

POWER, POLITICS, AND RELIGION IN SPINOZA'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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In this essay we seek to discuss the relationship between religion and politics in the political theory of Spinoza. Since Spinoza's politics is grounded in power, we must make an effort to understand the contribution both politics and religion make to the power of the state. In this connection our starting point is not one of arguing that Spinoza first seeks to undermine religion for the sake of some secular project. Rather, Spinoza saw religion as a necessary feature of political life. The problem then becomes one of reconciling some of the central features of religion with those of politics. This process of reconciliation alters the character of both religion and politics, and we outline the elements of that alteration. The concepts of justice and charity play a critical role in this process. We also examine the way in which piety and salvation are reconstituted. Finally, some speculation on the implications of a transformed religion and politics are noted at the end of this essay.

As he found a very ferocious people and wanted to reduce it to civil obedience with the arts of peace, he turned to religion as a thing altogether necessary if he wanted to maintain a civilization.

Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, I, 11.

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Spinoza is not generally regarded as a promoter of religion. He is not, for example, read today as a theologian even though it would be hard to find an historical figure with more of an impact on the curriculum of modern seminaries (e.g., the requirement of reading the Bible in its original language; the historical approach to biblical criticism). His universalistic theology, such as it is, hardly seems to inspire spiritual awakening or renewal, and its programmatic elements are not detailed enough to spawn a religious sect. True, over the centuries Spinoza has been described as a "God intoxicated man," mystic, and a man of faith. Yet in a way reminiscent of distinctions Spinoza himself makes in the TTP, Spinozism could perhaps inspire one to blessedness; but it is not clear that it does much toward promoting religion.

Defenders of Spinoza as a sincere advocate of religion must argue for their views in the face of massive historical opinion that Spinoza was either an atheist or at least an underminer of religion. In our own day, this opinion is expressed most simply in the title of one of Leo Strauss' books: *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* — as if there were no *defense* of religion offered by Spinoza and as if it is the *nature* of religion, rather than religion as he found it in his own day, to which Spinoza objects. If critics are so insistent that Spinoza leaves no room for revealed religion, it is no wonder that Spinoza's admirers appear constantly on the defensive. From Spinoza's position on miracles to prophecy it certainly is not *obvious* what Spinoza's defense of religion would be.

In this essay our position is not easily assimilated by either Spinoza's defenders or critics. Against the critics our claim is that Spinoza took religion seriously, at least in politics. We must begin, in other words, not with the notion that Spinoza sought to undermine religion, but rather with the idea that for Spinoza religion is inevitably and essentially a part of political life. Yet against any defenders of Spinoza who may wish to argue that his doctrine is not inconsistent with a healthy religious climate, we shall see that the implications of that doctrine raise some serious issues with respect to both the viability of religion and the effects that may follow from the role Spinoza's theory gives to it.

The Nature of Spinoza's Political Theory

Spinoza's political philosophy is unique because it is the only power-based, as opposed to rights-based, form of liberalism.¹ Unlike theories such as that of Hobbes and Locke which are grounded in rights, Spinoza's theory is grounded in power.

By the right of nature, then, I mean the actual laws or rules of nature in accordance with which all things come to be; that is, the actual power of nature. Thus the natural right of nature as a whole, and consequently the natural right of each individual extends as far as its power. Hence everything a man does in accordance with the laws of his nature, he does by the sovereign right of nature, and he has as much right against other things in nature as he has power and strength (TP II, 4).

It is perhaps tempting to claim that Hobbes too made right(s) co-extensive with power, at least in the state of nature. Some commentators have correctly noticed, however, that right and power are not absolutely co-extensive for Hobbes even in the state of nature.² More importantly, right-as-power is compromised once one leaves the state of nature for Hobbes, whereas Spinoza holds that in a certain fundamental sense we *never* leave the state of nature. "The fact is that man acts in accordance with the law of his own nature and pursues his own advantage in both the natural and the political order" (TP III, 3). This perspective has a significant bearing on the nature of political theory as done by Spinoza. Whereas other thinkers are worried about questions of political and moral legitimacy (whether of particular forms of authority or the state itself), Spinoza does not regard such questions as foundational. Issues of legitimacy and ideal forms of government belong more to poetry than to political theory (TP I, 1). Instead, our attention should be focused upon the ways in which power functions in a political context and upon its most efficient use.

This is not a doctrine, then, grounded in concerns about what *ought* to be the case in some moral sense. As Leo Strauss has correctly put it when comparing Spinoza to Hobbes: "political philosophy deprived of its moral foundation is, indeed, Spinoza's

political philosophy, but it is not Hobbes' political philosophy. Spinoza, indeed, and not Hobbes, made might equivalent to right."³ Consequently, it would be a mistake to regard Spinoza's political writings as statements about what rights we ought to have or to see those writings as recipes for ideal political organizations. Since writers from Hobbes through Rousseau view political philosophy in just this way, it is difficult for us to avoid giving such a reading to Spinoza. But if one does not resist that temptation one will make serious errors in understanding Spinoza, the most basic of which is to regard "rights" as a normative concept.

Unlike, say, Locke, Spinoza is not concerned to detail our rights and obligations so much as he is to describe the various permutations of power.⁴ So, for example, a Lockean, and therefore misleading reading of Chapter XX of the TTP would claim that we ought to have the right of free speech. A truly Spinozistic reading, in contrast, would see our right to speak our mind freely as a function of the power the sovereign has granted us to do so, but that a great deal of freedom in this area is consistent with enhancing the sovereign's power. Notice that in correctly reading Spinoza, one's first impulse should not be to ferret out normative pronouncements or implications, but rather to find the positive theory and then determine any normative elements that may be derived from it. Our claim, of course, is not that Spinoza never makes normative pronouncements, but rather that such pronouncements are neither fundamental nor central to the theory. Consequently, if we apply these conclusions to our topic here, we should first consider the role of religion as an instrument of power, and then secondarily what religion might look like in an ideally constituted order.

In addition to our point about the foundational character of power, it is equally important to recognize the irrelevance of reason to politics. Reason is not, of course, irrelevant to the *theorist* of political life; but it has little or no role to play in politics *per se*. Spinoza, for example, says:

But men are led more by blind desire than by reason; and so their natural power, or natural right, must not be defined in terms of reason, but must be held to cover every possible

appetite by which they are determined to act, and by which they try to preserve themselves (TP II, 5).

