Baruch Spinoza: Democracy and Freedom of Speech

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Baruch Spinoza (also known as Benedictus de Spinoza) lived from 1632 to 1677 in the United Provinces of the Netherlands (a federal republic existing during the years 1581–1795, the forerunner of what is today know as the Netherlands). Europe in the mid-1600s was plagued with conflict and strife amongst Lutherans, Calvinists and Catholics. Minorities were persecuted in most countries. The states were developing in an absolutist direction, severely limiting the citizens' freedom of faith. The Dutch Calvinist bourgeoisie of The United Netherlands had amassed considerable social power through extensive international trade, having only recently cast off Spanish and Catholic dominance. The Netherlands had quickly become the richest state in Europe, with Europe's largest merchant fleet, and Amsterdam had established itself as the centre of the European economy. The Dutch bourgeoisie contributed to the building of a more tolerant climate, and the United Netherlands quickly became the country to which persecuted Europeans fled.

Spinoza fought every form of fanaticism and intolerance in and through his works. His struggle formed a great philosophical system, strongly influenced by Descartes' philosophy as well as by ancient Jewish teachings, the Platonism of the Renaissance and the new mechanistic view of nature. His political philosophy builds on Machiavelli's political realism, and Spinoza more than likely studied the work of Thomas Hobbes.

A Romantic tradition shows us Spinoza as a lonely philosopher living a life far removed from worldly interests and passions. Spinoza did, however, participate in civil society with great political as well as theoretical awareness. He enjoyed a certain influence as a member of the circle around one of the great statesmen of the day, the liberal politician Jan de Witt, secretary of state from 1650 to 1672. Spinoza's correspondence suggests that he knew many of the prominent scientists and philosophers of his time.

Spinoza was born in Amsterdam, of Sephardic descent: his Jewish family had fled the Portuguese Inquisition. He attended the local Hebrew school where he

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studied Hebrew, The Old Testament, the Talmud (one of Judaism's most important Scriptures systematising the oral and written tradition and comments on the Torah from the first to the fifth century AD) and the Jewish philosophical tradition: from Moses ben Maimon to Hasdai Crescas to Judah Leon Abravanel (Leo Hebraeus). He learnt Latin from Franciscus van den Enden, a well-known freethinker. An inventory list found after Spinoza's death shows that his library contained several works in Latin, among others Latin translations of Aristotle, works of Horace, Julius Caesar, Virgil, Tacitus, Epictetus, Livy, Pliny, Ovid, Cicero, Martial, Petrarca, Petronius and Sallust. These texts show an interest that was most likely born during his contact with van den Enden. His knowledge of Latin let him read, in addition to ancient classical texts, the Renaissance authors from Machiavelli to Giordano Bruno, more recent philosophical literature from Bacon to Descartes and Thomas Hobbes, and familiarize himself with the whole Scholastic tradition. He gradually expressed his controversial theological ideas more openly, and in response the leaders of the Jewish religious community expelled him from the Jewish synagogue and community of Amsterdam on July 27, 1656. The Protestant as well as the Catholic Church kept up the persecution following his excommunication and expulsion from the Jewish religious community, based on his criticism of Rabbinic truths and the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He subsequently moved from Amsterdam to Leiden (Rijnsburg) and made a living as a lens grinder for optical instruments. In 1661, at the age of 29, Spinoza published *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum philosophiae* (On Descartes' Principles of Philosophy) and *Cogitata metaphysica* (Metaphysical thoughts). These works gave him a reputation as an interpreter of Cartesian philosophy. At this time a circle of friends and disciples had already gathered around him. They later established an extensive correspondence with him, which represents a valuable source on the development of his thinking. He started writing his masterpiece *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata* (*The Ethics*) in Rijnsburg.

The reputation he had gained as an atheist made it necessary, however, to move frequently. He lived in den Haag from 1663, where he became acquainted with the physicist Christian Huygens and Jan de Witt, the leader of the Dutch Republican Party. Stimulated by de Witt's circle, Spinoza systematised his political ideas in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Treatise on Theology and Politics) published anonymously in Amsterdam in 1670. The publication of *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* caused consternation in church circles, among Catholics as well as Protestants. His treatise's radical ideas increased the number of his critics and he was characterised as: atheist, *empius* (godless as well as immoral) and materialist. Nevertheless, Spinoza was not a blasphemous thinker. He held an immanent[1] perspective on reality and God, and rejected all traditional theological perspectives.

The political situation had changed as well: Jan de Witt was murdered in 1672 and the monarchical absolutist party of the House of Orange seized political power. One year after de Witt's murder, electoral prince Karl Ludwig of the Palatinate offered Spinoza a chair at the University of Heidelberg. Spinoza declined, however,

[1] The concept "immanent" here implies that God is not distinct from the World.

wishing to preserve his freedom of thought. He calmly continued his work, finished writing the *Ethics* and started writing a new political treatise, *Tractatus Politicus* (Treatise on Politics): he died, however, in den Haag in 1677, before completing his final work. A few months after his death his friends published his collected works, *Opera Posthuma* (1677), which include, in addition to *The Ethics* and the treatises already mentioned, *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (Treatise on the Correction of the Intellect), *Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand* (Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-being), correspondence, and a book on Hebrew grammar.

We find Spinoza's political philosophy mainly in *Treatise on Theology and Politics* (TTP) and in *Treatise on Politics* (TP) where he treats very originally subjects such as: the foundations of social life, the individual's fundamental and inalienable rights, the democratic organization of the state, and the freedom of thought.

TTP was published anonymously in 1670 in Amsterdam. The treatise was initiated in 1665 when Spinoza wrote a letter to Oldenburg (EP. XXX), describing his intentions in writing this work. The two primary aims were

1. To argue against the prejudice of theologians and common people, and against the accusation of atheism.
2. A strong desire to defend the freedom of thought and speech.

And so the liberation from prejudice and defence of civil rights are central themes in the book. As Spinoza prepared to write TTP, the fundamental principles of his ontology and anthropology had already been developed, i.e.: his central political tenets built on the theories he had developed in the *Ethics* (E). The theory on natural right, the development of the state, the concept of democracy, the notion that the absolute power of the state may only be upheld if executed rationally, are the fundamental political tenets of Spinoza and involve the solutions to some metaphysical, epistemological and ethical problems; solutions which Spinoza had worked out in *The Ethics.*

In the following paragraphs we will first take a look at Spinoza's fundamental ontological concepts that play such an important role in his political theory. We will then examine his view of human nature, before we turn to the preconditions for political life. Informed by this, we will approach his theory on natural law and democracy. Finally, we will show the central role the freedom of thought and speech plays in Spinoza's political thinking.

