient material to construct physics.³⁰

For the second reason, Mastricht notes that revelations of natural phenomena either confirm or correct philosophical conclusions. Philosophical conclusions are always subject to uncertainty because they are produced by imperfect reason. Even if such conclusions correspond to the way the world actually is, their certainty is greatly increased if they are confirmed by revelation. If they are wrong, revelation corrects them, for God reveals natural phenomena as the “most reliable author of nature.”³¹

Third, Mastricht argues that philosophy is subordinate to theology in terms of purpose. Each of the philosophical disciplines has a specific purpose. Medicine, for example, aims at health, and ethics aims at the moral blessedness of individuals. Philosophical disciplines, however, do not teach us how to achieve the general, ultimate goal for human beings, namely, to live for God. Because theology alone teaches this, it subordinates other philosophical disciplines.³²

30 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.6, 39; 1.7.5, 86–87; Mastricht, *Vindiciae veritatis et autoritatis Sacrae Scripturae in rebus philosophicis* 9.1 (Utrecht, 1655), 223. On Mosaic physics, see J.A. van Ruler, *The Crisis of Causality: Voetius and Descartes on God, Nature and Change* (Leiden, 1995), 71–84; Ann Blair, “Mosaic Physics and the Search for a Pious Natural Philosophy in the Late Renaissance” *Isis* 91 (2000), 32–58; Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy*, 104–133; Kathleen M. Crowther, “Sacred Philosophy, Secular Theology: The Mosaic Physics of Levinus Lemnius (1505–1568) and Francisco Valles (1524–1592),” in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, 2 vols, ed. Scott Mandelbrote and Jitse van der Meer (Leiden, 2008), 407–438; David S. Sytsma, “Calvin, Daneau, and *Physica Mosaica*: Neglected Continuities at the Origins of an Early Modern Tradition,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 95 (2015), 457–476.

31 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.6, 39.

32 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.6, 39; Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia* 1.1.1.3.37, 2 vols. (Utrecht, 1699), 112b–13a, trans. Todd M. Rester, in *Theoretical-Practical Theology. Volume I: Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2018), 99. Mastricht writes that “very eminent theologians” have called theology a “master science” (*scientia architectonica*). He is likely to have Voetius in mind. See Gisbertus Voetius, *Politicae ecclesiasticae. Pars tertia et ultima* 1.3.8.4.3 (Amsterdam, 1676), 207. This discussion has its source in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.1.1094a14, a27.

Mastricht finally rephrases the proposition that “philosophy is the handmaid of theology” as follows: “[T]he claims of reason about natural things must be subordinate to what the Bible says about them, and consequently they can either be confirmed or denied by what the Bible says.”³³

4 Against Wittich and Allinga

After clarifying the relevant terms, Mastricht sets out to criticize the Cartesians. First, he considers Wittich and Allinga. In his *Theologia pacifica*, Wittich claims that it is dangerous to subordinate philosophy to theology, referring to scholastic philosophy. Scholastic philosophy was initially subordinated to theology, and began to deal with the mysteries such as the Trinity under the direction of theology. However, it soon broke away from the rule of theology. It thus rejected the Word of God and brought the mysteries under the control of human reason. Wittich maintains that the only way to avoid repeating this mistake is to separate philosophy from theology and prohibit it from dealing with the mysteries.³⁴

Mastricht claims the exact opposite, for it was separating philosophy from theology and giving the former independence that enabled scholastic philosophy to dominate theology:

On the contrary, we ought to fear it [i.e., philosophy’s domination of theology] precisely when philosophy is given its independence and a domain parallel to theology. This was actually done by scholastic philosophy, which ceased to be the handmaid [of theology] and began to command it. This currently takes place in Cartesian philosophy. Having abandoned its servitude [to theology], Cartesian philosophy first acquired a parallel relationship with theology, and shortly thereafter, under the guise of providing useful things [to theology], it blatantly insulted theology or, rather,

33 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.6, 39: “Ut proinde sensus *Philosophiae Theologiae ancillant*is, non alius sit: quam *Effata Rationis* de rebus naturalibus, subesse debere *dictatis Scripturae* de eisdem, ita ut ab iis approbari aut improbari possint.”