The same point is made in the TTP:

[A]ll men are born in complete ignorance, and, even although they are well brought up, much of their life must pass before they can discover the true way of living and acquire a virtuous disposition. Yet meanwhile they have to live and preserve themselves as best they can; that is, by the prompting of appetite alone, since nature has given them nothing else, and has denied them the effective power to live by sound reason (TTP XVI).⁵

Individuals who live long enough to actually "discover the true way of living" are rare and statistically insignificant as a percentage of the total population. Politics, then, is primarily affective, that is, governed by appetite or (in cognitive terminology) imagination. It is also imagination that rules religion as can be seen from Spinoza's discussions of prophesy and miracles (TTP Chs. 1-3, 6). If, therefore, politics is essentially about what appeals to the appetites or imagination, we must consider political power in terms of its effect upon imagination and appetite.

Finally, we must say something about how the foregoing can be connected to liberalism. To do so, we must again resist another temptation, namely, to suppose that Spinoza's doctrine *implies* liberalism. All that is technically implied by his theory is that whatever social arrangements or form of government a society may possess, its institutional features are there as the result of determinate causal factors that necessitate their presence. To repeat, Spinoza is not Locke; his first concern is not to defend or legitimize the liberal state, but to elucidate the relations of power that characterize political life. *If*, however, we understand that power is the currency of politics *and* we also wish to understand how the power within society might be utilized so as to maximize its effectiveness (i.e., "effectiveness" being the ability to control the social, political, and natural environments), then "liberalism" becomes descriptively more appropriate.

Even here one may wonder what is liberal about a theory which takes politics to be the affective and largely irrational interplay of power relations that are as likely to end in illiberal social orders as liberal ones. Yet the key to understanding Spinoza's liberalism is to recognize that the liberal state is the most powerful state and thus the descriptive and normative elements of the theory are joined under the single rubric of power. It was Spinoza's insight, and we believe the first of its kind in modern Western political thought,⁶ that a social order where individuals were joined together on the basis of interest and for limited ends (secure and comfortable living [TTP III]) would direct the forces within society so efficiently that the power of that society would dwarf the power of all the petty tyrannies of history.

The various devices of the liberal state (e.g., rule of law, representative government, commerce, etc.)⁷ can secure that end of absolute power and are all recommended because of the contribution they make to the power and unity of the state, and not because they are morally obligatory or worthy. Spinoza is clear that absolute sovereignty is the object of politics (TP VI, 5-6; VIII, 4-5), not moral perfection. Indeed, the deep liberalism of Spinoza's theory is precisely that the state is not an instrument for making men good. As we just noted, the ends of the state are limited; it makes no contribution to blessedness. By the same token, religion, whose goal is presumably salvation, is, we are claiming, an essential part of political life. The problem to which we now turn is how to reconcile these claims. Our main thesis is, however, that these claims must be reconciled. From our perspective it is not correct to claim that Spinoza sought to undermine or abandon religion to make room for the liberal state. The liberal state *and* religion are both *jointly* in the service of detailing the components of absolute sovereignty.

Religion and Politics

Like Hobbes before him, Spinoza is concerned that priests and various religious sects divide sovereignty and create civil strife. Spinoza's solution to the problem of religion and politics is, however, neither Adam Smith's solution from the *Wealth of*

Nations nor the American one. Smith's approach was one where numerous sects compete against each other to the point where they cancel out each others' influence upon public life. By the same token, Spinoza does not opt for the American solution which is to institutionalize a constitutional separation of church and state. So far as we can tell, Spinoza thought religion must be an inevitable part of political life whose influence could not be diluted or diminished. As Spinoza says in TTP V,

knowledge of [scripture] is quite indispensable for the masses....The masses, then, need know only the stories which can best inspire them to obedience and devotion. But the masses are not wise enough themselves to judge which these are...so they need pastors and ministers of the church to supplement their reading by giving them instruction suited to their feeble understanding.

But since "the sovereign...must also be the interpreter and guardian of religious law"(TTP XIX), "pastors and ministers" will not stand entirely outside the political order.

In the TP (TP VI, 40; VIII, 46) we see Spinoza seeking not to remove religion from politics, but rather trying to find the appropriate form of accommodation. For example, he recommends virtually complete freedom of religion in monarchies, whereas in the case of aristocracy, he recommends large and magnificent state churches. There is no indication that he conceives of politics without religion. Quite the contrary, if we take Spinoza to be an admirer of Machiavelli — and Spinoza tells us such himself (TP V, 7) — and a reader of Machiavelli's *Discourse on Livy* (TP X, I), then these words by Machiavelli may give us some insight into Spinoza's own frame of mind:

And as the observance of the divine cult is the cause of the greatness of republics, so disdain for it is the cause of their ruin. For where the fear of God fails, it must be either that the kingdom comes to ruin or that it is sustained by the fear of a prince which supplies the defects of religion (*Discourse I*, 11).

Indeed, Chapters 11-15 of Book I of the *Discourses* generally argue for the indispensability of religion to politics, and from the text just cited, religion seems importantly connected to liberty as well. But even the most cursory reading of Spinoza indicates that Spinoza's urge to reform religion is due to its apparent uneasy relationship to politics. How then does Spinoza propose to harmonize the two?

Spinoza takes "democracy" to be the most natural and original form of political society (TTP XVI: TP IV, 6; TP VIII, 12). This should not be understood normatively. Although Spinoza does recommend democracy as the "best" form of government, the point is that the base of all political power does in fact lie with the people for Spinoza. Since this is the same audience for whom Scripture is intended, we must next ask whether politics and Scripture overlap in other ways. It is here that one realizes that politics and scriptural religion have the same end — obedience ("Scripture demands nothing from men but obedience," TTP XIII).⁸ If, therefore, obedience is the end, and both politics and religion must secure it by appealing to the appetites and imagination, then politics and religion cannot be distinguished on the basis of their respective objects, but only, if at all, on the basis of the means to them. Yet this is not quite accurate because it suggests that Spinoza's method is one of comparing various means to obedience. Instead, what Spinoza does is to identify the essential elements of unshakable obedience as they might be found in either politics or religion, while leaving what is not common and essential to both to their respective realms. What gets marginalized in both religion and politics under this procedure was what was *traditionally* thought essential to each. In politics what gets marginalized is coercion. In religion what gets marginalized is sacred Scripture. It is not that either one disappears, but rather that both no longer serve to define the central core of political life. What has replaced them, and what is the most powerful element in both religion and politics is *voluntary willing obedience*.