1 The New Revolutionary View of God: God or the Infinite Substance, the World and Human Beings

Spinoza rethinks and radically transforms the fundamental theses of Cartesian metaphysics. As we know, Descartes assumed the existence of three kinds of substance: thought (*res cogitans*), extension (*res extensa*), and the infinite substance or God (re. Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia*, III, 22). According to

Spinoza, only the latter may truly be considered a substance. When the substance is rigorously defined, it must be one wholly independent reality and it is conceived through itself. I.e., it must be *causa sui* ('self-caused'), and its essence involves its existence. Spinoza brackets all anthropomorphic, personal and volitional aspects of God when he explores the concept of the divine substance on the logical-ontological level. He consequently denies the existence of the personal God and the divine providence. The infinite substance, which Spinoza also calls *God* or *Nature*,[2] consists of infinite "attributes" and each attribute *expresses* the infinite essence of the substance.

Spinoza, who refuses to call himself an atheist, nevertheless denies any form of a transcendent God. God is *ens absolute infinitum* (the absolute infinite being) and all is in God and depends on God (E.I., p. 28, scholium). God is the actualised force or strength (*potentia*)[3] *that* necessarily, eternally and infinitely produces reality. Everything is in God, he is self-caused (*causa sui*), and thereby also the cause—immanent and not transitive—of all that God contains.

Human beings are an expressive part of the substance or reality, but are able to know the substance only through the two attributes in which they participate: thought and extension. Thought and extension, body and mind, are two sides of one and the same reality. Spinoza calls them identical, i.e., that they express the same reality in two different ways. In other words, there is a structure which may be expressed in an infinite number of aspects, and that we human beings know two of these aspects: thought, i.e., the very structure of thought, because we are thought, i.e. mind; and extension, the whole structure of matter, because we are matter, i.e., body.

As a part of substance human beings participate in its productivity or "*potentia*" (actualised force or strength): the essence of human beings is *conatus*, effort or striving for self-preservation and self-realization. This is the case for all things: human beings, animals, rocks, etc. We human beings are part of nature, but only a part: we are a "natural thing", one thing among many other things, and we do not constitute any special domain in nature. This distinguishes Spinoza from other

[2] On *Deus sive Natura* or *Deus seu Natura*: this wording occurs twice in E.IV. Praefatio: "For the eternal and infinite being we call God or Nature acts by the same necessity as that by which it exists" (æternum namque illud et infinitum Ens quod Deum seu Naturam appellamus, eadem qua existit necessitate agit) … "Therefore the reason or cause why God or Nature acts and why it exists is one and the same" (Ratio igitur seu causa cur Deus seu Natura agit et cur existit una eademque est.): this all shows that the wording is used on the productive level. The wording is undoubtedly emblematic for Spinoza's philosophy, but occurs only twice in all of his works and only when he speaks of the "*potentia*"—level.

[3] Translation of the Latin terms *potentia* and *potestas* is difficult to be made in English since the English word power includes two meanings whose difference is essential in the ontology of Spinoza. Martial Gueroult (Spinoza, T.1: Dieu (Ethique, I), 1968) was one of the first which rightly emphasizes this difference. Toni Negri in his "*The savage Anomaly*" from 1981 analyzes deeply this question: "potestas refers to power in its fixed, institutional or 'constituted form', while potentia refers to power in its fluid, dynamic or 'constitutive' form" (Negri 1981, p. xv.) I will therefore make a distinction between potentia and potestas by using power for potentia and actualised force or strength for potentia.

philosophers of the seventeenth century: e.g. Francis Bacon, who wanted to see human beings as the rulers of nature. We find in Spinoza a greater respect for nature, the part cannot dominate the whole. As part of the substance or of the nature, human beings are—each and every human being—at the same time a product of the productive strength of the substance, and also a "producer". Put differently, as part of nature we are ruled by natural laws, and we are consequently determined by external causes, but as part of the productivity of substance, our essence participates in the constitutive process of reality (being). We are thus determined by an external cause, we are passive; and we are also determined by our inner force, we are active and free. But it would be absurd and ridiculous to believe that we may fully overcome our passivity. At best, we can reduce it.

2 View of Human Beings, Freedom and Reason

Spinoza denies that we are free in the sense that the causes of our actions depend solely on us: everything in the world is produced by one or more causes. Being free does not entail evading the laws of nature, but using the laws of nature the way we use the wind—which certainly does not blow because we want it to—when wind fills the sails of a boat. So, according to Spinoza, we should not go against the laws of nature in order to become free in a wider sense; we must, however, bend them to our purposes and our utility (*utilitas*). Being free entails knowing the limits of our freedom and knowing that we can expand our field of intervention only if we are aware of the given conditions for action (these may also be political).

Let us consider a very simple example from Spinoza's own work, from his *Treatise on Theology and Politics.* It is useless to preach to people and admonish them to "be more rational". When human beings are victims of an accident, misfortune, hatred generated by the passions, they will never be rational. Rather, they will become superstitious, and then live in a world of fantasy and passions. A precarious life will make human beings less rational. If a human being wants to become more autonomous,—more able to run his or her own life—he or she must act differently and change his/her life conditions. Only in this way may human beings become more rational. The *Ethics* teaches us how we may control our destiny. According to the *Ethics* we can change all that which throws us into the reign of the passions and partly eliminate it.

How does Spinoza define a human being? We have already seen that a human being is a small "particula", a small part of an infinite order. So what follows from this? From this follows that our emotions, our actions, our behaviour, most of what happens in our lives and in human history, happens as a result of an encounter between us and that which surrounds us. Everything that happens is thus the outcome of an interaction between our essence and the essence of other things. But what is our essence or the essence of a human being? Let us read Spinoza: "Desire (*cupiditas*) is the very essence of man".... "Desire (*cupiditas*) is appetite (*Appetitus*)

with the consciousness of itself. And appetite is the essence itself of man, insofar as it is determined to do what is useful for his preservation".[4] Striving is the essence of a human being, i.e., a human being is an animal that desires.

To understand what this definition entails, let us look at some aspects of Spinoza's philosophy of knowledge. Spinoza claims that there are three kinds of, or steps to, knowledge. The first is inadequate and false knowledge. He calls this imagination and it relates only to memory and vague and flighty impressions, when we know things as isolated and arbitrary. The second is rational knowledge, when we learn to see the proper relations between things through their common notions: Reason then, is a "common" domain, and only in this domain may human beings agree.