34 Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.15, 12; Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 233. De Raey also denied subordinating philosophy to theology with reference to scholastic philosophy. See De Raey, *Disputatio philosophica, de forma substantiali et anima hominis* corollaries 1–6, sig. b4r–v; Antonella Del Prete, “Discussioni sul metodo nel cartesianismo olandese. Il caso di Johannes de Raey,” in *La ragione e le sue vie: Saperi e procedure di prova in età moderna*, ed. Carlo Borghero and Claudio Buccolini (Florence, 2015), 146–167, there 150–151; Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism*, 43–44.

it drove theology out of its own domain. This is what we are trying to show more clearly than the light of day throughout this treatise.³⁵

Mastricht accuses Wittich and other Cartesians of repeating past mistakes. Similar to earlier scholastic philosophers, they make their philosophy independent and allow it to dominate theology.

Mastricht then focuses on the following assertion by Allinga:

Also of great force here is the reason that Mr. Wittich and Mr. Burman provide on this issue [to deny the subordination of philosophy to theology]. They [i.e., theology and philosophy] have different principles. The principle of theology is the divine revelation, or God's Word. The principle of philosophy is the light of nature, and clear and distinct perception. When the principles of the disciplines or sciences are so different, one cannot be the handmaid of the other.³⁶

As already discussed, this argument was included in the disputation held in Leiden in January 1671. In opposition, Mastricht insists that disciplines relying on different principles are distinct from one another, but they can still constitute a hierarchical relationship. He cites as an example the relation between metaphysics and other philosophical disciplines. Although they are distinct and based on different principles, metaphysics subordinates others because it supports their conclusions by providing the ontological principle that "the same thing cannot *be* and *not be* at the same time." Similarly, theology provides other disciplines with infallible conclusions drawn from the Bible. These conclusions become the principles of other disciplines by which whatever opposes them is rejected as false.³⁷

35 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.8, 41: "Contra 2. omnino id verendum, si sui juris fiat, eique regnum collaterale tribuatur, prout revera *factum* est a Philosophia Scholastica, non utique *ancillante*, sed *imperitante*, et prout *fit* in Philosophia *Cartesiana*, dum excusso servitio, collateralitatem cum Theologia primum consecuta, postmodum ei, sub titulo *Usus commodandi*, proterve insultavit, quin et suo regno dejecit, sicut nos per universum hunc *tractatum*, sole opinor clarius dabimus demonstratum."

36 Allinga, *Een korte verhandeling*, 224: "Ook is hier van groote kragt die reden, welke de Heeren *Wittichius* en *Burmannus* hier over inbrengen. Sy hebben verscheiden beginselen. Het beginsel van de Theologie is de Goddelijke openbaring, of Godts woord. Het beginsel van de Philosophie, is het licht der nature, en klare en distincte bevatting. Waer de beginselen der disciplinen of wetenschappen soo verschillen, daer kan de eene niet zijn een dienst-maagt van de andere." Cf. Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.15, 12; Frans Burman, *Synopsis theologiae* 1.12.48, 2 vols (Utrecht, 1671–1672), 1:79.

37 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.8, 41–42; Mastricht, *Vindiciae* 1.1, 2.

5 Against Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*

Mastricht proceeds to criticize Spinoza, whom he considers to have denied the subordination of philosophy using stronger arguments than those of Allinga and Wittich. Mastricht begins his criticism by quoting the following passage from Chapter 15 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

If reason must still be made completely subordinate to Scripture, however much it may protest against it, I ask whether we ought to subordinate it with reason or without it, like blind men? If without reason, then of course we're acting foolishly and without judgment. If with reason, then we embrace Scripture only by the command of reason. We would not, therefore, embrace it if it were contrary to reason.³⁸

Mastricht regards this argument as “Achillean” because it effectively creates a dilemma: if we subordinate philosophy to Scripture without reason, we would act irrationally; if with reason, we put the authority of reason above that of Scripture, hence we could not subordinate philosophy to Scripture.