The foregoing may give the appearance that Spinoza seeks to secularize religion (although it has seldom given the appearance of theologizing politics), and in a certain sense that is undeniable. By focusing on what it is about religion that is serviceable to politics, religion does lose much of its independent and

transcendent quality. Indeed, it might be argued that Spinoza has already presupposed the secularization of religion when obedience becomes the object of religion rather than say, blessedness, salvation, or personal immortality.⁹ It is precisely here, however, that another facet of Spinoza's connection to liberalism can be found. The state has nothing to contribute to one's achieving blessedness, except *perhaps* by providing an environment secure enough to do so. Indeed, blessedness (about which we shall say more below) has nothing to do with obedience: "we cannot without great impropriety call the rational life 'obedience'" (TP II, 20).¹⁰ Consequently, the only aspect of religion left that is relevant to politics is that which *does* involve obedience, for it is here and only here that the two realms interface. And since "belief in historical narratives...cannot give us knowledge of God, and hence cannot give us love for him either" (TTP IV), what Spinoza ends up doing is not so much secularizing or undermining religion as indicating the irrelevance of politics to true blessedness. It is the traditional belief that one's state or community can make a contribution to one's true blessedness that Spinoza rejects.

In addition, as we just noted, Spinoza rejects the idea that the powerful state is the coercive one (TP VI, 8). Despite claims about the sovereign having the right to do whatever he has the power to do, Spinoza's doctrine of political obedience is built on the notion of "voluntariness."

[O]bedience is less a matter of the outward act than of the mind's inner activity, so that the man who wholeheartedly decides to obey all the commands of another is most completely under his government; and in consequence he who rules in the hearts of his subjects has the most absolute sovereignty [*maximum imperium*] (TTP XVII).¹¹

The problem such a view of obedience now poses is that politics is unable to supply what would benefit it most — willing obedience — because the tools most common to politics tend to be coercive and directed at external behavior. If the state, then, is to be supremely powerful, it must derive much of that power from the only institution which has historically engendered willing obedience, namely, religion. Religion, however, does not

seem to have the welfare of the state as its end. We must, therefore, find a way to make the object of religion something that is also suitable as an object of politics. Blessedness is not a candidate because it is achieved beyond politics and because it is not a form of obedience anyway. What we need is a new kind of political obedience, one that serves the ends of religion (some form of salvation) while at the same time not siphoning off the power of the state into diverse rivulets of authority.

We do have something of a model of what Spinoza admired in these matters in the Jewish state. It is common to see the discussion of the Jewish state in the TTP in a critical vein, as part of an attack on traditional scriptural authority and the doctrine of the election of the Jews. Yet the rather lengthy discussion of the Jewish state should suggest to us that something more than criticism is taking place. First of all, the foundations of power in that state were essentially democratic.

Since the Jews transferred their right to no other man, but all made an equal surrender of their right as in a democracy, and cried with one voice "Whatever God shall command we shall perform" (without naming anyone as God's mouthpiece), the covenant left them all completely equal, and all had an equal right to consult God and to receive and interpret His laws; in short, they were all equal in charge of the whole administration of the state (TTP XVII).

Moreover, when Moses led the state "he took great pains to see that the people should do its duty willingly and not through fear" (TTP V). Finally, we are told that the Jewish state "could have lasted forever," if certain problems had not arisen.¹² If the Jewish state really is a model of good government for Spinoza, why then not simply advocate a theocracy like it?

Spinoza tells us that "it is neither advisable nor possible to copy [the Jewish state] today" (TTP XVIII). The first reason he gives is that since the covenant is no longer written in ink or stone but in men's hearts, we can no longer make a covenant with God in the way that the Jewish state did.¹³ The second, and we believe more significant reason, was that such a state is too limited for the modern world.¹⁴ If theocracies are too closed for the modern world and yet politics cannot succeed in maximizing

the power of the state without religion, then we must discover an object of obedience that can serve both religion and a new open-ended politics. While the universal religion described in Chapter XIV of the TTP accomplishes that end, it is not so much its universality and doctrinal minimalism which concerns us here. Neither of these characteristics is fundamental because, although they might both jointly achieve the unity of politics and religion, they do not explain what it is about that unity that is likely to inspire the sort of willing obedience Spinoza wants and the religious character of that obedience. To that problem we now turn.

Justice and Charity

In one of the more significant, yet seldom noticed, passages in Hobbes,¹⁵ we find the following:

[T]hat moral virtue, that we can measure by civil laws, which is different in different states, is justice and equity; that moral virtue which we measure purely by the natural laws is only charity. Furthermore, all moral virtue is contained in these two. However, the other three virtues (except for justice) that are called cardinal — *courage, prudence, and temperance* — are not virtues of citizens as citizens, but as men, for these virtues are useful not so much to the state as they are to those individual men who have them.... For just as every citizen hath his own private good, so hath the state its own public good. Nor, in truth, should one demand that the courage and prudence of the private man, if useful only to himself, be praised or held as a virtue by states or by any other men whatsoever to whom these same are not useful. So, condensing this whole teaching on manners and dispositions into the fewest words, I say that good dispositions are those which are suitable for entering into civil society; and good manners (that is, moral virtues) are those whereby what was entered upon can be best preserved. For all the virtues are contained in justice and charity (*De Homine* XIII, 9).

This passage is remarkable in its dismissal of the bulk of the cardinal virtues and its reduction of all virtues to two. And despite Hobbes' reputation as an anti-communitarian individualist, we see from this passage that what is truly private is simply irrelevant. For although the passage seems to allow a broader extension to the moral than the political or social, we see by the end of it that the realm of both becomes identical. The moral disposition has value only when it serves some social or political end.¹⁶ We are thus either constructing social relations or maintaining them.

