

# Goldsmiths Research Online

*Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO)  
is the institutional research repository for  
Goldsmiths, University of London*

## Citation

Taylor, Dan. 2019. The Reasonable Republic? Statecraft, Affects, and the Highest Good in Spinoza's Late Tractatus Politicus. *History of European Ideas*, 45(5), pp. 645-660. ISSN 0191-6599 [Article]

## Persistent URL

<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/28425/>

## Versions

The version presented here may differ from the published, performed or presented work. Please go to the persistent GRO record above for more information.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Goldsmiths, University of London via the following email address: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk).

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated. For more information, please contact the GRO team: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk)

# The Reasonable Republic? Statecraft, Affects, and the Highest Good in Spinoza's Late *Tractatus Politicus*

**Abstract:** In his final, incomplete *Tractatus Politicus* (1677), Spinoza's account of human power and freedom shifts towards a new, teleological interest in the 'highest good' of the state in realising the freedom of its subjects. This development reflects, in part, the growing influence of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Dutch republicanism, and the Dutch post-*Rampjaar* context after 1672, with significant implications for his view of political power and freedom. It also reflects an expansion of his account of natural right to include independence of mind, a model of autonomy that in turn shapes the infamous *sui juris* exclusions of his unfinished account of democracy. This article focuses specifically on the *Tractatus Politicus*, a hitherto under-addressed work in Spinoza's corpus and one too often considered indistinct from his earlier *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670). It argues for a reconsideration of its importance to early modern political thought, particularly regarding the role of the state in realising the freedom and harmony of its subjects through reasonable laws.

Keywords: Spinoza, natural right, sovereignty, teleology, democracy, collective power

That the *Tractatus Politicus* (*Political Treatise*, 1677) begins with the word 'Affectus', and ends with the expulsion of women from an idealised democracy, makes it something of an anomaly within the thought of Benedict de Spinoza. While there has been a recent flourishing of interest in Spinoza's politics, it has tended to share in an

enthusiastic image of the thinker as a radical, untimely figure. ‘The true visionary is Spinoza in the garb of a Neapolitan revolutionary’, write Deleuze and Guattari, while others have traced and hailed his contributions to a radical Enlightenment or late 20<sup>th</sup> century modernity.<sup>1</sup> Yet behind this visionary Spinoza is a more nuanced and ambivalent political theorist, one whose thought develops and transforms in his final years between the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Theological-Political Treatise*, 1670; hereafter TTP) and unfinished *Tractatus Politicus* (hereafter TP) in a way that is instructive, and under-assessed, for understanding his political thought.<sup>2</sup> As an incomplete work one must be cautious in inferring what may have been ultimately revised or abandoned, but, in itself, it presents arguments about political power logically derived from the *Ethics* and TTP while exploring new directions. One can highlight the foundational role of the affects in politics, the heightened role of the state in human flourishing, a greater emphasis on the singularity of social coordination and association ‘led as if by one mind’, and in a peculiar application of teleological

---

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004), 29; Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Michael Mack, *Spinoza and the Specters of Modernity* (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Standard referencing used with Spinoza’s works: E = *Ethics*; Ep = *Letters (Epistolae)*; KV = *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-being (Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand)*; TIE = *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)*; TP = *Political Treatise*; TTP = *Theological-Political Treatise*. References to TTP and TP indicate chapter number followed by section e.g. TTP 20.6 is Chapter 20, section 6. References to *Ethics* follow standard format: app = appendix; df = definition; p = proposition; pref = preface; s = scholium. E.g. E4p37s2 refers to *Ethics* Part 4, proposition 37, second scholium. Editions used: Benedictus de Spinoza, *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925); *The Collected Works of Spinoza: Vols I-II*, ed. trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, 2016).

principles in politics that reflects a re-engagement with Aristotle, necessitated by a changing political context and reflections on his theory of the imagination.

The argument is structured as follows: Part 1 assesses current scholarship on the TP, and Part 2 explores its historical-political context. Part 3 analyses the influence of Aristotle in its teleological identification of the ‘highest good’ and optimal form of the state in realising freedom, and Part 4 contrasts it with Machiavelli’s influence. Part 5 assesses Spinoza’s new formulation of collective power or ‘union of minds’ with the enhanced role of the state in *making* reasonable and free citizens of the multitude. The conclusion challenges whether Spinoza sufficiently incorporated individual self-determination into the models of free and reasonable republics.

## 1. Context

The TP has long been overlooked by scholars of Spinoza’s politics and ethics.<sup>3</sup> Where discussed, accounts tend to focus on three features: 1) its relationship to Spinoza’s previous works, and whether it marks an evolution or merely reiteration of earlier ideas; 2) its incomplete account of democracy and relegation of women from citizenship on naturalistic grounds; and 3) the relationship of the multitude to the constitution of the state, upon which Spinoza rests its peace and security. The TP’s obscurity is not helped by a common view that the late work marks, in Lee Rice and Steven Barbone’s words, ‘no real doctrinal shift’ from the better-known TTP, just a ‘change in language and formulation’.<sup>4</sup> We find more sympathetic praise among its

---

<sup>3</sup> This is no new phenomenon: the TP was rarely translated until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Bayle, Diderot and D’Alembert’s encyclopaedia entries on Spinozism, decisive to the dissemination of Spinoza’s ideas over the 18<sup>th</sup> century, make no mention of it. Nor does it feature at all in the early biographies by Lucas and Colerus.