The third Spinoza calls intuitive knowledge, and this is the knowledge of singular things as a determinate expression of the infinite productive strength of the substance. Intuitive knowledge does not exclude reason, but is simply a form of knowledge that presupposes the two former kinds.

The three forms of knowledge are nothing but three stages of desire: The first is the slavery of the passions, the second is reason, a necessary, but not sufficient level and the last and highest stage, only for the sage, is intellectual love.

The first, inadequate knowledge, leads to vulgar impulses and egoism in a narrow sense. Morally, life is very poor: one's thoughts and actions revolve primarily around oneself. But the passions are not merely chaos; no matter how uncomfortable they may be, they are understandable. Even that which causes suffering has its own explanation. Therefore, the first step we must take is to understand that we are passive, for the passions are signs of our inevitable place in relation to the dominating powers of the universe. However, the passivity may partly be overcome.

Spinoza gives a very clear example: A child is surely more determined by external causes and less autonomous than an adult. But he or she grows up and becomes increasingly more able to rule him or herself, gradually leaving all the fantasies typical of childhood and becomes more rational. According to Spinoza it is thus not to be expected that the passions can be abolished; passions may, however, become transformed into affects, i.e., conditioned by adequate knowledge.

Thus the second level of our way of being and knowing, the second level of our striving or desire: reason. Reason is an instrument that enables us to understand the preconditions for the strengthening of our force to exist. Reason learns to use the most useful passions to strengthen the positive ones, the ones that help a person to express his or her own nature, and to work against the negative ones that imprison a person in loneliness, bitterness and hatred. Reason, in other words, manipulates the passions with a concern for social life. Reason does not limit the passions; reason uses the passions, or as Spinoza says, the affects.

This strategy of the affects has great political implications. However, Spinoza claims variation as being typically human: humans are able to pass from a certain state to a poorer or better state. When I pass into a poorer state, I do this because I am unable to tear myself away from negative passions—sadness, *tristitia*, Spinoza

[4] "appetitum autem esse ipsam hominis essentiam quatenus determinata est ad ea agendum quae ipsius conservationi inserviunt" (Eth.III, Affectum definitiones, Def.1 et explicatio).

calls them—that weaken and oppress me, such as melancholy, hatred, envy. All these emotions imprison me, while I need to be able to grow. The aim of the Spinozistic human being is not just self-preservation—as it is for Hobbes—it is "to grow". A human being (any human individual) is not just a cog in a machine, making itself as one with the machine. According to Spinoza the individual is a particular expression of the eternal substance, and his/her essence is "*potentia*", force, which is part of the strength of nature: "Man, insofar as he is part of nature, constitutes a part of the strength of nature".[5]

Many Spinozistic notions may be comparable to Hobbes' theories, but Spinoza develops other theses: Hobbes has been one of the most rigorous spokesmen for the absolute power of the state, Spinoza has been one of the most eager defenders of freedom of thought and speech and one of the first to claim that democracy is the best form of social and political organization. Behind this great difference lies an alternative view of human nature where "potentia"—strength—plays the most important role.

3 Conditions for Political Life: Conflict and Cooperation

Spinoza states that human beings should avoid negative emotions, individually as well as socially. To handle this problem from a political point of view, Spinoza starts from a critique of theological prejudices.

But why does Spinoza, in one and the same work, treat both theological and political problems? Spinoza recognized that religious and political phenomena have something in common. When he takes religion as his point of departure for his political reflection, Spinoza in a certain sense anticipates what will be the modern sociological problem, developed by Weber in particular: the relationship between the social practices and the religious and ethical ideas that attempted to explain the origin of political power. That is why, when Spinoza examines the conditions for social life, he first and foremost does it as a historian and sociologist. He emphasises that the state and religion both have their historical roots in the primitive and undifferentiated emotion of holiness, as this emerges, e.g. in the history of the Jewish people.

The most obvious and apparent consequence is that politics in modern society play the role that religion played in a traditional archaic society. The understanding of the state, its genesis, its history and its transformations requires a consideration of this crucial fact.

This is why Spinoza opens his political treatise with a focus on the emotions on which theocracy and political oppression are grounded. The most dangerous passions, the theological-political passions par excellence, are fear and hope. We are

[5] Homo quatenus pars est Naturae, eatenus partem potentiae Naturae constituit. (TTP, cap. IV, *Spinoza opera*. Im Auftrag der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften hrsg. von Carl Gebhardt. 4 vols, Heidelberg, Carl Winter-Verlag, 1925. v.3, p. 58).

used to considering fear as negative and hope as good, as a theological virtue or as a principle to help us survive. For Spinoza, however, fear and hope are just two sides of the same coin: both are passions characterised by future uncertainty. Hope is unstable joy waiting for a future good, fear is unstable sadness waiting for future evil. Hope and fear are characterised by being directed at objects or goods, the acquisition of which is always placed in the future.

This kind of passions causes a weakening of self-awareness and a feeling of insufficiency. Fear as a passion generates a special need for security, and thus plays an important part in the political and social sphere. So from a political point of view fear is the foundation, not just for the absolutism, but for almost every regime: one cannot rule unless one induces fear.

In Hobbes' political thinking fear has a "civilizing role". Fear plays a key role in the establishment of the power of the sovereign. According to Hobbes, individuals understand that if the violence of the state of nature continues, nobody is safe, and that it is better to establish institutions and rules to safeguard the individual. It is the fear of a violent death that drives an individual to accept rational behaviour and social choices (e.g. *pactum unionis* and *subjectionis*, i.e., social contract and contract of subjection).

But even after the social contract is established, fear is not eliminated, for only fear can force people to obey laws. "*Homo homini lupus"*, man is a wolf for man; and social peace can only be upheld by a great wolf, the monarch (i.e., with terror and fear).

Spinoza disagrees strongly with all this for he knows that fear weakens human powers. Both philosophers define fear as an affective state like a varying sadness, but Spinoza claims that fear cannot be sublimated through an increase in rationality, neither individually nor politically. Fear—Spinoza continues—effects political relations twice: the fear felt by the masses, and the rulers' constant fear of the masses. In neither case does fear have a stabilising effect, for, even if fear may possibly lead to order and obedience in the short run, it will always lead to discontent and rebellion in the long run. Fear causes a very unstable emotional state that imprisons humans in a world of passing illusions.