It is also remarkable, and undoubtedly not coincidental, how central a role justice and charity also play in Spinoza's TTP.¹⁷ Indeed, once one starts to look for it, one finds it everywhere and in the most significant places. For example, Spinoza introduces his tenants of a universal religion in Chapter XIV with the following words:

I shall now make bold to enumerate the dogmas of the oecumenical creed, or the basic beliefs which Scripture as a whole aims to convey. These...must all reduce to the following: that there exists a supreme being who loves justice and charity.

Moreover, article five of the creed, and the one we hold to be most important, states: "worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity (or love) towards one's neighbor." This statement points to what can be generally said about the TTP: virtually all the uses of "justice and charity" involve the fusion of religion and politics. Consider these few examples:

[Since] obedience to God consists solely in loving one's neighbor...it follows that Scripture commands no other kind of knowledge than that which is necessary for all men before they can obey God according to this commandment, and without which men are bound to be self-willed, or at least unschooled to obedience....The knowledge which God through the medium of his prophets has required of all men universally, and which every man is in duty bound to pos-

ness, is no other than the knowledge of his divine justice and charity (TTP XIII).¹⁸

The safest way to protect a state from these evils is to make piety and worship consist simply in works, i.e., simply in the practice of charity and justice (TTP XVIII).

[H]e who practices justice and charity by God's command fulfills God's law completely....And I recognize no difference here whether it is by natural reason or by revelation that God teaches and commands true justice and charity (TTP XIX).

[A] man's devotion to the state, like his devotion to God, can only be known from his actions, i.e., from his charity towards his neighbor... (TTP XX).

It is especially important to note here, in connection with what was said above, that the Jewish state was a model of the combination of politics and religion in this same respect: "no one was subordinated to his equal, but only to God; charity and love toward a fellow citizen was accounted the height of piety" (TTP XVII).

What we sought earlier, namely that which can serve as the object of both religion and politics, is to be found in justice and charity. With justice one has a traditionally political end; with charity a traditionally religious one.¹⁹ Moreover, they have been connected in some form at least since Aquinas.²⁰ Yet what Hobbes did was to isolate the *utility* of charity by socializing it and thereby rendering it suitable for connection with the traditional political end of justice. In this respect he de-theologized charity.²¹ Spinoza, by contrast, realized that by making charity simply a moral ideal Hobbes had missed a key feature of both the moral character of charity and its utility. Morality has always been, and is likely to continue to be, the province of religion. Consequently, to teach charity and justice one must also engage religion. And since the devotion religion offers is itself useful to the political order, and charity and justice are themselves social virtues, we can derive even greater benefit than Hobbes imagined if we only equate religious piety with these virtues.

We have claimed that the powerful state is one in which the citizens obey willingly and that for Spinoza religion is the paradigm example of willing obedience. Consequently, justice and charity (especially charity) include more than simple conformity to whatever laws or commands are given by the sovereign. Spinoza's continual prescriptions to love one's neighbor suggest that these virtues are exhibited in the *disposition* to cooperate. If this is so, justice and charity are not expressed simply in conduct that is devoid of conflict, but in conduct which is proactively cooperative. When this occurs, justice and charity become not just means to social stability but to social power as well. If people can associate with each other on the basis of mutual cooperation, they can accomplish more than if their association is based upon some other terms.²² Of course, mutual interest and the freedom to pursue associations on that basis seem a requirement of the disposition to cooperate. In Spinoza, as we have argued elsewhere, freedom and power are virtually synonymous terms.²³ Here our point is that the disposition to cooperate is what links such concepts as freedom, power, and peace together in Spinoza's social thought. Keeping in mind that Spinoza equates right with power, four passages should suffice to indicate the connections:

I therefore conclude that the right of nature peculiar to human beings can scarcely be conceived save where men hold rights as a body....The more men there be that unite in this way, the more right they collectively possess (TP II, 15).

It is abundantly clear from my previous account of the basis of the state that its ultimate purpose is not to subject men to tyranny, or to restrain and enslave them through fear, but rather to free everyone from fear so that he may live in all possible security, i.e., may preserve his natural right to exist and act in the best possible way, without harm to himself or his neighbor. It is not, I say, the purpose of the state to change men from rational beings into brutes or puppets; but rather to enable them to exercise their mental and physical powers in safety and use their reason freely, and to prevent them from fighting and quarreling through hatred, anger, bad

faith, and mutual malice. Thus the purpose of the state is really freedom (TTP XX).

A commonwealth whose subjects are restrained from revolting by fear must be said to be free from war rather than to enjoy peace. For peace is not the mere absence of war, but a virtue based on strength of mind; since...obedience is the steadfast will to do what the general decree of the commonwealth requires. Besides, a commonwealth whose peace depends on the apathy of its subjects, who are led like sheep so that they learn nothing but servility, may more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth (TP V, 4).

Men should really be governed in such a way that they do not regard themselves as being governed, but as following their own bent and their own free choice in their manner of life (TP X, 8).

These connections between freedom, peace, and power need only to be connected more directly to a specifically religious concept such as piety. There is no problem establishing the connection here either. Spinoza tells us that "piety...attains its highest expression in the service of public peace and tranquility" (TTP XX). And although the issue is much less prominent in the TP, the same point is made there as well:

The objection is that the political order, and such obedience as I have shown to be required of subjects in that order, does away with religion and our duty to worship God. However, if we consider the actual facts, we shall find nothing which can give rise to any misgivings....And if we also remember that love [*charitatis*] finds its supreme expression when directed to the preservation of peace and the promotion of concord, we shall have no doubt that a man truly does his duty if he gives everyone as much help as is consistent with the laws of the commonwealth, i.e., with peace and concord (TP III, 10).

Justice and charity being linked to peace and piety are also thereby linked to power. The most formidable state is one where

the citizens are disposed to cooperate and in so doing are convinced of the supreme moral worthiness, if not piety, of their conduct. One is still left wondering, however, what has happened to such religious concepts as “salvation” and “blessedness” in all of this. Are these not concepts that extend well beyond the political? And are these not central to religion in a way that cooperation is not? To these sorts of questions we now turn.

Salvation and Blessedness

The main problem with respect to salvation and blessedness in Spinoza comes in trying to square the texts of the *Ethica* with those of the TTP. A central text of the *Ethica*, for example, is the following:

From this we clearly understand in what our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love towards God, that is, in God’s love towards men. This love or blessedness is called glory in the Holy Scriptures, and rightly so. For whether this love be related to God or to the mind, it can properly be called spiritual contentment, which in reality cannot be distinguished from glory (E5P36Schol.).