<sup>4</sup> As Steven Barbone and Lee Rice argue in their perceptive introduction to Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 20.

translators – Curley, as deserving ‘careful attention’ and furnishing ‘the materials for a much deeper understanding of Spinoza’s political philosophy’, and Moreau as the most ‘autonomous’ expression of his political ideas, unfettered of Cartesianism, or natural law and Hobbesian right.<sup>5</sup> But in both cases, the engagement with the TP comes much later in their careers which have been otherwise established through research on the *Ethics*. Not dissimilarly, a recent collection of essays on the TP, edited by Yitzhak Melamed and Hasana Sharp, presents the work as Spinoza’s ‘neglected masterpiece’.<sup>6</sup> Yet many essays therein give as much (if not more) space to discussing Spinoza’s earlier works, with the TP serving to illuminate his earlier, more important formulations. It is unclear from these works there would be any interest in studying the ideas of the TP if its author were unknown, and all that remained were its place and date of publication.

This is to grapple with the problem of a thinker’s intellectual development, a question of ‘evolution’ that has been explored comprehensively by Alexandre Matheron in the relation of the TTP and TP. For Matheron, a decisive rupture occurs between the two through Spinoza’s late theory of the imitative affects in *Ethics*, resulting in a shifting view of the political that is no longer contractualist and static, but ‘dynamic’, governed by the interplay of affective forces through which society is engendered.<sup>7</sup> Reciprocal affective cycles of compassion and revenge form the basis

---

<sup>5</sup> Curley, *Collected Works II*, 491; Moreau in Melamed and Sharp (eds.), “Introduction”, in *Spinoza’s Political Treatise: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Alexandre Matheron, “Le problème de l’évolution de Spinoza du *Traité théologico-politique* au *Traité politique*”, in *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies et l’âge classique* (Lyon: ENS, 2011), 205; the analysis expands on his earlier *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 328-29.

for our social relations.<sup>8</sup> In a genealogical account that ventures way beyond Spinoza, Matheron envisions the state's emergence out of a struggle of pity or glory, degenerating into domination or envy, from which an afflicted party becomes indignant, and gathers the power of the multitude to defend them, through which a new political order is constituted.<sup>9</sup> Yet indignation for Spinoza is necessarily evil, and there is little either in the TP or *Ethics* that sustains such a heavy weighting on the imitative affects. While the affects and sociability are fundamental features of Spinoza's late politics, Matheron's effort to dismiss Hobbesian contractualism in Spinoza's politics<sup>10</sup> leaves him with a politics of human unsociability at odds with what I suggest is the TP's more Aristotelian framework. One which places the state's genesis in the sociality and common affects of the multitude, and a statecraft guided by reason, prescribing laws and institutions of government that engender common flourishing.

As others have also observed, the emphasis on the social contract is also relegated, resting on the scarce mention given to *contractus*, and no mention of *pactum* (though Hobbes rarely used either term).<sup>11</sup> Rosenthal claims there is instead a more dynamic investment of power through direct 'participation in public life', a view indebted to Matheron.<sup>12</sup> Curley debates whether this abandonment of the social contract in the late Spinoza is correct.<sup>13</sup> In any case, Spinoza does refer to the social

---

<sup>8</sup> Matheron, "Le probleme de l'evolution", 211.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 212-13, relying tenuously on TP 6.1.

<sup>10</sup> Matheron, *Individu*, 295-6

<sup>11</sup> Others who claim Spinoza rejects contractarianism include Antonio Negri, *Savage Anomaly*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 30; Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (London: Verso, 2008), 50; Michael A. Rosenthal, "Spinoza's Political Philosophy", in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 409; and Barbone and Rice's introduction to Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, 12

<sup>12</sup> Rosenthal, "Spinoza's Political Philosophy", 410; Matheron, *Individu*, 37-38.

<sup>13</sup> Curley, *Collected Works II*, 491.

contract in TP 4.6, and writes of a transfer of power elsewhere,<sup>14</sup> and Matheron understates the constitutive and binding nature of this later rendition of the contract, which is not merely procedural or legal as he suggests.<sup>15</sup> Given Spinoza's own critical remarks in the TTP (16.6) about the social contract being only as useful as the utility of obeying it, we should question whether Spinoza was ever a sincere contractarian in the first place. Nonetheless, the nature of the contract changes: the peace and power of a state reflects laws and decisions that realise, rather than coerce or govern, the 'common feeling' of the multitude, and the nature of this common feeling is the subject of Part 5.

A second feature of TP scholarship is its exclusion of women (alongside servants, children and foreigners) from its theoretical form of democracy, left incomplete on his death. As Balibar memorably writes, here 'we watch him die before this blank page', as his earlier anthropology of human power as socio-circumstantial clashes with the uncritical reiteration of prevailing patriarchal norms. It results in what Steinberg calls a 'rigid and untenable essentialism', echoing earlier claims by Genevieve Lloyd, Moira Gatens and others.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, these questions are part of a broader reassessment of sexism in the history of philosophy of great importance. Yet

---

<sup>14</sup> E.g. TP 3.3, 6.5, 7.5, and 8.2.

<sup>15</sup> Matheron, "Le probleme de l'evolution", 206-08.