Against the first horn of this dilemma, Mastricht argues that even if we were to follow the Bible without reason, we would not act foolishly, because the obedience of creatures to their Creator is always rational. Similarly, even if the Bible subordinates and corrects philosophy without reason, it would not do so foolishly, since it is just like a king who gives a reasonable order but does not disclose its reason.³⁹

Mastricht goes on to criticize the second horn of Spinoza's dilemma, namely, that philosophy could not yield to the Bible with reason:

But let us suppose that obeying without reason is utterly foolish. Then, it would follow that reason or philosophy yields to Scripture with reason. But this does not necessarily mean that reason and philosophy reign over Scripture. For reason can be both philosophical and theological, and therefore reason [and philosophy] can yield [to the Bible] on account of theological reason (because theology is as rational as philosophy. Rom. 12:1). Is this tantamount to giving philosophy the reign over Scripture? [The answer is negative.]⁴⁰

38 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, in *Opera*, 3:182, trans. Curley, 2:274–275.

39 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.9, 43.

40 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.9, 43: “Sed si stultum omnino sit *sine ratione obedire*, atque adeo *cum ratione*, ratio seu Philosophia cedat Scripturae; non tamen hinc statim Ratio

Mastricht accuses Spinoza of assuming that reason is always philosophical. Based on this assumption, Spinoza claims that reason cannot subordinate philosophy to the Bible. Against this claim, Mastricht states that reason could also be theological and such theological reason subordinates philosophy to Scripture.

Mastricht elaborates on the idea of theological reason in his *Theoretical-Practical Theology*. Theological reason is the reason that is illuminated by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Hence, illuminated reason is able to make judgments about spiritual matters and assemble the teachings scattered throughout the Bible into a coherent whole of theology. Because theology is thus ordered by “the laws of right reason,” even Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, called “the worship that theology propounds” rational.⁴¹

Finally, Mastricht points out that Spinoza’s entire argument rests on his failure to distinguish reason from philosophy:

Third, we would not dwell too much on the greatest falsehood that appears constantly in this discussion [of Spinoza]: the confusion of reason with philosophy. We have already carefully distinguished them as causes from effects. The claims that constitute philosophy are gathered from nature by reason. From this, [the falsehood of Spinoza] immediately attributes whatever reason teaches to philosophy alone, even if the same reason can also be found in Scripture. For Scripture does not exclude reason, but rather presupposes it as its handmaid, together with philosophy.⁴²

et Philosophia imperium acciperet in Scripturam; cum ratio sit vel *Philosophica*, vel *Theologica*, adeoque cedere posset ob *rationem theologicam* (eo quod et Theologia, non minus quam Philosophia, sit λογική Rom. XII.1.) et quod tandem hinc Philosophiae cederet in Scripturam imperium?”

41 Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia* 1.1.1.3–6, 1:2a–4a, trans. Rester, 67–71; Neele, *Mastricht*, 84–86. On Mastricht’s theory of illumination, see Elco van Burg, “Mastricht and the External and Internal Call: Cartesian Influence of Reformed Thinking?,” in *Petrus van Mastricht*, ed. Neele, 55–70, there 59–61. Reformed theologians generally recognized the usefulness of reason in theology. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed., 4 vols (Grand Rapids, MI., 2003), 1:398–405.

42 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.9, 44: “Non notabo 3. perpetuum hujus discursus πρώτον ψεύδους, quod *Rationem* confundat cum *Philosophia*, quam supra accurate distinximus, velut causam ab effectis. Effata enim quae Philosophiam constituunt, per rationem a natura colliguntur. Unde fit, ut quicquid *Ratio* dictat, id soli statim tribuat *Philosophiae*, licet eadem ratio etiam possit inesse *Scripturae*. Scriptura enim rationem non excludit, sed *praesupponit*, ut sibi cum Philosophia ancillantem.”