The highest form of the love of God comes from the third kind of knowledge (E5P27) and is thus very much linked to adequate ideas.²⁴ Adequate ideas are themselves linked to activity, freedom, and reason for Spinoza (e.g., E4P23-26; E5P20). Yet we have also seen above both that one can be “saved” through faith and obedience alone and that when one is possessed of adequate ideas one cannot be said to be obedient.²⁵ The problem then is what sense it makes to say that anyone attains salvation through obedience when having adequate ideas seems at least a necessary condition for salvation. Or, to put the problem another way, if we say obedience is a necessary condition (though not sufficient) for salvation and those with adequate ideas are not obedient, then how can they be saved?

Some have argued that when it comes to salvation by obedience or faith alone, Spinoza was not serious about its possibility for those with inadequate ideas.²⁶ Others, such as Matheron,²⁷ want to solve the problem by distinguishing weak from strong senses of salvation, with the weak ones occurring in the political writings and the strong in the *Ethica*. The former is a non-intellectual form of "salvation" and not to be confused with the eternity enjoyed by the wise in their union with God. Still others, in this case Rice, want to argue for a uniform degree of adequacy in all forms of salvation, but differing degrees of surrounding inadequacy.²⁸ The ordinary believer, in other words, has elements of real adequacy in his ideas about God, but those ideas are surrounded also by much inadequacy, unlike the wise man whose adequate ideas of God are themselves surrounded by other adequate ideas.²⁹ Those who are saved, therefore, are in some ways always linked to eternity on this view.

These interpretations, with the exception of the first which we reject, are not so much mistaken as they are incomplete. The problem is not to find a theory that will render salvation or blessedness consistent in the political and ethical writings. Rather one must realize that there are actually two modes of salvation for Spinoza which, though not necessarily inconsistent with each other, do entirely different work. In this respect, our interpretation is like Matheron's in that there is both a weak and strong form of salvation.³⁰ The problem with Matheron, however, is that he necessarily links salvation to eternity,³¹ whereas we do not. The form of salvation that concerns the political writings has nothing to do with eternity, but is rather a form of moral salvation. The salvation spoken of in the passage cited above from the *Ethica* is clearly linked to eternity and constitutes the higher non-political form. Our interpretation is also similar to Rice's, however, in recognizing that some form of adequacy pervades all forms of salvation. We differ, of course, in denying that it is the same form of adequacy in both cases. That is, one is adequacy when it comes to social/political life; the other, adequacy about God's nature.

For ease of exposition, we shall restrict the use of the term "salvation" (*salus*) to the lower moral form of salvation and reserve "blessedness" (*beatitudo*) for the higher. Despite the opening passage of this section, the two terms rarely appear

together in Spinoza anyway. And although "salvation" is sometimes used in the high sense,³² its most common usage in the political writings is the lower form. "Blessedness" is never used, as far as we can tell, in the low manner.

The main problem the reader of Spinoza's works confronts when it comes to issues of blessedness or salvation has to do with reason being the basis for the adequacy of one's ideas. If adequacy of our ideas is our link to eternity, then it would seem that when Spinoza speaks of living according to reason, he is speaking of that life which constitutes blessedness in the full sense described in the *Ethica*. This would then be read into passages one finds in the political works such as the following:

Thus when I say that the best state is one in which men live in harmony, I am speaking of a truly human existence, which is characterized, not by the mere circulation of blood and other vital processes common to all animals, but primarily by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind (TP V, 5).

Yet however much this passage may *look* like similar recommendations in the ethical writings, there may actually be a significant difference. Spinoza tells us, for example, that the "whole teaching of reason is to seek peace" (TP III, 6). If this is so, then to be rational in this sense is to understand the value of and means to seeking peace. Reason, consequently, has a distinct meaning in the political writings that is much less robust than reason as it is found in the *Ethica*. This, in turn, means that one can live "primarily by reason" without having to be fully possessed of adequate ideas.³³ Of course, understanding the value of peace is itself an adequate idea, but it may not be accompanied by any significant understanding of the nature or essence of God at either the second or third levels of knowledge. Indeed, it is our claim that it is not likely that it would be so accompanied, for such individuals are rare and beyond the purview of politics anyway.

If a person can live according to reason without possessing any extended degree of adequate ideas, then perhaps it is possible to be saved without being blessed. If we apply this notion to the discussions found in the political writings (especially the TTP), we begin to realize that the life devoted to the

pursuit of justice and charity is what Spinoza means by salvation.

For I have shown that faith demands goodness rather than truth, that it is good and a means to salvation only because of the obedience which it inspires, and, consequently, that it is obedience alone which makes a man a believer. Hence it is not necessarily the man who produces the best arguments who displays the best faith, but he who produces the best works of justice and charity (TTP XIV).

We might recall in this connection also what we cited earlier from the same chapter, namely, the fifth proposition of the universal faith: "worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity (or love) towards one's neighbor." This proposition is followed immediately at the beginning of the sixth with Spinoza saying that "all who obey God by following this mode of life are saved and they alone."

Apparently, to act in the spirit of justice and charity is *sufficient* to qualify as obedience to God and only this so qualifies. In addition, those and only those who act this way can be considered saved. As to faith itself, it is "simply those beliefs about God without which obedience to him cannot exist, and which necessarily exist when this obedience exists" (TTP XIV). It is therefore sufficient to having the right beliefs about God that one have the right dispositions towards others. Moreover, "faith is not a means to salvation in itself, but only because of the obedience it involves" (TTP XIV). So it is not the beliefs themselves that matter, but the dispositions that are induced by them. This is confirmed by the fact that Spinoza tells us that "faith does not require true dogmas so much as pious dogmas, i.e., dogmas which inspire the mind to obedience" (TTP XIV). Whatever one needs to believe to induce one to justice and charity is sufficient for faith, "for if men love justice and charity, that in itself is proof that they are of the faithful" (TTP XIV).