<sup>16</sup> TP 11.4; Balibar, *Masses, Classes, Ideas*, trans. James Swenson (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 26; Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology: The Taming of Fortune and Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 166. Feminist critiques of Spinoza's reasoning tend to pitch *Ethics'* anthropology of power against the TP. See, inter alia, Lloyd, *Part of Nature* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1994), ch5; Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 134; James, "Democracy and the Good Life in Spinoza's Philosophy", in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charles Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 146; Lord, "'Disempowered by Nature': Spinoza on the Political Capabilities of Women", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 19.6 (2011), 1087.

while Spinoza's uncritical appeal to nature should here (and elsewhere) be challenged, such views on women's franchise are the norm in classic and contemporary Dutch republicanism, from Aristotle and Cicero to Machiavelli, the De la Courts, and, in England, among radicals like the Levellers. We ought to engage with hermeneutic charity when challenging Spinoza with perspectives or ideas he could not have entertained. A discussion on the TP's historical context, intellectual sources or textual composition is decisive to understanding why Spinoza returns to political matters (and changes his ideas on certain foundational matters of the TTP, like the nature of democracy, independence of mind, human association, and the social contract) at the end of his life.

The same must apply to Spinoza's extensive reconsideration of the powers and purpose of the state, explored in Part 5. Steinberg's landmark 2018 analysis of Spinoza's politics returns the TP's account of the state back to the fore. Its underlining argument is that, in Spinoza, the 'aim of politics is continuous with the aim of ethics', and that the 'fundamental purpose of the state is to reconstitute essences or reorient *ingenia* [the mentality of its subjects] so as to promote liberty, power, and hope'.<sup>17</sup> Yet the analysis's focus on drawing commonalities excludes innovations in the TP like its concern with state's highest good, its focus not on individual but collective right, and its understanding of the political as inherently conflictual.<sup>18</sup> These all bear the imprint of an engagement with the politics of Aristotle and Machiavelli which cannot be discerned in the earlier TTP, as well as changing political contexts. The paper will now make the case for this context and influences over the next three parts, before exploring

---

<sup>17</sup> Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> This view of the political as inherently conflictual in Spinoza, and its basis in Machiavelli, is outlined in Filippo Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza* (London: Continuum, 2009), 29-32.

the theoretical dimensions of this late political turn to the highest good, popular sovereignty and its relation to statecraft.

## 2. *Rampjaar*

The period between the TTP's publication in 1670 and Spinoza's untimely death in February 1677 (with the publication of the TP in the *Opera Posthuma* later that year), has been subject to many good historical analyses.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, certain events over these years are decisive to the TP's production, motivations and aims. Following the subterfuges in publishing the TTP anonymously, Spinoza initially avoided identification as its author, and returned to the *Ethics*, upon which work was delayed the previous five years.<sup>20</sup> A report suggests he was still anxious for his safety, as well as for the reputation of the TTP. In February 1671 he writes to his friend Jarig Jelles, asking him to do everything he could to prevent the circulation of a Dutch translation of the work, fearing it would become banned and jeopardise his safety.<sup>21</sup> In the same letter, he speculates about the need for a new political work that would treat the 'highest good' of the state, beyond the empty pursuit of 'wealth and honours', but his later preoccupation with completing the *Ethics* postpones this plan, like many other of Spinoza's great, unfinished projects. It would be through the hostile reaction to the

---

<sup>19</sup> On the historical context of the TTP, see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, ch. 16; M.J. Petry, 'Hobbes and the Early Dutch Spinozists,' in *Spinoza's Political and Theological Thought*, ed. C. De Deugd (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing, 1984), 150-170; Noel Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 44-52, and Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ep 30 to Oldenburg.

<sup>21</sup> Ep 44 to Jelles (17th February 1671). There is a strong argument by Duijkerius, reproduced by Curley in *Collected Works II*, 390 n30, that J.H. Glazemaker was the translator, and that Jelles subsidised the translation, hence Spinoza's entreaty. Glazemaker was a friend of Spinoza and an accomplished translator in his own right, and author of the first Dutch translation of the TTP, belatedly published in 1693.

TTP, and the collapse of the Dutch republic's liberal government in 1672, that compelled a return to politics.

The republican government under Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt had been surrounded by rivals since the 1650s. Despite their shared Protestantism, conflict had broken out with England over maritime trading supremacy, resulting in the First and Second Anglo-Dutch wars of 1652-54 and 1665-67, through which the Dutch United Provinces emerged damaged but victorious.<sup>22</sup> A year later, an unlikely Triple Alliance was formed between England, the United Provinces and Sweden to support the defence of the Spanish Netherlands against invasion by France. Resentful of defeat, jealous of Dutch wealth and seeking to boost the royal coffers, Charles II of England concluded the secret Treaty of Dover with Louis XIV of France in June 1670 to attack the unsuspecting Dutch. Two years later, a major coordinated attack by France, England, Munster and Cologne overran its borders and overwhelmed its forces. The year 1672 would be called *Rampjaar* or 'Disaster year'.

Though no prescription of the TTP could have aided the Dutch against such odds, they might have saved de Witt and his supporters who, in the ensuing military collapse, were purged from power by the supporters of Prince William III of Orange, who re-assumed the title of *stadhouder*, left unoccupied for two decades. For while the Dutch were militarily able to conduct an effective defence by land and sea, the invasion produced a political crisis of legitimacy that led to the collapse of the state's liberal, republican regents, amid a war many accused the government of not being sufficiently

---

<sup>22</sup> For more on the Dutch context, see J.L. Price, *Dutch Society: 1588-1713* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), chapter 5; Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Diane Webb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50-52; and Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), chapter 31.

vigilant and prepared. Its downfall had been accelerated by an uneven division of power between the pro-Orangist and Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church, which enjoyed significant public support, and the mercantile, liberal States faction which made up De Witt's government and supporters, to whom the TTP had appealed. Spinoza's appeal for democracy and toleration had been ignored by the many, who now embraced draconian religious controls and the slow restoration of monarchy. But for Spinoza, the momentary triumph of the *ultimi barbarorum* in the deaths of the De Witts could not be put down to the moral failures of any group of people, but the inadequate constitution of the state.