From all this follows that human beings are unable to develop in a fear regime that furthers the power of the few, and strangles the life force of the others. Spinoza pits the expression "*Homo hominis Deus*" (Man is a God for man) against the Hobbesian motto. So what does all this mean? It means that the best we can do is to enrich our social life, the most important environment for human development. Spinoza is thus fundamentally in disagreement with "the melancholics", those who retreat into themselves and lead a lonely life, those who do not believe that living in society is worth their while.

So neither fear nor misanthropy will help, but neither will hope or the idea that human beings are able to radically change. The Spinozistic position does not coincide with the modern "homo ideologicus" who uses images and illusions to produce "rational myths" and a series of "industrial" desires unable to steer people in the direction of a "formal" reason. Here we see more clearly than ever the methodological influence from Machiavelli; we must start from the analysis of human nature as

it really is: "la verità effettuale della cosa" "the real truth of a matter"[6] stating facts. But what does stating facts imply?

Stating facts implies that in order to understand human nature as it really is, we must also look at what takes place in human beings and that does not just depend on their force. Spinoza designates this area with the classical term of "*fortuna"*. What is "*fortuna"?* This is not the place for a reconstruction of the cultural genesis of the concept—and especially the influence from Quintus Curcius to Niccolò Machiavelli, which is in direct reference to Spinoza. Let us rather see how Spinoza defines the concept: "… by fortune I mean simply God's direction in so far as he directs human affairs through external and unexpected causes".[7] If we remind ourselves that "God's direction" (*Dei directio*) is nothing other than the order of nature, it becomes clear that "fortuna" is the order of external things; i.e., all the events with causes that do not depend on us: "*fortuna"* is, in other words, that which is not in our power, or that "which does not follow from our nature".[8] All that happens around us and in us, all that we experience, but is not in our power to control, this is "*fortuna*": our affects, our actions, our behaviour, most events in our existence and in human history. In front of this unexpected "*fortuna*", this form of necessity which we cannot know nor control in its entirety, and which appears before us as the face of contingency, can we do other than state what has already happened? Spinoza's whole authorship is built up around the purpose of creating a change in human behaviour as well as in the structure of society. The stating of facts becomes the basis for the development of operative strategies.

So stating facts means to take into consideration, simultaneously, human nature, i.e., human *potentia* or force to exist or act, and "fortuna", that which does not follow from our nature.

Human nature, or *conatus*, constitutes natural right. "Each individual thing has the sovereign right to do all that it can do; i.e., the right of the individual is coextensive with its determinate force (potentia)".[9] Everything an individual does is therefore ipso facto valid. And this is so, not just because there are no transcendental norms, but because the norm is in the individual himself and is the justification for everything he does.

Because of all this, a human individual's natural right (*jus naturale*)—disregarding religious and political organizations—is a behavioural rule which does not greatly distinguish itself from the physical laws which all natural things follow with unavoidable necessity. "By the right and established order of Nature I mean simply the rules governing the nature of every individual thing, according to which we conceive it as naturally determined to exist and to act in a definite way. For example, fish are determined by nature to swim, and the big ones to eat the smaller ones. Thus it is by sovereign natural right that fish inhabit water, and the big ones

[6] N. Machiavelli, *Il Principe* in *Tutte le opere, storiche, politiche e letterarie,* a cura di Alessandra Capata. Roma: Newton & Compton editori, 1998, p. 33.

[7] TTP, chap. III, G.3, p. 46.

[8] Eth. II, p. XLIX, sch. G.II, p. 136.

[9] TTP Chap.16, G.3, p 237.

eat the smaller ones. For it is certain that Nature, taken in the absolute sense, has the sovereign right (jus summum) to do all that she can do; that is, Nature's right is coextensive with her strength (potentia). For Nature's strength (potentia) is the very strength (potentia) of God, … But since the universal strength (potentia) of Nature as a whole is nothing but the force (potentia) of all individual things taken together, it follows that each individual thing has the sovereign right (jus summum) to do all that it can do; i.e., the right of the individual is co-extensive with its determinate force (potentia)".[10]

The natural right of the individual is a certain expression of the dynamic aspect of being. Natural right is therefore defined according to the degree of each individual's force (*potentia*) to feel or act in a certain manner, i.e., according to the success or failure of his or her striving for self-preservation. From this follows that an individual follows his or her own right at all times, his or her degree of perfection notwithstanding. Put differently, those who live under the rule of the passions follow the same necessary natural rules as those who live in accordance with the laws of reason, without there being a normative rule to show them another way to live, to convince them or to force them to follow another life norm. The human individual thus has a natural right that corresponds with the physical and intellectual force to exist, feel and act, which in all likelihood will come into conflict with the rights of others.

On the other hand, human beings must necessarily live in a web of relations that represent some sort of community. Spinoza makes this clear in a passage in chapter V of TTP that sums this up more clearly than other texts. Reduced to our own individual resources, we would be in a state of almost complete helplessness. The human body is in fact quite complex and in need of a lot of things in order to sustain itself. All the things we need, a great variety of things, are not immediately accessible in nature. They must be processed in order to be useful to us. One person alone would not have the time and strength to plough, to sow, to harvest, to mill, to cook, to weave, to do all that is necessary to live. In solitude we would be completely incapable to perform all the work life demands: quantitatively it would require much too much time, qualitatively the variation of work needed is much too great, and every human does not possess the necessary skills to perform all the necessary tasks. The most basic survival requires a division of labour, which, even on the poorest level, is a form of mutual cooperation (*mutua opera*).

According to Spinoza, human beings always have the potential for cooperation. The joining of an individual's physical and intellectual strength with that of others, i.e., the joining of an individual's natural rights with that of others, may help each individual to exercise and improve his or her own right.

Conflict and cooperation are preconditions for the political. There are—in human beings—as we stated through facts—negative passions that may lead individuals toward conflict, and positive affects that lead individuals toward cooperation. The whole problem of politics then becomes to unite human beings who are driven by these contradictory principles in such a way that they are best able to

[10] *Ibid.*

cooperate. This entails finding the mechanism that makes it possible to form a political body understood as a harmonious entity, and define forms, structures and rules for a peaceful and free society.