From this doctrine it is clear that we can be saved through faith alone. It is also clear that salvation is within range of the non-philosopher. And since we have already established that justice and charity are what are dictated by reason, reason and faith turn out to command the same things when it comes to the

social and political order. This conclusion seems paradoxical at first. Reason is connected to philosophy and truth which Spinoza explicitly contrasts with faith at the end of Chapter XIV of the TTP. Indeed, he says that "between faith or theology and philosophy there is no connexion or relationship." But Spinoza is speaking of philosophy and faith as general enterprises or disciplines whose ends have no relationship. This does not imply that the generally faithful cannot at times be rational or that the generally rational are ever unable to live in accordance with faith. Possession of truly adequate ideas may, by contrast, be necessary for one to be blessed. If so, those who are in the foregoing sense saved are not necessarily thereby blessed. To be blessed would require that one connect up to eternity through adequate ideas. Blessedness by means of faith, however, seems on this reading quite impossible. The blessed could not be obedient. Philosophy is the road to blessedness, religion to salvation.³⁴

Since the ordinary citizen is not blessed, we still have the problem of how it is possible for one to be both rational and obedient to the same thing at the same time. We saw earlier that reason and obedience were opposed. How, then, can one both pursue justice and charity from reason and also be obedient? To be cooperative and lawful (charitable and just) is, of course, precisely the conduct the state needs from its citizens, and in this sense to act from reason is to obey. But this is external rather than internal. If one pursues justice and charity because one recognizes their value, it seems that attitudinally one is not acting out of obedience.

We could solve our problem with a kind of literalist reading of the passages cited above. To act with justice and charity *just is* to be obedient and have the right ideas of God. There is nothing more to it than this. This reading, however, would imply that the blessed could be obedient. Since the blessed person would have adequate ideas, including an idea of the soundness of justice and charity, and would be "free" according to Parts IV and V of the *Ethica* in the sense of being active (rather than passive), the just and charitable conduct of such a person that stems from adequate ideas would without addition suffice as obedience. The only problem here is that this interpretation does not explain why Spinoza would say that acting from reason

is not obedience. In fact, this sort of reading suggests that the more rational one is the more obedient.

I believe, therefore, that the issue here is somewhat more complex than the literalist reading allows. Perhaps we can best see the matter by noting a kind of paradox of the TTP. In the preface to the TTP Spinoza tells us he is not writing for the masses who are incapable of reason anyway, but for the learned, perhaps even philosophical, reader. And he tells us early on in the TTP (Chapter 4) that one sign of the superstition of the masses is belief that God is a lawgiver, ruler, or judge. Yet when we arrive at the dogmas of universal faith in Chapter 14, we are told:

God, a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, i.e., a model of true living, exists. This is a necessary article of faith, for if a man does not know or does not believe that God exists he cannot obey him or recognize him as his judge.

The language of this passage, and indeed the others that follow, is clearly not in the mode of the philosopher, but more in the mode of the superstitious.³⁵ The paradox, if not outright contradiction, is obvious. How can Spinoza resort to the very practice he criticizes earlier?

What seems most plausible is to recognize that we need not choose between the masses, on the one hand, and the fully enlightened philosopher, on the other. There is another class of people who would necessarily be vital to a liberal political project and who would fall somewhere in between the ignorant masses and enlightened philosophers. We might call them the "middle class" or the "educated bourgeoisie" or some such synonym. It was clearly a class that was on the rise in Spinoza's day and that would have supported De Witt. More importantly, it is a class that predominates in Western liberal societies today. With respect to religion it is a class that is neither orthodox or fundamentalist, nor fully secular or humanist. Religion plays a role in the lives of these people, but more in a moral educative mode than a doctrinal one. Bible stories or "Sunday school" are taught to children because of their salutary and edifying effects. "Maybe" they are true, but the truth does not matter very much here; only the messages of peace and cooperation. Spinoza

anticipates what may in fact have turned out to be the case, namely that the sort of religion that will predominate liberal social orders is not, and cannot be, the religion of the masses. It will be an "enlightened" religion, one that does not carry with it the baggage of superstition and yet may still have room for biblical texts.

With respect to our question of reason and obedience, the sort of person of whom we are speaking is quite capable of seeing the rationality of justice and charity and is therefore not "obedient" insofar as his or her actions are based on reason alone. That very same person, however, may be *brought* to that position and *sustained* in that position by religion. Indeed, what the same person may "know" by reason may need to be "propped up" by faith in order to remain constant. In such individuals reason and "revelation" exist side by side with the relationship between them never really being called into question. It is only natural, therefore, that Spinoza would present his dogmas with something of the old religious language; the truly enlightened (i.e., blessed) do not need the dogmas, while the masses will require stories more than principles. The educated non-philosopher can thus be "saved" by developing an attitude of genuine cooperation and concern for adherence to the rules that govern society. This is salvation in the sense that it marks a real reformation of one's moral character by means of religion. One is therefore saved from the ignorance, strife, and fanaticism of the masses but, on this interpretation, at the price of eternity itself. For to be saved is not yet to be blessed.³⁶ To be saved is, nonetheless, to be a factor in social success and well-being.

Religion, Politics, and Power

It is remarkable how much Machiavelli's *Discourse of Livy* anticipates Spinoza's conception of the relationship between religion and politics.³⁷ In general, the instrumental power of religion to order the state is emphasized strongly by Machiavelli.

For a prudent individual knows many goods that do not have in themselves evident reasons with which one can persuade

others. Thus wise men who want to take away this difficulty have recourse to God (I, 11).

Recall that it is the power of the Roman republic that Machiavelli wishes to impress upon his readers in the *Discourses* and thus how we might profit from the example of the Romans. And like Spinoza, pious dogma matters more in this connection than true dogma.

Thus, princes of a republic or of a kingdom should maintain the foundations of the religion they hold; and if this is done, it will be an easy thing of them to maintain their republic religious and, in consequence, good and united. All things that arise in favor of that religion they should favor and magnify, even though they judge them false; and they should do it so much the more as they are more prudent and more knowing of natural things (I, 12).

It is, nevertheless, the potential power of religion that constitutes the chief defect of Christianity for Machiavelli.

Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men. It has then placed the greatest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human.... This mode of living thus seems to have rendered the world weak and given it in prey to wicked men, who can handle it securely, seeing that the generality of men, so as to go to Paradise, think more of enduring their beatings than of avenging them (II, 2).