Worse, the TTP had become a *succès de scandale*, with authorities rushing to raid bookshops and ban the work shortly after its sale, and Spinoza was openly identified as its author by 1671-2.<sup>23</sup> Spinoza had lost one friend to political repression (Adriaan Koerbagh, who had died in jail in 1669), and between the murder of De Witt in 1672 and the execution of his friend and teacher, Franciscus Van den Enden, for treason in France in 1674, Spinoza had sufficient grounds to question his safety. His correspondence indicates an increased suspicion of the motives of others, be it the offer of the chair of Philosophy at Heidelberg University in March 1673, or, in 1675, Leibniz's request for a privately-circulating manuscript of the *Ethics*.<sup>24</sup> Both are refused. Spinoza's world had become a more dangerous place since the TTP.

---

<sup>23</sup> Though there was no formal ban against the work by the States of Holland until June 1674, circulation was suppressed from the outset. See Jonathan Israel, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: Foreshadowing the Enlightenment's More General Spinoza Reception?" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 76-85.

<sup>24</sup> See Ep 48 to J. Louis Fabritius (30<sup>th</sup> March 1673); and Ep 72 to G.H. Schuller (18<sup>th</sup> November 1675).

His personal safety was also in danger. In late July 1675 Spinoza visited Amsterdam to oversee the publication of the *Ethics*, begun around thirteen years earlier, but after being warned of a danger to his life should the book be published, he postpones it, fearing its suppression and his arrest.<sup>25</sup> In a letter of September that year, alongside revealing his reasons for delaying publication, he reports that his intention to clarify the more controversial passages of the TTP ‘and remove the prejudices conceived about it’, with a series of annotations.<sup>26</sup> The enterprise was incomplete by the time of his death in February 1677,<sup>27</sup> and it is more likely that in his final years, and after completing the *Ethics*, Spinoza placed his efforts in a new wholly political work, like that suggested to Jelles four years earlier.

Spinoza’s final known letter to an unnamed friend, likely Jelles, written around the summer of 1676, informs him of work completed on the TP, begun ‘some time ago, on your recommendation’.<sup>28</sup> He had completed six chapters so far, and stated his intention to treat the ‘ultimate thing a state can aim at’ in a new political work. It is a peculiarly teleological object, presented in the TP’s title-page as the inviolability of a state and its citizens, its peace and security.<sup>29</sup> Unlike the TTP and *Ethics*, the work is written in a freer style, neither deploying rhetorical and hermeneutic devices involving scripture, nor in geometric order. It openly acknowledges arguments in the previous two works, something unprecedented in Spinoza’s writing, given concerns over anonymity, safety and censorship. It suggests that its audience were the circle of

---

<sup>25</sup> Ep 68 to Henry Oldenburg (September 1675).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.; cf. Ep 69 to Lambert van Velthuysen (Autumn 1675), which also requests in writing his criticisms of the TTP.

<sup>27</sup> A total of 39 exist, though most seem to have been produced by later translators, with only five agreed on as close to authoritative. See Curley, *Collected Works II*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> Ep 84, undated.

<sup>29</sup> TP title-page.

trusted friends who had studied copies of the *Ethics* in circulation, and had commented upon the TTP. This new political work emerges out of conversations like those leading to the friend's suggestion to set Spinoza's political ideas onto the page, revised for a more unstable milieu. Spinoza's late politics would be rooted in a foundation of the political in the affects, mirroring their expanding role for human freedom in the later *Ethics*, and in the ability of a state's organisation (and not individual leadership) to instil and enhance the 'justice and loving-kindness' of its subjects, foundational to 'true religion' in the TTP, and now essential to a state's security.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. The Highest Good

The changing context is alone insufficient to grasp the TP's specificity, which marks the use of new (or at least, previously little used) theoretical materials. It commences with natural right, and from there to sovereign power, before moving onto the classic trio of political models: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (*populare imperium*), a cyclical, tripartite model that contemporaries would immediately associate with classic proponent, Aristotle. In seeking to address both the highest end of the political community, as well as its three manifestations, Spinoza was drawing on a tradition in political theory through Aquinas, Machiavelli, Grotius, and Hobbes of using Aristotle's *Politics* as a theoretical base from which to think through and beyond. The *Politics* combined teleological optimism with scientific naturalism to describe the civil state (*polis*) as the highest aim and 'most sovereign of all goods' towards which human

---

<sup>30</sup> Numerous commentators have observed the expansion of the affects in Spinoza's late philosophy, compared to TIE and KV. It is possible that through work on the TTP, Spinoza became aware of the affective and imaginative nature of the political, compelling an expansion of what had been one chapter-treatment of the affects into Parts 3 and 4 of *Ethics*, separating human servitude to the affects from our freedom or power over them. The TTP repeatedly pairs 'justice and loving-kindness' as the social goods taught by true religion, e.g. pref.26, Ch. 14, 19.6-9.

associations look.<sup>31</sup> Aristotle considered the human as a distinctly ‘political animal’, able through speech to indicate what is useful, just and good, and naturally driven to seek ‘the *good life*’ made possible through the state.<sup>32</sup> Political organisation was understood as the highest ideal of human achievement, yet a true understanding of politics must begin, for Aristotle and Spinoza, in the elementary nature of human sociality and association.