Mastricht defines philosophy as the claims that reason forms from created things. From this definition, however, we cannot conclude that everything formed by reason is philosophy. In fact, what reason teaches could belong to theology because humans read and comprehend the Bible with reason. Therefore, Spinoza is wrong in equating reason with philosophy, so that his “Achillean” argument is invalidated.

Mastricht finds Spinoza’s second argument in the following passage from Chapter 15 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

So we’ve demolished this position (i.e., that of Rabbi Alfakhar. He claimed that reason serves Scripture) as well as that of Maimonides (he wanted Scripture to be subordinated to reason). We’ve established, unshakably, that Theology is not bound to be the handmaid of reason, nor reason the handmaid of Theology, but that each rules its own domain. As we’ve said: reason’s domain is truth and wisdom; Theology’s is piety and obedience. For as we’ve shown, the power of reason does not go so far as to enable it to determine that men can be blessed by obedience alone, without understanding things. But Theology teaches nothing but this, and does not command anything but obedience. It neither wills nor can do anything against reason.⁴³

Mastricht criticizes this as relying on many unproven premises that are destructive of the Christian faith. For example, Spinoza presupposes that philosophy and theology rule separate domains; however, he must prove, not presuppose, this.⁴⁴

Mastricht continues by accusing Spinoza of denying that the Bible contains truth. Mastricht insists that the Bible reveals numerous truths about God and created things. He again confirms this claim by referring to the writings of the proponents of “Mosaic physics,” such as Zanchi and Daneau. Mastricht also criticizes Spinoza for mistakenly assuming that reason does not teach piety or obedience. Mastricht disproves this assertion by referring to the fact that philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, and Seneca had much to say about ethics.⁴⁵

Finally, Mastricht refers to Spinoza’s “most pestilent” premise, namely, that “Scripture, or theology, allows anyone to claim whatever they want about any

43 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* in *Opera*, 3:184, trans. Curley, 2:277. The complements in the two brackets are given by Mastricht.

44 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.10, 44.

45 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.10, 44.

truth, as long as it does not subvert piety and obedience.”⁴⁶ At this stage, Mastricht does not further develop his criticism. He will expound on the horrendous consequences of this premise at the end of Part 1, Chapter 3 of the *Gangraena*.

6 The Road to Libertinism

Having refuted the Cartesians, Mastricht finally explains the dangers that arise when philosophy ceases to be the handmaid of theology. He argues that making philosophy independent from theology would undermine longstanding attempts to Christianize philosophy, reverting it to paganism. He notes that Cartesians are well aware of this danger, which is clear in the conclusion of the Leiden Disputation of January 1671:

Not a small number of people want to make philosophy Christian, but this is as contrary to reason as saying that philosophy is Muhammedan. For all philosophy has no connection to revelation or even to religion and is completely pagan.⁴⁷

Mastricht insists that a paganized philosophy necessarily clashes with Christian theology. In the past, scholastic philosophy gained independence from theology and gave Aristotle equal authority with Paul, thus introducing many errors to religion.⁴⁸

Mastricht regards Cartesianism as the paganized philosophy of his time, finding that it advocates doctrines contradictory to the teachings of the Bible. He first refers to the contradiction concerning the doctrine of God’s omnipresence. The Bible teaches that God is omnipresent not only by his operation but also by his essence. By contrast, the Cartesians deny God’s essential omnipresence, because they do not attribute any locality to divine essence, which they define as “thought” (*cogitatio*). Consequently, they claim that God is omnipresent only by his operation. Mastricht responds that in order to resolve this

46 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.10, 45: “Et, quod *septimo* praesuppositum est longe pestilentissimum: Scripturam seu Theologiam, cuius integrum facere, ut de quavis veritate, quatenus pietatem et obedientiam non evertit, statuat pro lubitu.”