In the same chapter, however, Machiavelli gives hope that Christianity can be reformed in such a way that it can be made useful to republics. For him, of course, a more worldly attitude would help immensely in increasing the value of Christianity to politics, and he speaks of reforming Christianity such that it promotes the "exaltation and defense" of the fatherland.

Yet however much Spinoza may have drawn from Machiavelli when it comes to the role of religion in politics, his project is significantly different from Machiavelli's. The divergent paths are themselves noted by Machiavelli:

Those who plan for a city to make a great empire should contrive with all industry to make it full of inhabitants, for without this abundance of men one will never succeed in making a city great. This is done in two modes: by love and by force (II, 3).

It might be said that Machiavelli, in the end, chooses the path of force while Spinoza chose the path of love. Power was in large part the ability to induce fear for Machiavelli, and for him republican virtue manifested itself in the ability to wage or prepare for war. Spinoza, by contrast, as we have seen above, sought the ways of peace and saw them as a more certain and effective form of power. In this respect, Spinoza saw Christianity not as a religion of weakness but as a religion of power. His constant positive references to Christ throughout the TTP³⁸ and in his correspondence suggest that he saw the power contained in peace and love. He nowhere indicates agreement with Machiavelli's criticism of Christianity as a doctrine of weakness. In addition, Spinoza may have understood that this power cannot be limited within the borders of small republics. If our goal is a small warlike republic modeled after ancient Rome, then Christianity may indeed be otherworldly and weak. But if our vision is recast more broadly to an extended republic, then perhaps the true power of Christianity becomes apparent. As a universalistic religion, Christianity is more suited in a way that paganism, and perhaps even Judaism, is not to forms of cooperation that extend well beyond the borders of "the fatherland." We should recall that Spinoza lived in a society of federated states with a highly commercial and international orientation.

Religion (appropriately recast) can thus be used as a tool for controlling the unruly masses, but more importantly it can be used as a tool for extending general order and cooperation. These are ends well suited to the burgeoning commercial, bourgeois, and liberal social orders that were developing during Spinoza's time and afterwards. The more serious question is whether such social orders have any real need of religion in the end. Cannot the ethic of justice and charity be promoted quite independently of religion? If we add to this question about liberal orders the idea that commerce can bring about coopera-

tion without the need for central or even conscious direction, one wonders how important religion need be.

We have not chosen to take the path in this essay of arguing that Spinoza sought to undermine religion or that he thought society would do well without it. Our official line has been to claim that Spinoza saw religion as an inevitable part of social life³⁹ that, for whatever reasons, he wished reform to enhance the power of the state. Minimally this means not allowing power to be diverted to useless squabbling by competing seats of power. More importantly, we have seen that religion could be reformed to better accord with a more expansive vision of the modern liberal state — states so powerful that they know no parallel in history. Still, with traditional biblical religion being judged at the court of reason and directed to secular ends, one is entitled to wonder whether it will wither away and what might be lost if it did?⁴⁰

The chief danger of the secularization or absence of religion is ideology. The need for moral justification seems basic to human activity, and if religion will not supply it then various secular versions will. These secular religions are likely to bear all the marks of Spinoza's reformed religion: they will be universalistic, mix reason and faith (science and sentiment), preach cooperation and social harmony, appeal to well-to-do members of society rather than the working poor, purge superstition, combine moral authority with political sovereignty, and promise improvement of the human condition. From Marxism to environmentalism we have witnessed the phenomenon of ideology through much of the modern era. To allow salvation to take place through works or moral enlightenment and the displacement of the centrality of biblical religion may be the first important step toward ideology. In an odd sort of way, Spinoza's removal of the transcendent (blessedness) from the political has reinvigorated the secular utility of the moral component that remains. Ideologies are certainly characterized by a strong sense of moral righteousness without a transcendent foundation.

But despite any similarities or projected consequences between Spinoza's doctrines and the pathologies of the modern era, Spinoza would not welcome the demise of religion, even biblical religion. Religion has the advantage, in a way ideology does not, of promoting an ethic that retains a certain indepen-

dent impartiality. Its truths are meant to be applicable to diverse circumstances rather than as a means to reforming those circumstances for particular ends as an ideology would do. Yet if it is the detached and independent character of religion that will keep us from the deleterious effects of ideology, one is left wondering how to sustain that advantage if religion is put in the service of the state. For it would seem that to put religion in the service of the state is to undermine that very independence that can serve so well as a buffer against tyranny.

Notes

I wish to thank Lee C. Rice and Steve Barbone for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I also wish to thank Daniel Elazar and the participants at his conference on Spinoza and religion for inspiring this essay.

1. To claim that Spinoza is a full-fledged liberal may be too excessive. See Douglas J. Den Uyl and Stuart D. Warner, "Hobbes, and Spinoza, and Liberalism," *Studia Spinozana*, vol. 3 (1987):261-318.
2. A.G. Wernham, *The Political Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), p. 13. Wernham suggests that one also look at *De Cive* I, 4. Translations of Spinoza's political works used in the text here are Wernham's unless otherwise noted.
3. Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 28. In my own work I have identified some of the significant differences between Hobbes and Spinoza in *Power, State and Freedom* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1983), ch. 1 and Appendix A; and "Sociality and Social Contract: A Spinozistic Perspective," *Studia Spinozana*, vol. 1 (1985):21.
4. In this respect Spinoza sounds quite "post-modern" in that all political relations are reduced to power relations. One should not make too much of the similarity, however. Spinoza's "post-modernism" does not have the Marxist overtones found so much in standard post-modern literature. First of all, power does not carry with it the normative overtones of "oppression" that is found in contemporary literature. Secondly, power does not flow in dialectical fashion (there is no teleology of history as in Marx and Hegel): and finally the unit of analysis is the individual for

Spinoza, not social classes. For an opposite and often brilliant counter interpretation on this issue, see Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