Determining the extent of influence in Spinoza’s work is always difficult, given his reluctance to openly refer to or engage in open dialogic critique of other positions. Spinoza’s sparse references to Aristotle tend to be critical (‘[t]o me the authority of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates is not worth much’, he writes to Hugo Boxel),<sup>33</sup> though this tends to be more directed at the Scholastics, and a small number of commentators have observed patterns of influence, from Freudenthal and Wolfson to Vardoulakis and Sharp most recently.<sup>34</sup> Manzini’s 2009 magisterial study of Spinoza’s Aristotelianism rests on the evidence that Spinoza possessed a 1548 copy of Aristotle’s *Opera Omnia*, a work with a peculiar misprint responsible for an inaccurate citation

---

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 1252a1.

<sup>32</sup> 1252b27.

<sup>33</sup> Ep 56 (October/November 1674).

<sup>34</sup> The study of Spinoza’s intellectual development dates to ground-breaking works by Freudenthal and Wolfson; more recently, Yitzhak Melamed’s edited *The Young Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) contains numerous essays that challenge the idea that Spinoza’s thought remained static and fully-formed over his life. On Spinoza/Aristotle, see Jacob Freudenthal, “Spinozastudien”, in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, 108: 238-282 [1896]; 109: 1-25 [1897]; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza, vol. 2* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 47-48; Dimitris Vardoulakis, “Equality and Power: Spinoza’s Reformulation of the Aristotelian Tradition of Egalitarianism”, in A. Kiarina Kordela and Vardoulakis (eds.), *Spinoza’s Authority: Resistance and Power in Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 11-31; Hasana Sharp, “Family Quarrels and Mental Harmony: Spinoza’s *Oikos-Polis* Analogy”, in Melamed and Sharp (eds.), *Spinoza’s Political Treatise*, 93-110.

of the *Metaphysics* given in his early *Cogitata Metaphysica* (2.6), and which appears later in an inventory of his library after his death.<sup>35</sup> References to man as a ‘social animal’ abound, and Aristotle is Spinoza’s second-most cited philosopher after Descartes. Manzini uses the CM to argue for a lifelong engagement with Aristotle in Spinoza, jeopardising our hypothesis about the *Politics* and TP. While traces of Aristotle are visible in his metaphysics and ethics,<sup>36</sup> the TTP demonstrates little of an inherently Aristotelian view of human sociality, the three fixed constitutional forms, discussion of a ‘highest good’ in politics, or a theory of collective power, in contrast to their predominance in the TP. Nor are these merely matters of audience or context. Whereas Chapter 16 of the TTP would rest its political naturalism on a Hobbesian ‘natural state’ based largely on conflict, mutual fear and self-interest, the TP takes as foundational that the good of the state is realised in the collective feeling, thinking and activity of citizens, guided into a life in common by a state founded on a constitution and laws in accordance with the dictates of reason.<sup>37</sup>

There are several compelling reasons to consider Aristotle’s *Politics* as an important interlocutor in the development of the TP. First, as discussed, both share the

---

<sup>35</sup> Frédéric Manzini, *Spinoza: une lecture d’Aristote* (Paris, PUF, 2009), Introduction. References are to chapter, section and sub-section number in an electronic edition. On Spinoza’s library, which contained works by Machiavelli and the De la Courts, see Henri Krop, “Spinoza’s Library: The Mathematical and Scientific Works”, *Intellectual History Review*, 23.1 (March 2013), 27-30.

<sup>36</sup> Some pose whether there is something teleological in the conatus doctrine of *Ethics* (E3p6-p9). Jonathan Bennett uses a push/pull analogy: while the conatus as an efficient cause would involve a pushing motion (striving *as its nature*), there is in fact a pulling final cause: striving purposively to what will aid one’s preservation (*A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), §50). But this issue can be remedied by considering desire, as humanity’s consciousness of the conatus, as something necessarily drawing on affective and imaginative ideas like ends and purposes, which are not necessarily veridical. Spinoza explicitly discourages finalism here (e.g. E1app), whereas the TP actively encourages it, marking a sea-change in its use of Aristotle.

<sup>37</sup> Compare TTP 16.1-3 with TP 2.21, 4.4; cf. E4p35.

view that the political is founded in human nature, specifically human sociality and the affects.<sup>38</sup> Aristotle presents the state as the highest of all human associations, one whose sovereignty is constituted by the participation and support of the majority.<sup>39</sup> He also argues that, where social unrest or law-breaking occurs, it is not the common people themselves at fault but the weak constitution of the state which gives rise to disturbances.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, Aristotle's teleological reasoning explores the complex nature of the political through optimal models of various political forms which arise, and are suited, to the contingent socio-cultural circumstances and traditions of different communities. Aristotle considered that 'all possible forms of [political] organisation have now been discovered',<sup>41</sup> a point parroted in TP 1.3, and could be summarised as either monarchy, aristocracy, or 'polity' – defined as '[p]olitical control exercised by the mass of the populace in the common interest'.<sup>42</sup> Unlike a democracy, disparaged as rule by the poor alone, the benefit of a polity is in enabling the highest possible number 'to reach a high standard in all forms of virtue'. Its social institutions are sufficiently balanced to enable the majority to achieve the conditions of virtue that best provide for the 'common good'.<sup>43</sup> Polity therefore enables *eudaimonia* on a collective scale, impressing the common shared interest into the heart of decision-making, while additionally facilitating, by way of large deliberative assemblies, that a plurality of

---

<sup>38</sup> TP 1.1, 1.4; *Politics*, 1252b27-1253a7.