4 From Natural Right to Positive Right and Democracy

In the state of nature human beings thus have a right to all they will and can do. The right is identical with the immanent norms in the exercise of power. Right and reality coincide. But a human being is, in the state of nature, determined by passive emotions and not by active affects: "Thus the natural right of every man is determined not by sound reason, but by his desire and his force".[11] In the supposed state of nature individuals are therefore driven by the passions and this may antagonise them, a tendency which hinders cooperation. In fact, individuals in the state of nature do not live *sui juris* (based on their own rights), but as *alterius juris* (subjected to the power of others). Thus the state of nature is exposed as a state of slavery—a state where the individual's right and power are non-existent. The transition from the state of nature to the state of civil society in history is continuous.[12] This continuous transition consolidates the uniting of human powers and establishes conditions for peace and protection. Human beings are truly able to exercise their rights when living and working together, when they protect their land together so they can live on it and cultivate it. When they are related through mutual dependence, human beings can actively express their individual forces, *ex communi consensus* (by common consent), *una veluti mente* (as one mind).[13] The cooperation between individuals thus forms a *multitudinis potentia* (the strength of multitude)[14] of a social power. The concept of *multitude*, which is at the heart of current debates in political philosophy, has a famous father in Spinoza.

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[11] "non sana ratione sed cupiditate et potentia determinatur" (TTP XVI, s.378; jfr. TP, II, 5).

[12] Here Spinoza breaks with traditional contract theory, even when using the concept of pact in TTP. The interpretation of Spinoza's relationship to contract theory is quite controversial. Exemplary of an anti-contract theory interpretation is Matheron, A. (1969) *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit; Matheron (1990) *Le problème de l'évolution de Spinoza du TTP au TP,* in Edwin Curley & Pierre-François Moreau (red.) *Spinoza. Issues and directions. The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference (1986)*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, pp. 258–270; Matheron "The theoretical function of democracy," in Bostrenghi, Daniela (ed.) (1988) *Hobbes e Spinoza: scienza e politica: atti del Convegno internazionale,* Urbino 14–17 ottobre, 1988. Naples: Bibliopolis. Published again in Lloyd, Genevieve (ed.) (2001) *Spinoza – Critical assessments of leading philosophers,* vol. III. London: Routledge. Among those who interpret Spinoza's political theory as contract theory: Giancotti, E. *Individuo e stato nelle prime teorizzazioni dello stato moderno: Hobbes e Spinoza a confronto,* pp. 12–25; (In: *Massa folla individuo,* ed. Alberto Burgio, Gian Mario Cazzaniga, Dominico Losurdo). Urbino: Quattro Venti, pp. 11–25.; Bobbio, Norberto (1979) *Il modello giusnaturalistico*, in Nobbio, N. & Bovero, Mario *Società e stato nella filosofia politica moderna*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.

[13] Ref. T P, II, pp. 13–15.

[14] TP, II, p. 17.

For Spinoza, the concept of the *multitude* means a real entirety of individualities, maintained through a series of positive actions and emotions without reducing this multitude to a unity. It is therefore the foundation of civil rights.

In his explanation of the foundations of civil society Spinoza revises Hobbes and contract theory. The transition from natural rights to civil right is not based on a voluntary decision, but is an *unavoidable necessity*.[15] Further, there is no way, in Spinoza's theory, to rescind power and freedom. Spinoza notes that as he upholds the natural right as it is, his position differs from Hobbes'. Hobbes builds his system on the alienation of natural right: the positive law abolishes natural right. In Spinoza, positive law is upheld to better guarantee natural right and exercise it rationally. Positive law is nothing but natural right which creates the conditions for its own expression.

For Spinoza does not transfer *multitudinis potentia* to a third party, Leviathan, the sovereign authority, through a contract of subjection: "When it comes to politics, the difference between me and Hobbes […] is that "I continue to hold the natural right complete" and say that "the highest power (*summa potestas*) does not have a greater power over its citizens than that which the authorities have over its subjects".[16] The civil rights, which constitute the state, is the individual right itself exercised collegially: "Such a society's right is called a democracy, which can therefore be defined as the universal assembly of human beings which collegially possesses sovereign right over everything within its power" (coetus universus hominum, qui collegialiter summum jus ad omnia, quae potest, habent)".[17]

And it is this "democracy" which in its turn transfers, not its *potentia*, but the exercise of its power to the representative or representatives in order to express the common will to rule the community as one mind. In a democracy the majority expresses the common will: "…the democratic governance… seemed the most natural and the most closely to the freedom which nature grants to every man. For in a democratic state nobody transfers his natural right to another so completely that thereafter he is not to be consulted; he transfers it to the majority of the entire society of which he is part".[18]

This again distinguishes Spinoza from Hobbes: for Spinoza it is in fact both parties (multitude and power holder) who accept obligations and tasks. Hobbes' Leviathan is rather a perfect machine for obedience, and the subjects can only rebel if the sovereigns are unable to uphold security. Whereas for Spinoza the state has no more right over its citizens than what is given to the state by all citizen's power.

Absolute democratic power, which has yet to be realised in history, is the self-government of the associated and collaborating forces of all individuals, when "all of society, if possible, collegially must exercise power (*Imperium collegialiter*

[15] Ref. ETH. IV sch. II prop. XXXVII.

[16] Ep. 50, G. IV, pp. 238–39.

[17] TTP. XVI, G. 3, p. 241.

[18] TTP, XVI G.3, p. 243.

tenere debet), so that each and every one serves himself and nobody is obligated to serve their like".[19]

In any kind of society, also the most perfect, any sovereign authority will—as soon as it is established—ascertain the conditions for the moral distinction between transgression and obedience to the laws, justice and injustice,[20] and also demand that the pact be kept, with threats of punishment; which shows that transgressions lead to more harm than good.[21] But as we said, above, the transition to the state does not mean an actual loss of individual rights that were only usable in the state of nature. Firstly, the subjects do not transfer their pre-existing power; before the civil state they were not able to exercise their power individually. The natural state was, in fact, a state of powerlessness. Secondly, individuals only rescind what is truly transferable. No one may transfer their power (*potentia*) to others and thus their right in such a way that he or she rescinds being human. No one may transfer the right to judge, or be led to believe the opposite of what he or she thinks. Spinoza therefore insists on freedom of thought and speech, whereas Hobbes not only suggests, but acknowledges, censure of doctrines that may be a threat to the security of the state. According to Spinoza, security is not the only aim to be pursued in order that humans may live together and cooperate in conflict situations. Freedom is, in addition to security, the immanent purpose of a political state. The citizen's obedience to the state is, according to Hobbes, absolute and proportional to the security which the state guarantees. For Spinoza, such obedience requires that the state is rational (and the state is rational because all the citizens have participated in passing the laws) and that the state respects and facilitates the freedom of the citizens. To sum up, both philosophers speak of *multitude*, which is organised and becomes one; while the Hobbesian state *rules* the *multitudo*, the Spinozistic state rules *with* the *multitudo*, for the state and *multitudo* is one and the same.