5. This is not even to mention the Preface to the TTP where Spinoza says, "the masses can no more be freed from their superstition than from their fears. Finally, I know that they are unchanging in their obstinacy, that they are not guided by reason, and that their praise and blame is at the mercy of impulse" (Shirley translation).
6. See Den Uyl, "Passion, State and Progress: Spinoza and Mandeville on the Nature of Human Association," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. XXV (1987), for a possible connection between Spinoza's ideas and the more familiar related views of the Scottish Enlightenment.
7. See again Note 1.
8. And about politics Spinoza says, "to organize the state in such a way that no room is left for disloyalty, nay more, to arrange every detail of the constitution so that everyone, whatever his disposition, prefers public right to private advantage, this is the task and this the toil" (TTP XVII).
9. He does, of course, assert that religion is all these things as well. That is why we need to devote time in a later section to the issue of salvation and blessedness.
10. Spinoza's own footnote #34 to the TTP also suggests this contrast between reason and obedience.
11. In the same chapter he says, "nothing takes a greater hold on the mind than joy arising from devotion."
12. It is not our intention to imply that Spinoza believes this or any state can really last forever. Rather his words indicate that all the essential elements for extreme stability were present.
13. But if our interpretation below is correct, we do make a "covenant" with God in our hearts.
14. Spinoza says that "I suspect that this form of state could only be expedient for men who wanted to live their own lives behind their own frontiers, with no foreign trade or contact with the rest of the world, and not for men who must have dealings with others" (TTP XVIII).
15. For example, there is no index entry in the Wernham edition for "justice and charity," and no entry for "charity" alone. There are, however, numerous footnotes comparing Spinoza to Hobbes. (The references to justice are generally "justice" used alone.)

16. It is often thought that the individualist/communitarian debate is somehow about the essence of modernity and that enlightenment liberals were essentially individualists. This proto-Marxist reading of history is belied by passages like the one cited here and the others from Spinoza about to be cited. Instead, what seems characteristic of modernity is not so much its individualism, but its efforts to reduce all issues to the social or political. It may be that it was antiquity that allowed for true individuality. See my "The Right to Welfare and the Virtue of Charity," in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Winter 1993):192-224. Spinoza, as we shall shortly see, wanted to retain something of both the classical and modern perspectives. It is likely Spinoza read *De Homine*, since this work was known largely in Latin.
18. Shirley translation.
19. Their combination was undoubtedly made possible by the Reformation which removed the intermediary of the priest and placed emphasis upon deeds rather than words or intentions.
20. *ST*, II-II, Q32, A5; Q58, A12; Q66, A7-8.
21. It is, of course, not the case that charity and justice never appear in theological contexts in Hobbes. In part 4 of *Behemoth* he describes justice and charity as "the manners of religion." More typical (and more likely an influence on Spinoza), however, is his description of them in the dedication of *De Cive* where they are described as "the twin sisters of peace."
22. Machiavelli notes that there are only two ways to make a republic great: by force or love. (*Discourse on Livy* II, 3; all translations of Machiavelli's *Discourse*, by permission of the translators, are from N. Tarcov and H. Mansfield's forthcoming edition from the University of Chicago Press.) Since force is not Spinoza's mode, increased emphasis would be placed on the latter.
23. Den Uyl, *Power, State and Freedom*, *op. cit.*, ch. 5, p. 10.
24. For a review of the literature (and a contribution in its own right) on the *amor dei intellectualis*, see Vance Maxwell, "Spinoza Doctrine of the *Amor Dei Intellectualis*," in *Dionysius*, vol. XIV (December 1990):131-156. This does not attempt to deal with the political writings on salvation, however.
25. The basic parameters of this problem were first pointed out to me by Lee C. Rice. For an excellent discussion of many of the elements of this issue that are both of concern in this paper and not so directly an issue here, see Rice, "Faith, Obedience, and Salvation in Spinoza," unpublished; and "Piety and Philosophical Freedom in Spinoza," *Spinoza's Political and Theological Thought*, (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 184-205.

26. Rice puts Misrahi, Matson, and Hessing in this category.
27. Alexandre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Aubier, 1971), ch. III.
28. Rice, "Faith, Obedience, and Salvation in Spinoza," *op. cit.* Rice also wants to claim that certain forms of obedience result in the possession of adequate ideas about the love of God:
29. Rice by his own admission says that this interpretation would have trouble explaining why obedience need have any role in salvation as Spinoza says it must in TTP XIV, the 6th article of faith.
30. Spinoza himself suggests a separation: "Even if we did not know that mind is eternal, we should still regard as being of prime importance piety and religion and, to sum up completely, everything which in Part IV we showed to be related to courage and nobility" (E5P41).
31. He is thus quite vulnerable to Rice's objections, which do indeed seem decisive against a view which wants both a weak and strong sense of eternity. But Rice does not necessarily link eternity to salvation in his earlier article cited above as he does in his second article.
32. The work that most consistently uses "salvation" in the high sense is the *Short Treatise*.
33. Steve Barbone provides an excellent discussion of how one can live "according to reason" in Spinoza without living a life of reason. See "Virtue and Sociality in Spinoza," *Iyyun*, vol. 42 (1993):303-395.
34. Of course, as he tells us in the *Ethica*, we can arrive at salvation too through reason. This raises some interesting problems about whether religion has any necessary role to play.
35. I thank Paul Bagley for pointing this out to me. See his "Spinoza, Biblical Criticism, and the Enlightenment" (manuscript) for a discussion of this and other features of Spinoza's use of religion in the TTP. Bagley's interpretation of this particular paradox and my own interpretation are not necessarily the same.
36. Keep in mind our decision, mentioned earlier, to distinguish "salvation" from "blessedness" for the sake of clarity. There are, of course, passages where the two terms are equated, e.g., E5P42Schol.
37. Among the other things arguably present in the *Discourses* that anticipate Spinoza are the rejection of ends (teleology), the need for social science, the centrality of power to politics, the basing

of social theory upon self-interest, the instrumentality of religion, and the utilitarian goals of the state.

38. In the Preface to the TTP he describes Christianity as a "religion of love, joy, peace, temperance and honest dealing with all men."
39. Lee Rice has pointed out to me that religion in Spinoza is the product of a reason that touches eternity and our passions which, though ideationally inadequate, are nevertheless powerful motivators. And, following Part three of the *Ethica*, we will never be able to abandon the latter (passions), making at least this feature of religious motivation ever-present.
40. These reflections are not strictly speaking "Spinozistic," given their normative quality, but Spinoza himself is not beyond pausing to speculate on implications as we see especially in the TP.