<sup>39</sup> 1264b15, 1278b6, 1296b16, 1309b16 – compare TP 2.15-17.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. 1308b32, and across Book V. Echoed in Niccolò Machiavelli later, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), III.23, and TP 5.2.

<sup>41</sup> 1264a1.

<sup>42</sup> 1279a32. It is also notable that Spinoza does not endorse a 'mixed government' of the three as per Aristotle, Cicero and later Locke, though places a common principle of popular sovereignty in each.

<sup>43</sup> 1278b6-1279a16.

views is represented and evaluated.<sup>44</sup> '[F]or this reason', Aristotle remarks, critically of monarchy, 'in many cases a crowd judges better than any single person'.<sup>45</sup> Such a polity has its foundations in reason, and can be discerned like any other natural phenomena.

The polity is also a *koinonia* – a 'community' or 'association' defined by its common purpose.<sup>46</sup> Spinoza's earlier scepticism about free will in the *Ethics* plays out in the foundation of the state not in a common purpose but through shared affects – 'a common hope, or fear, or a common desire to avenge some harm'.<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting here that, contra Manzini, Spinoza may have imbibed his Aristotelian politics via intermediaries, in particular the Dutch Neo-Aristotelians at Leiden, where Spinoza is thought to have briefly studied, like Franco Burgersdijk, whose textbooks on logic, moral philosophy and politics had a lasting influence on Dutch academic learning from the 1640s, or his pupils Adriaan Heerebord and Marcus Zuerius van Boxhorn. Boxhorn's *Institutiones Politicae* (1657) begins with a discussion of the origin and goal of political society, and then moves to the three classical forms of government – much like Spinoza, though typical of the genre. Boxhorn would produce an influential edition of Tacitus in 1643, an important source for the TTP, and Boxhorn's teachings would influence Johan and Pieter de la Court, whose popular republican tracts of the 1660s-70s also influence the TP. Yet Boxhorn and the De la Courts both emphasise humanity's self-interested individualism in nature, echoing Hobbes and even the Spinoza of the TTP,<sup>48</sup> which placed far more emphasis on *contract* than *social*,

---

<sup>44</sup> 1281a44-b1; cf. TP 6.20.

<sup>45</sup> 1286a31-32; cf. Manzini, *Spinoza*, 1.5.2.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. 1280b29.

<sup>47</sup> TP 6.1.

<sup>48</sup> TTP 16.6-9.

whereas the TP gestures towards a politics not just of sociality (like Burgersdijk or Grotius), but collective power.<sup>49</sup>

#### 4. Men as they are

While the TP remains preoccupied with identifying this highest good in political societies, the first chapter also bears the influence of Machiavelli. Often ungenerous with his praise, Spinoza unusually refers to him favourably twice, and there are indirect allusions to his ideas throughout the TP. Important studies by Del Lucchese and Vittorio Morfino have addressed conceptual overlaps in both, while translators of the TP often highlight numerous parallels.<sup>50</sup> Like Aristotle, consideration should be given to Dutch intermediaries: Machiavelli is prominently denounced in Burgersdijk, obliquely introducing his ideas to a generation of Dutch students.<sup>51</sup> Some of the more obviously Machiavellian ideas of the TP appeared in earlier works by Johan and Pieter De la Court, for instance criticising mercenaries,<sup>52</sup> and the rationality of large assemblies over small councils.<sup>53</sup> Other significant overlaps between Machiavelli and

---

<sup>49</sup> For deeper historical work on this context, see Arthur Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism in the Dutch Golden Age: The Political Thought of Johan & Pieter de la Court* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 26-35, and Hans Blom, *Causality and Morality in Politics: The Rise of Naturalism in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Political Thought* (Utrecht: University of Utrecht, 1995), 89-100, and 175-177.

<sup>50</sup> For a systematic comparison on both, highlighting a common view of the political as inherently conflictual (a view shared by Hobbes) and their emphasis on the popular sovereignty of the multitude, see Del Lucchese, *Conflict*. Pace Morfino, it is Tacitus, not Machiavelli, that shapes the realism of the TTP; the TP by contrast clearly reproduces or expands explicitly on Machiavelli's work (Morfino, "Memory, Chance and Conflict: Machiavelli in the *Theological-Political Treatise*", in *Spinoza's Authority: Resistance and Power in the Political Treatises*, ed. A. Kiarina Kordela and Dimitris Vardoulakis (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 7-26.

<sup>51</sup> Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 35

<sup>52</sup> TP 7.17, 8.9, echoing Machiavelli, *Discourses* III.24, in the De la Courts, *Politike Discoursen*, I.III.18 – cf. Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> TP 8.3-4, echoing *Discourses*, I.58, and in the De la Courts' *Politike Weeg-Schaal* III.I.3 – cf. Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 265-266.

Spinoza include how military leaders often become tyrants;<sup>54</sup> and on the critique of dictators and military law in Roman times.<sup>55</sup> A lack of such Machiavellian motifs in the earlier TTP either suggests Spinoza's thinking was still under the thrall of Hobbes or, more likely, that the turn to Machiavelli (and Aristotle) were conceptually and formally necessary, arising from a two-pronged aim to outline a politics commensurate with the affects and human nature, while also attuned to the highest good and optimal features of different forms of government.