Spinoza here gives a significant contribution to modern political thinking, as his reflection represents one of the first theoretisations on democracy.

In political life, democracy is the best means available to human beings—the passionate human beings—for winning a form of autonomy, almost in spite of themselves. The association of human beings is realised in a continuous process that expresses the development of reason, reason understood as freedom. Freedom is thus the first condition of and, at the same time, the aim of a democratic state.

5 Democracy and Freedom of Thought and Speech

Spinoza sees democracy as the basis of every form of governance because it is governance of the association of human beings, exercised by the association itself. Democracy is an absolute power because it is governed by a community and entails

[19] TTP, V, G.3, p. 130.

[20] Ref. Ethica, IV, 37 Scholium2 and P.T., pp. 18, 19 and 23.

[21] TTP, V, G.3, p.129 XVI, G.3 pp. 381–382.

common decisions wherein human reason expresses itself. As we said above, reason is a "common" domain for Spinoza: through reason alone may humans reach agreement and strengthen cooperation. Only in this common domain may natural right remain in the civil state.

Reason plays a double role in democracy. On the one hand reason works, as said, positively in social political life. In the democratic order a common reflected decision (*communi consensus decernitus*) and a common determination (*mens una*) are basic elements. But because a common agreement entails *all* people, and a common determination involves *all* parts of society, the capability to use one's judgment becomes a core element. Freedom of thought and freedom of speech, expressed in public open debate, thus have a constitutive role in Spinozistic democracy.

In the Spinozistic democratic state each individual citizen can change the organization of the state only through a process of consensual common decisions.

However, the individual citizen retains his or her own free judgment before and after the common decision, i.e., his/her human essence, which no human being can rescind. This freedom enables citizens to participate extensively in the political debate.

Reason is, on the other hand, a critical instance: Reason is the basis for the change and possible dissolution of the state when the state becomes a machine of oppression.

In fact, under a democratic regime, citizens may enjoy their freedom as long as the state maintains its objective, i.e., the welfare of its citizens, their freedom of thought and speech; in other words, as long as the state preserves its rational essence. When the highest authorities forget the true purpose of the state, they have established the conditions for their own abolition: "For if one abolishes the foundations, the whole building is easily destroyed".[22] Reason, which is an underlying force in the establishment of the free republic, becomes the driving force for change when conflicts arise between the rulers and the ruled.

Spinoza's democracy differs from Rousseau's democratic model, where rights are granted from above, where one says to people by decree "be happy", or "be equal", "be free". This is an important point in the history of culture and in general political philosophy. In Rousseau we see the triumph of the model of natural right, where each citizen transfers his freedom to the general will, to the state, in order to get it back wholly and be as free as before.

Spinoza does not start from such a transfer of the freedom of the citizen. He knows that no state will return freedom wholly to the individual citizen—if he/she does not have power—but will always retain some of this freedom. So the state does not emerge, for Spinoza, from the efforts of a small minority, as with the Jacobeans or the Bolshevik Party. Neither does the state emerge from the idea that individual freedom can come from above, as Robespierre said: "Three men can change the Republic".

We have said that, according to Spinoza, reason is both the foundation of society and a basis for a critique of society. Reason is a constructive force, but not a dominating

[22] TTP, cap XVI, G. 3, p. 194.

force. On the contrary, reason is a subversive force, a basis for change. This dynamic character is typical of Spinoza's concept of reason; the Spinozistic reason thus becomes a critical entity.

One must again emphasise that according to Spinoza a critique of reason is not some sort of lonely anarchist revolt. Reason is developed in a common public debate. In other words, a state is democratic when decisions are made in common, based on free rational debate.

Spinoza himself points to the basic problem inherent to this definition of democracy: only individuals think, where then is a common reason? Where and how may individuals think together? Spinoza was also very much aware of the difference between thinking and feeling! He saw very clearly the inherent danger in all this commonality, i.e., that the individuals, rather than *thinking* together, risk *feeling* together! The unreason at times displayed by people in political decisions may pose some disquieting questions in a democratic society. Is it not often the case that the people prefer dreams to a rational analysis of the true possibilities for social development? Rational analyses are frequently much too difficult and abstract. Very few people are able to walk the steep (*perardua*) path of reason. In other words: the power of reason is less than the power of emotions, and the latter rules most people. The questions which Spinoza poses are the same as Étienne de La Boétie already had asked himself, and that later surprised Jacques Necker: Why do people sacrifice their lives and own interests for the interests and ambitions of other individuals? Why do people accept the authority of others when this harms them more than it helps? Is it possible to develop a political strategy that is based on a reason nurtured by liberating passions and constructive images?

In the Spinozistic project we find the theoretical preconditions for establishing an order where the relation between reason and imagination becomes central, so that one can avoid falling victim to the external order of the passions: an order that otherwise may work on us like a blind force.

We have seen that according to Spinoza the emotions are a necessary and positive part of the structure of the mind. Genuine understanding of the productive force of the emotions thus becomes the starting point for their use as the source of freedom. Spinoza's historical-critical concept of reason is the new rational equipment for working with this structure.

Spinoza knows that prejudices have an almost unlimited influence on the human mind. He consequently spends the first part of TTP examining the most common prejudices with regard to religion as "the remnants of an old slavery" and examines prejudices related to a sovereign power's rights. Spinoza carries out a thorough historical-philological critique of the Bible to show how the Scripture's descriptive form and categorical structure are strongly influenced by the historical situation. Spinoza is not the first to historically-philologically analyze the Bible; this was already done by Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus, and Protestant interpreters of the Scriptures. He was not the first who connected philological criticism to political thought: Hobbes did this in the third part of Leviathan. But it was perhaps the first time that all this was done so consistently. In fact, the biblical text is interpreted in the light of Jewish people's culture, language and mentality: in this way, the Bible

became a text like the others and was no longer considered sacred. From this premise, Spinoza shows that the Old Testament is a collection of writings with the purpose of regulating Jewish people's lives. The Bible's purpose is moral and the dogmas through which faith is expressed, have no theoretical significance. These principles are simple and common to all religions, and therefore, this should exclude religious conflicts. According to Spinoza, the meaning of religion is justice and charity, and this coincides with what reason itself investigates. People who are not able to realize their freedom through reason and intellect, can, by obedience to "true religion", produce in practice—in practical life—the same effects that people ruled by reason and intellect produce: a life directed by justice and charity. There is thus no contrast between philosophy and "the true religions": the one is based on truth and is autonomous, the others are based on authority and obedience, and are therefore heteronomous.