47 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.11, 45: “Proinde non minus contra rationem est, quod nonnulli Philosophiam CHRISTIANAM esse velint, quam si MUHAMMEDANAM dicerent. Omnis enim Philosophia revelationis, atque adeo RELIGIONIS, EXPERS EST, ET PLANE ETHNICA.”

48 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.11, 45.

opposition, either Cartesian philosophy or Scripture must yield to the other. The Bible can never legitimately make such a concession, and yet, according to the Cartesians, philosophy must not surrender to Scripture. Thus, the opposition is “hopeless and without remedy.”⁴⁹

Mastricht argues that Cartesianism also conflicts with theology concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. According to Mastricht, the Cartesian Wittich does not defend the Trinity on rational grounds because he has been persuaded by the Socinians that the mystery is irrational. Therefore, Wittich declares in his *Theologia pacifica* that the Trinity must be accepted solely on the basis of biblical revelation. Mastricht finds that Wittich faces a dilemma: philosophically, he must deny the Trinity, but theologically, he must affirm it. Mastricht points out that Wittich cannot escape this dilemma because he is unwilling to subordinate philosophy to theology.⁵⁰

Mastricht anticipates the Cartesian objection that philosophy never opposes theology. Wittich, for example, denies that clear and distinct perceptions contradict revelation.⁵¹ Van Mansvelt also asserts that reason and the Bible teach the same truth, and thus Spinoza is mistaken in acknowledging the conflict between the two.⁵² Mastricht refutes this objection based on his definition of philosophy:

There can be no real conflict between the truth of nature and the truth of Scripture. However, there can be a real conflict between the claims of reason about natural things (strictly speaking, such claims constitute philosophy, as we saw in Section 4 [of this chapter]) and the claims of Scripture about natural things. Oh, sadly, a conflict is certain to arise. We know this from the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 1:21, 2:4–6), as well as from experiences.⁵³

49 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.13, 46–47; Kato, “Mastricht,” 137–140. On the controversy over the essential omnipresence of God, see Maria Emanuela Scribano, *Da Descartes a Spinoza: Percorsi della teologia razionale nel Seicento* (Florence, 1988), 182–186; Igor Agostini, “Sull’onnipresenza di Dio nel cartesianismo,” in *Studi cartesiani: Atti del Seminario Primi lavori cartesiani. Incontri e discussioni, Lecce, 27–28 settembre 1999*, ed. Fabio A. Sulpizio (Lecce, 2000), 11–87.

50 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.13, 47; 2.18.5, 328; Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 1.6, 4–6; Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 229–230.

51 Wittich, *Theologia pacifica* 4.37, 29; Del Prete, “Oltre Descartes,” 40–41; Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 252–253.

52 Regnerus van Mansvelt, *Adversus anonymum theologico-politicum liber singularis* 20.7 (Amsterdam, 1674), 260.

53 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.14, 47: “Licet inter veritates naturae et Scripturae, non possit esse vera repugnantia: quin tamen esse possit, inter *effata rationis* de rebus naturalibus, quae

Mastricht defines philosophy as the claims that reason forms from created things. Because reason is corrupt, these claims could conflict with the truth of nature. Consequently, they contradict the truth of Scripture. They must then be corrected by the Bible; hence, the subordination of philosophy to theology.

Mastricht points out that in order to negate the conflict between the Bible and philosophy, the Cartesians introduced a new biblical hermeneutics. They proposed it in the cosmological controversy of the day, in which Descartes's philosophy was denounced as contradicting the Scriptures for asserting the motion of the Earth. The Cartesians denied the contradiction by arguing that the Bible often speaks "according to the false opinions of the people" (*ex falsa opinione vulgi*), not according to the truth of nature. Mastricht notes that this hermeneutics is commonly employed by Cartesians, including Spinoza, and is especially abused by Wittich.⁵⁴ Mastricht responds as follows:

I do not, for my part, accept that Scripture often speaks in that way, but let us assume for the moment that it does. If so, how would a Cartesian prove that this occurs with respect to this subject, as well as in the passages cited above? Is it by Scripture? This is something even a Cartesian would not attempt. Scripture always teaches the contrary. Then is it by philosophy, and indeed by Descartes's philosophy? It is legitimate for Scripture not to allow this. For if it were to allow this, it would admit philosophy as the judge in its own cause.⁵⁵

Mastricht criticizes Wittich's hermeneutics as making philosophy the arbiter in biblical interpretation. Wittich's conclusion thus agrees with the thesis of the *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres*.⁵⁶

Mastricht maintains that Wittich draws another conclusion from his hermeneutics: Scripture provides no knowledge about natural phenomena. Mastricht observes that this has been approved by all Cartesians, including

proprie Philosophiam constituunt, secundum ea quae §. iv. Observavimus: et *effata Scripturae* de eisdem, nimirum pro dolor! certum est, tam Scripturis. 1. Cor. 1.21. et Cap. 11.4.6. quam experientia."

54 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.5.2, 63–64. On this hermeneutics, see Lee, *Accommodation*, 23–59; Eberhardt, *Vernunft*, 331–383.

55 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.14, 47: "Dato, non conesso [*sic*], Scripturam sic nonnunquam loqui, ut Cartesianus probabit, in *hoc subjecto*, et *addictis locis* hoc fieri? *vel e Scriptura*, quod ne tentabit quidem Cartesianus, adeo constanter contrarium Scriptura tradit: *vel e Philosophia*, et quidem Cartesiana, quod Scriptura non feret, et jure quidem, admitteret enim Philosophiam in propria causa Judicem."

56 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.15, 48; 1.10.8–9, 114–116.

Spinoza.⁵⁷ Mastricht then notes that Wittich considers the Bible to also speak erroneously about moral matters and, in agreement with Spinoza, even on theological matters.⁵⁸ Mastricht therefore summarizes Wittich's thesis as follows: "No exact knowledge of any matter can be drawn from the Scriptures."⁵⁹

Mastricht regards this thesis as identical to that of the *Theological-Political Treatise* because both Wittich and Spinoza deny that Scripture teaches truth. Mastricht insists that they thus let everyone believe anything regarding religious matters. He describes the horrific outcomes that would result:

All of this finally comes down to libertinism, or the common religion of Campanella. Thus the pagans, the Muhammedans, the Jews, the Socinians, the Papists, etc., can be saved in their own teachings. Therefore, there will be no need for the Christian religion above any other. This is where the entirety of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, especially Chapter 15, is headed.⁶⁰

Wittich and Spinoza argue that humans can be saved through any religion, even heretical or pagan. Thus, they reduce orthodox Christianity to one religion among many. Mastricht concludes that good Reformed believers must avoid such a dreadful situation at all costs.

57 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.7.1–2, 82–83.

58 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.8.2, 92; 1.9.2, 97.

59 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.7.13, 90–91: "Proinde nullarum rerum accuratam cognitionem e Scripturis hauriri posse."

60 Mastricht, *Gangraena* 1.3.16, 49: "Quae omnia tandem semet exonerant in *Libertinismum*, aut Campanellae *Religionem communem*, per quam quisque: Ethnicus, Muhammedanus, Judaeus, Socinianus, Pontificius et c. in suis placitis servari possit. Adeoque nullam Religionis Christianae, prae quibusvis aliis, necessitatem esse. Huc omnino contendit totus ille *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, sigillatim capite xv [...]." In his *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, Mastricht calls the belief that a person can be saved by any religion "common theology" and names Campanella as its proponent. See Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia* 1.1.1.23, 1:7a, trans. Rester, 82. On the reception of Campanella's works, see Andrea Strazzoni, "Vix sciebant legere clerici: La fortuna di una citazione campanelliana nella cultura olandese," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 19 (2013), 237–247. For the use of the term "libertine," see Catherine Secretan, "Qu'est-ce qu'être libertin dans les Pays-Bas au 'siècle d'or'?", *Libertinage et philosophie à l'époque classique (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle)* 19 (2022), 21–48.