While also a naturalist, Machiavelli's view of human nature is more pessimistic ('all men are evil'),<sup>56</sup> and his faith in wisely-organised political institutions is of a paternalistic sort, saving both princes and peoples from their worst impulses.<sup>57</sup> The result is somewhat contradictory: while attuned to the best that an ideal society might achieve, Spinoza echoes Machiavelli in denouncing other philosophers whose politics have been based on 'a human nature which doesn't exist anywhere', and who 'conceive men not as they are, but as they would want them to be'.<sup>58</sup> The 'utopias' of philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, More and Bacon are dismissed in favour of a new empirical methodology, following the lessons of 'statesmen' who, guided by experience (and Spinoza implies Machiavelli and the De la Courts, the few theorists referred to positively in the text),<sup>59</sup> will aid him 'to demonstrate the things which agree

---

<sup>54</sup> TP 7.17; *Discourses* III.24

<sup>55</sup> TP 10.10, echoing *Discourses* III.24.

<sup>56</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Peter Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), I.3, 28.

<sup>57</sup> *Discourses*, chs.III-IV.

<sup>58</sup> TP 1.1; Manzini notes similarities with Aristotle's *Poetics* (1460b33-34), wherein Sophocles is said to portray people as they ought to be, and Euripides as they are – *Spinoza*, 1.5.1.

<sup>59</sup> He refers to 'a very wise Dutchman, V.H.' in TP 8.31 – V.H. being the initials 'Van den Hove', the Dutch equivalent of 'De la Courts'. Machiavelli is referred to in TP 5.7.

best with practice, in a certain and indubitable way, and to deduce them from the condition of human nature'.<sup>60</sup> Politics is no longer concealed beneath biblical analysis but is presented as a 'science', rooted, like Aristotle, in a theory of the sociality of human nature.<sup>61</sup> Just as in the *Ethics* Spinoza considered human nature as if it were 'of lines, planes or bodies',<sup>62</sup> here the affects are a 'science' that can be scientifically understood with the same 'freedom of spirit' as mathematics, so that one can regard 'love, hate, anger, envy, love of esteem, compassion, and other emotions' as properties like 'heat, cold, storms, thunder, etc., pertain to the atmosphere'.<sup>63</sup>

This model is probably inspired by Polybius' understanding of society as an equilibrium of forces, an important precursor for Machiavelli, whose models of checks, safeguards, and defusing inevitable social conflicts influence Spinoza.<sup>64</sup> Whereas Aristotle, Cicero, and Polybius considered political forms as acting naturally towards the teleological good of civil harmony, events in early modern Europe presented Machiavelli and Spinoza with case-studies in how societies drift towards conflict and war if not sufficiently responsive to popular sovereignty. Yet while Machiavelli dismisses utopias to advise would-be princes to 'learn how not to be good',<sup>65</sup> Spinoza takes a separate route, arguing that a well-organised and reasonable state requires no such expedient vices.<sup>66</sup> What differentiates Spinoza's TP from its peers is its attempt to derive a political naturalism from its own earlier definitions of reason, affects and natural right. Leaving nothing to *fortuna* or the moods of the

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 1.2-4.

<sup>61</sup> TP 1.4. Balibar, *Spinoza*, 50.

<sup>62</sup> E3Pref.

<sup>63</sup> TP 1.4.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. *Discourses*, III.11, 286.

<sup>65</sup> *Prince*, XV, 53.

<sup>66</sup> TP 5.2.

monarch, Spinoza's rational republic places a commonly-recognised principle of popular sovereignty into the very life, and highest good, of political processes.<sup>67</sup>

'Spinozism', Alquié wrote, 'although it rejects all subordination of desire for any purpose, remains a doctrine of seeking the highest good'.<sup>68</sup> There are scattered references to a 'highest good' or 'perfect good' across Spinoza's works: the free man of the *Ethics*, and the exemplar of the Hebrew Republic under Moses in the TTP, both present devices for different audiences aimed at educating our imaginations to what else might be possible, and thereby accomplished.<sup>69</sup> God is also described as the 'exemplar of the true life' in the TTP, and the early *Short Treatise* encourages us to imagine a 'perfect man' to emulate.<sup>70</sup> The orientation towards the mind's freedom in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* is provided by a 'true good' that acts as a 'guiding principle'.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, the TP sets out to address the 'highest good' of the state, noted earlier, but also specifically in Chapter 5, which shifts to normative considerations. 'We can know easily what the best condition of each state is from the end of the civil condition', he writes, 'which is nothing other than peace and security of life'.<sup>72</sup> Taken in itself, this marks a more cautious climbdown from the TTP's exhortation that the 'true end of the Republic is really freedom'.<sup>73</sup> But the chapter is conflicted between a Machiavellian realism that understands politics 'by right', and in

---

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), XII.8; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, IX, 36

<sup>68</sup> Ferdinand Alquié, *Leçons sur Spinoza* (Paris: La Table ronde, 2003), 313.

<sup>69</sup> E4p67-73, TTP 17.

<sup>70</sup> TTP 13.8, 14.10-11, KV 2.6.

<sup>71</sup> TIE 11.

<sup>72</sup> TP 5.2.

<sup>73</sup> TTP 20.9; cf. Balibar, *Spinoza*, 51.

terms of the capacity, affects and judgement of various actors – or by the ‘best way’,<sup>74</sup> as per Aristotle. Five people may own neighbouring fields of equal size, and each can by right choose to sow seasonable or unseasonable crops, or turn it to pasture, or leave it fallow. Some may draw on first-hand practical knowledge of growing or the latest fertilisers and seeds suited for the soil; others may plant what they judge will yield the greatest profit at market, and, fogged by ambition and greed, give little thought to whether the site is suitable; others may make little or no effort at all. The best way is of a different order, involving that which is most conducive to human flourishing. In a remark that echoes *Eudemian Ethics* on the ‘noble life’, Spinoza argues that the best way in politics involves not merely a comfortable animal existence (‘merely the circulation of blood’, but passing ‘a human life’ – a rare forceful instance of this word – a life ‘mostly by reason, the true virtue and life of the Mind’.<sup>75</sup> But, as the preceding argument already makes clear, the life of reason cannot fall back on Ciceronian platitudes of the inherent harmony or virtue of politics. Drawing on Machiavelli’s recognition of the inherently conflictual and dynamic nature of politics, Spinoza’s political reason raises its attention to what can best mould and manage the wills of the multitude – no longer the persuasive prophets of the TTP, but the virtuous administration of the state.