To understand the significance of Spinoza's analysis of religion it is necessary to recall the situation in the United Netherlands. This was a country where all faiths, not only Christian, were represented, and the main problem in the regulation of social life was the relation between religious authority and political authority. That is why Spinoza's political reflection focuses on the relation between the State and the religious authorities and on freedom of thought. This analysis has great political consequences. Firstly, this allows free philosophical research: the state should not interpret the Scriptures, only guarantee freedom. Not even the church/churches have authority in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Secondly, it is clear that the state cannot legitimately hinder freedom of thought. We must remember how the subtitle of the theological-political treatise explicitly states its purpose: not only to show that freedom of thought and speech does not disturb the peace of the state, but that they are necessary conditions for peace and order in the state.

May Spinoza's thinking be considered as a philosophy of tolerance? In the history of ideas of tolerance one often finds references to Spinoza as a theorist of tolerance. But there is something strange in the works of Spinoza, the concept of tolerance does not exist, or rather: Spinoza does not use this term when he discusses these problems. The concept of "*tolerantia*" occurs only once in the works[23] of Spinoza in TTP, c. XX, understood in its precise etymological meaning: the ability to bear or endure pain and adversity, the ability to withstand the vagaries of life, ability to withstand. He does not ascribe this ability to the state, but to the citizens. For Spinoza the problem was not what the state decides to permit, because permission is considered a lesser evil than the effects of oppression: that would have been a covert form of despotism. It was important for Spinoza to identify the rights that provide the foundations for the state, not what the state may or may not permit. The concept of tolerance is never used by Spinoza with reference to what the state—in this case the rulers (*Summa potestas*)—may permit, most likely because, from his theoretical point of view, the concept of tolerance was insufficient to express the relation between people and therefore insufficient as a foundation for a civil society

[23] Re. Mignini, F. (1991) "Spinoza oltre l'idea di tolleranza," in Sina, M. (ed.) *La tolleranza religiosa. Indagini storiche e riflessioni filosofiche*. Milan, pp. 163–197.

project. If modes and everything that exists as singular and definite things necessarily follow from the infinite substance, every existing thing has a right to exist simply because it exists. So as all that exists, including human beings, exists not only as body, but also as mind, it is clear that to recognize the right of others to diversity only means to recognize that the other exists, and that his/her existence entails the right to exist just as he or she is. So to be tolerant in relation to the diversity of others' thoughts or the diversity of others' faith has, for Spinoza, the same meaning as being tolerant to the fact that the other has either blue or dark eyes, because the others think and feel as they must think and feel based on the inner necessity of their nature. It is on this basis that Spinoza says that freedom of thought and of speech may not only be permitted, but "must be given".[24]

It is impossible and harmful to proscribe everything by law, Spinoza continues, and all that is not forbidden must necessarily be permitted.

Based on this principle it becomes possible to work out political strategies to establish the external conditions necessary to gain security and exercise freedom. Important in this respect is, as we have already seen, the establishment of the democratic society.

Spinoza's answer to the disquieting question posed to a democratic society is as follows: only in freedom (understood as freedom of speech and thought) may individuals develop their rational abilities and cooperation. Freedom of speech is thus a human right and the basis for a human political life, or, in brief, a human life.

Society is, according to Spinoza, not founded on a fear of death (as in Hobbes), but on reasonable choices in solidarity with others. If the individual wants security and respect for his or her own rights, he or she cannot at the same time deny other people this. In such a society the state cannot be an absolute power oppressing its citizens, but must be an institution to guarantee and defend the freedom of the citizens.

Thus the state has a special responsibility to guarantee and defend freedom of thought, the most important condition for developing the individual's abilities and establishing a society. Freedom of thought and speech is therefore, according to Spinoza, a necessity for the state. Without freedom of thought there is no civil right. Here it is not a matter of tolerance, but of right; freedom of thought and consequently freedom of faith refer to each individual's right, which cannot be rescinded when the social body is built. This freedom is the true purpose of the state.[25]

6 History of Reception and Critique

Spinoza's influence and his reception are very complex, having constituted a continuous, more or less underlying, contrasting leitmotif in the history of thought from his death until today. The history of the reception of Spinoza's thoughts

[24] TTP, XX, G.3, p. 247.

[25] ref. TTP, XX, G. 3, p. 241.

entails historical and theoretical assessments of enlightenment philosophy, idealism, materialism (a.o. Marxist materialism), and, in part, political theory in postmodern thinking.[26] Jonathan Israel's book *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press 2001) is fairly paradigmatic in this respect. Israel identifies the origin of the radical enlightenment in 1650, when Spinoza cleared the way for theoretical and political enlightenment thinking in all of Europe: radical critique of religion, church, state, interpretation of the Holy Scriptures in the materialistic sense, attacks on European monarchies and acceptance of a radical democracy. Spinoza's thinking is, however, not easily susceptible to "classification", or reduction to a certain tradition. As a result, his political thinking has gone through a long series of partly contrasting interpretations, presenting Spinoza both as a contract theorist and not as a liberal or a proto-revolution theorist, etc. Spinoza's political thinking has not always received the attention it deserves, and he is frequently not included in canons of political doctrines. (See e.g.: George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1937.) However, we must remember the happy exception of Guido Fassò who, in his history of the philosophy of law (Fassò, 1966), devotes a chapter to Spinoza. Only from the second half of the twentieth century did the renewal of the study of Spinoza in France contribute to a focus on his political thinking.

In a discussion about the reception of his political philosophy, it is necessary to remember that for Spinoza politics is closely related to ontology, or as André Tosel said "Ontology becomes politics and politics is revealed as ontology" (Tosel 1984, p. 274), and the reception history of Spinoza's political philosophy is tied up with the interpretation of his ontology.

The reception may roughly be divided into three phases. The first phase is from the publication of his works to the so-called "Spinozismusstreit", a second phase influenced by the need to read his thinking in reliable texts, and finally a new beginning for the study of Spinoza from the end of the First World War up until today.

The first phase is characterised by a—we may say hidden, but nonetheless strong—presence of Spinoza's teachings in philosophical debates. The real problem with this reception is its approach. On the one side, we find the critics of Spinoza who see his doctrine as a threat to Christian thinking; on the other, the ones who make use of his ideas without naming him.

Spinoza's ideas became known during his lifetime in a small cultural circle from the beginning of the 1660s in the United Netherlands. During his own lifetime he developed a reputation for being an atheist and materialist (ref. Spinoza's correspondence).