7 Conclusion

This paper has examined Mastricht's critique of the *Theological-Political Treatise* to determine how he places Spinoza within the development of Cartesianism. Mastricht notes that although Descartes had subordinated philosophy to theology, all his followers assert philosophy's independence based on the assumption that philosophy and theology teach the same truth. Spinoza supports the same conclusion with the far more radical proposition that theology does not teach truth. He also argues that if we subordinated reason to Scripture, we would act irrationally. Mastricht objects to Spinoza, first, that the Bible teaches many truths about natural phenomena, as the authors of "Mosaic physics" have shown. Second, Mastricht argues against both Spinoza and the Cartesians that philosophy is formed by corrupt reason. Therefore, philosophy sometimes makes erroneous assertions that contradict the biblical truth, and in such cases, it could be rationally subordinated to theology.

In opposition to Spinoza's identification of reason and philosophy, Mastricht distinguishes between the two. He regards reason as an instrument and philosophy as its product, thus defining philosophy as "claims formed by reason from created things." He did not include this definition of philosophy in his critique of Wittich in the *Vindiciae*. Nor, to our knowledge, did Voetius or other Voetians adopt the same definition in their refutation of Cartesianism. Mastricht is thus likely to have introduced it specifically to criticize Spinoza in the *Gangraena*.⁶¹

In the *Gangraena*, Mastricht also revises his earlier criticism of Cartesian biblical hermeneutics. Wittich and other Cartesians deny the contradiction between philosophy and theology by maintaining that the Bible often speaks not according to the truth but according to erroneous opinions of the common people. Mastricht denounces this hermeneutics as having two dangerous consequences. First, it allows philosophy to determine where the Bible speaks erroneously, thus giving philosophy the ultimate authority to interpret Scripture. This thesis is identical to that of the *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres*, the author of which Mastricht suspects is Spinoza. Second, Cartesian hermeneutics has led Wittich to deny that any exact knowledge of anything can be drawn from the Bible. Mastricht links this conclusion with Spinoza's thesis that the Bible does not teach truth at all. Wittich and Spinoza thus reached the view

61 Here is the definition of philosophy that Mastricht gave earlier in the *Vindiciae*. See Mastricht, *Vindiciae* 1.2, 3: "Ego, quidem, ut uno verbo meam sententiam dicam, statuo eam [i.e., philosophiam] nihil aliud esse quam compagem veritatum, lumine rationis certo cognitarum." This definition of philosophy as the collection of truths is different from the one found in the *Gangraena*.

that one can be saved no matter what one believes, whether it is true or not. In short, Mastricht insists that by denying the Bible's authority to correct philosophy, the Cartesians anticipate the atheistic claims of either the *Philosophia* or the *Theological-Political Treatise*.

Now we can see how Mastricht made his criticism of Cartesianism in *Gangraena* effective by incorporating the criticism of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. He was thereby able to argue persuasively and distinctively that Cartesianism would lead to atheism. Certainly, he had similarly accused Cartesianism of inviting atheism in the *Vindiciae*, but he had made the accusation in relation to Cartesian doubt, relying mainly on Voetius's argument.⁶² In contrast, he argued in the *Gangraena* that the Cartesian denial of the subordination of philosophy would inevitably entail atheism, which he confirmed by referring to Spinoza, the Cartesian atheist. The *Theological-Political Treatise* denied the subordination and subverted the truth of Christianity. Mastricht's detailed critique of the *Treatise* thus confirmed his diagnosis that the Cartesian gangrene began with a single novel assertion, gradually spread throughout the entire body of theology, and finally destroyed the Christian faith.

62 Mastricht, *Vindiciae* dedication, sig. *3r; Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 172; Gisbertus Voetius, *De Atheismo*, in *Selectarum disputationum pars prima* (Utrecht, 1648), 176–177; Bizer, "Die reformierte Orthodoxie," 319–322.