whether there ought to be any form of religion on earth, or whether there be any God in Heaven.'[6]

Revealed religion and ecclesiastical authority long remained the chief targets of the new radical thinkers. But they were by no means the only ones. A prominent late seventeenth-century German court official, the Freiherr Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff (1626–92), observed in 1685 that what the radicals ultimately intended was to make 'life in this world' the basis of politics.[7] This, he explained, amounted to a revolution in outlook and expectations which potentially changed everything. Numerous theologians, he grants, strove valiantly to counter the disastrous impact of the new radical ideas, especially Spinozism, which he saw as the backbone of the radical challenge in the sphere of faith and Church authority. But what was insufficiently grasped in the Germany of his day and inadequately opposed, in his opinion, were the consequences of such ideas as Spinoza's for politics, the public sphere, and the individual's place in society. For in Spinoza, he avers, nothing is based on God's Word or commandment so that no institutions are God-ordained and no laws divinely sanctioned: hence the only legitimacy in politics is the self-interest of the individual.[8] Nor did the mounting strife over the nature and status of morality reverberate any less stridently. The Dutch preacher, Johannes Aalstius, held in his general introduction to Christian ethics, published at Dordrecht in 1705, that the new radicalism, and especially Spinozism, overturns the entire structure of divinely ordained morality.[9] Were such influences to gain wide acceptance, he predicted, mankind would in the future concern itself only with individual happiness in this life.[10] To many it appeared a frightful prospect.

It is, furthermore, a drama which profoundly involved the common people, even those who were unschooled and illiterate. What did they know of the Scientific Revolution or the new philosophical ideas, one might well ask? Surely, it is often supposed, there was turmoil on the surface but little change in the minds and outlook of the great majority. But while it is true that the intellectual revolution of the late seventeenth century was primarily a crisis of élites—courtiers, officials, scholars, patricians, and clergy, it was precisely these élites which moulded, supervised, and fixed the contours of popular culture. Consequently, an intellectual crisis of élites quickly made an impact on ordinary men's attitudes too and by no means only the minority of literate artisans and small bourgeoisie. Doubtless some officials, theologians, and academics toyed with trying to confine the more awesome shifts in ideas to the sphere of élite culture so as to preserve intact the existing structures of authority and belief among the common people. After 1650, as those pervaded by the new concepts increasingly doubted the existence of Hell and the reality of eternal torment for the damned, for example, some consideration was given to whether it might be possible to screen such

[6] *An Answer to the Discourse on Free-Thinking*, preface.

[7] Seckendorff, *Christen-Staat*, i, 12; on Seckendorff, see Pleticha, *Adel und Buch*, 82–3.

[8] Seckendorff, *Christen-Staat* ii, 139–41; Walther, 'Machina Civilis', 202; Funkenstein, *Theology*, 338–44.

[9] Aalstius, *Inleiding tot de Zeden-leer*, 512.

[10] Ibid., 512–14; similarly see Poiret, *Cogitationes rationales*, 592–602, 606, 629.