Opera posthuma, published with only the initials (BdS), and initially widely available, later became a rare bibliographic object, even if the books are found listed in the inventories of some collections in private libraries. The work was never published again until the 1700s, and Boulainvilliers' translation from 1710 had a limited distribution. One may in fact count on one's fingers the authors who show a

[26] We must here give only a very short and somewhat superficial sketch of all this. A good introduction may be found in Garrett (1996).

thorough and accurate knowledge of Spinoza's texts. So how did the teachings of Spinoza spread from his death and to Romanticism? What was Spinoza's thought as referred to by the Spinozistic enlightenment philosophers—the famous radical enlightenment philosophers? Spinozism spread in two ways: on the one hand, thanks to the polemicists who used Pierre Bayle's ambiguous presentation in his *Dictionnaire*: Spinoza as atheist and anti-Christian. An atheistic teacher, the virtuous atheist, all the more dangerous as he was an example of a moral life in no need of Christianity. On the other hand, Spinoza's philosophy spread after his death thanks to a whole set of secret heterodox and illegal literature taking him as a source of inspiration for new ideas on deism or "atheism" (and "pantheism", at that time frequently used as a synonym for atheism) [*La Vie et l'Esprit de Mr. Benoit de Spinoza* (Life and Teachings of Mr Benedict Spinoza, 1719), later published under the title *Traité des Trois imposteurs* and *Symbolum Sapientiae* or *Cymbalum Mundi*].

Polemical texts with refutations are published all over Europe. Spinozistic atheism, materialism and determinism was refuted by S. Clarke (1705–1706) and by the freethinker J. Toland (1704) in Great Britain. In 1731 three works were published in one volume in France: *Réfutation des erreurs de B. de Spinoza.* One of these is the false refutation by Henri de Boulainvilliers. Boulainvilliers does not actually criticize Spinoza but gives an account of Spinoza's text. Boulainvilliers was one of the few who had directly studied the works of the Dutch philosopher. His *Essai de metaphysique* (1731) was, according to P. Vernière, "the breviary of Spinozism of the eighteenth century" and was later used as a source by Voltaire and Diderot. Through these heterodox texts Spinoza's ideas implemented what Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel call the radical enlightenment.[27]

In the second half of the eighteenth century the so-called neo-Spinozists found inspiration in some of Spinoza's theses. Faced with new scientific discoveries and new political events, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751), Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (1698–1759), Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Paul Henri d'Holbach (1723–1789) developed their materialist theories from the conceptual frame of the *Ethics.*

We must nevertheless emphasise that no one (not even those most influenced by Spinoza's thinking) openly acknowledged being Spinozistic, although many were accused of being so.

The refutation of Spinoza's teachings dominated in Germany (see *Scriptorum Anti-Spinozianorum* from 1710 and Trinius, in *Freydenkerlexicon* (1759) which provides an estimate of 129 enemies). According to German enlightenment philosophers such as Leibniz (1646–1716), Christian Wolff (1679–1754), Christian Thomas (1655–1728), Andreas Rüdiger (1673–1731) and Christian August Crusius (1715–1775), Spinoza is a threat due to his atheism, which again is a consequence of his speculative rational method.

[27] Jacob, Margaret (1981) *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*. London/Boston; Israel, Jonathan (2001) *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*. Oxford.

The year 1785 represents a turn in the reception of Spinoza: the first public debate on Spinoza's teachings took place and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) publishes *Über die Lehre des Spinoza Briefen an der Herrn Moses Mendelssohn.* The book opened a debate on Spinozism that strengthened the pantheistic tendency that already animated the new post-enlightenment era in Germany, from Schiller and Schleiermacher to Goethe.

It should be noted that even though Spinoza's teachings are finally openly debated, and many acknowledge being Spinozistic, Spinoza's ideas are used to develop a whole new philosophy: The German idealist spirit of nature philosophy. The period from 1780 and the first part of the 1800s is possibly the period with the most intense studies related to the philosophy of Spinoza, as it involves all the great German philosophers, from Hegel to Schelling, from Schopenhauer and Feuerbach to Marx and Nietzsche. In the wake of Hegel, Spinoza is read as a great metaphysician, the philosopher of the infinite and indefinite substance, and the things and variety disappear and become reduced to a state of illusion. However, only the parts of Spinoza's texts that better explained the new philosophy were read, namely parts I and II of *Ethica*. So, more or less consciously, these readers fail to mention the three-quarters of his works devoted to human passions, society and politics. This tendency is even today dominant in some of the secondary literature. We must, however, also remember that the great interpretation problem in relation to Spinoza's ontology is met with strictness and precision. The need for a more correct historical and philological analysis of Spinoza's work subjects his writing to textual criticism. At the end of the nineteenth century *The Short Treatise on God, Man and its wellness* was discovered. This period sees the publication of the two most complete editions of Spinoza's work (van Vloten and Land 1883; Carl Gebhardt 1925). This great historical and concept-analytical work provides the foundations for later studies that again spark the contemporary Spinoza renaissance. The thinkers of the 1900s also engaged with Spinoza's philosophy, thanks to a significant improvement in historical studies: see e.g. Wolfson's *The Philosophy of Spinoza* (1934) and L. Robinson's *Kommentar zur Spinozas Ethik* (1928), P. Vernière*, Spinoza et la pensée française avant la Révolution* (the reception of Spinoza before the French Revolution, 1954), the numerous articles by E. M. Curley, Y. Yovel's *Spinoza and other Heretics* (1989), and *Lexicon Spinozanum* edited by E. Giancotti. New, robust philosophical interpretations emerge in the 1960s, particularly in France. The new reading of Spinoza is developed in the philosophical context of structuralism and its crisis. In 1961, M. Gueroult published his structuralist analysis of the first and second part of the Ethics: *Spinoza Dieu* (1961) and *Spinoza L'Âme* (1974). The book will influence many later works. Even Althusser acknowledges that Spinoza's philosophy played a fundamental role in the development of his later theories, and he participates, with Deleuze, in the great French—Italian new interpretation of Spinoza's philosophy in a Marxist view. Althusser's contribution to the interpretation of Spinoza influenced the works of G. Deleuze: *Spinoza et le problem de l'expression* (1968), A. Matheron's *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (1968), E. Balibar's work on the transindividual in Spinoza, and Antonio Negri's *L'anomalia selvaggia*, where the key concept is multitude, to become the principle of a new form of political life.

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Note: There is a huge bibliography on Spinoza in many languages, especially French, Italian, Dutch, English and German. This is a very selective list of books.

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