## 5. The Virtue of the State

The TP displays an increased confidence in government and law for realising human freedom, one conceived no longer at an individual level, as per the *beatitudo* of *Ethics*, but on the collective. As Spinoza argues, ‘the path reason teaches us to follow is very

---

<sup>74</sup> TP 5.1.

<sup>75</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), I.2, 1214b10; cf. Manzini, *Spinoza*, I.3, comparing Aristotle to TIE 16.

difficult’, and so those ‘who persuade themselves that a multitude, which may be engaged in public affairs, can be induced to live only according to the prescription of reason’ are ‘dreaming of the golden age of the poets’.<sup>76</sup> The TP’s goal is to describe various optimal forms of political organisation wherein ‘the peace and freedom of its citizens is to remain inviolate’.<sup>77</sup> If a state is to survive, its ‘affairs must be so ordered that, whether the people who administer them are led by reason or by passion, they can’t be induced to be disloyal or to act badly’.<sup>78</sup> Whether they do or not is a consequence of the good organisation of their governmental form. Spinoza adds that it ‘doesn’t make a difference ... in what spirit men are led to administer matters properly’, so long as this instrumental good is achieved. For ‘freedom of mind, or strength of character’, *Ethics*’ highest virtues, are no more than a ‘private virtue’, whereas ‘the virtue of the state is security’. Whether individuals are guided by reason or passion is irrelevant to the overall freedom that living in a well-organised, secure state confers.

But does this proposal relegate the value of individual freedom or truthfulness altogether, and does it constitute a seismic break from the TTP, as Balibar suggests?<sup>79</sup> There is something of Machiavelli’s *Prince* in the remark, and it jars with the highest good of Chapter 5. Its conflicting strands are illuminated by the account of freedom and nature that follows it, early in Chapter 2, which render the conceptual necessity and consistency of thinking individual freedom through the state. Spinoza begins with a recap of the TTP’s theory of natural right, involving a subtle redefinition bearing the

---

<sup>76</sup> TP 1.5.

<sup>77</sup> TP title-page.

<sup>78</sup> TP 1.6.

<sup>79</sup> Balibar also remarks that the works ‘belong to two entirely different worlds’, a view this paper is sympathetic to: *Spinoza and Politics*, 50-51.

influence of the *Ethics*, where ‘freedom is virtue, or perfection’.<sup>80</sup> Against Hobbes, there is no ‘freedom’ in the natural state, but only in living in the civil state, where together we can offer mutually assistance and live lives of greater well-being and peace.<sup>81</sup> But what if the state we live in is poorly-constituted and regularly suffers crises of sovereignty, like the collapses of *Rampjaar*?

One issue facing Spinoza’s endorsement of free speech, toleration and the inherent rationality of large, free democratic assemblies in the TTP was the extent to which individuals were able to think and speak freely, or under the coercion of another. Whereas the Preface of the TTP reflects on how men can be led by their fear to ‘fight for servitude as if for salvation’,<sup>82</sup> defending the regimes of tyrants who ultimately oppress them, the ‘theoretical’ Chapter 16 considers men in nature who will speak and deliberate by their own reasonable judgement.<sup>83</sup> Contextual matters discussed in Part 2 necessitate a theoretical explanation as to how the judgement of many can fall under the power of one, in ways not just explicable by hope or fear. In his gloss of the TTP’s natural right in Chapter 2, Spinoza significantly if subtly redefines the relation of freedom to independence of thought.<sup>84</sup> He begins by outlining the conatus doctrine, before re-formulating desire as a form of consciousness of one’s appetites, wherein a desired object’s ‘good’ or ‘evil’ is relative to its empowerment of a person’s specific

---

<sup>80</sup> TP 2.7, echoing E4df8.

<sup>81</sup> TP 2.15.

<sup>82</sup> TTP Pref.10.

<sup>83</sup> Spinoza uses this term to distinguish his preceding theory of natural right and democracy from the historical analysis of the Hebrew Republic under Moses that follows it (TTP 17.1).

<sup>84</sup> Spinoza will do the same in his gloss of the *Ethics*, redefining Adam’s original sin as resulting from being subject to affects that prevented him from using his reason (TP 2.6), versus E4p68s, which peculiarly explains it through Adam’s imitation of the affects of the animals.

nature as they judge it.<sup>85</sup> Spinoza then adds a new argument that correlates human power with independence of thought. He gives four instances where one person falls under the authority of another (*sub potestate habere*) either in body or mind,<sup>86</sup> and to the extent that one is deceived by another, one is subject to their right.<sup>87</sup> By implication, ‘it follows that a mind is completely its own master just to the extent that it can use reason rightly’. Neither afraid nor deceived, it can think for itself, and since human power should be assessed ‘not so much by the strength of the body as by the strength of mind’, it follows that ‘people are most their own masters when they can exert the most power with their reason’. The argument is made briefly in the manner of a recap, but Spinoza expands his theory of power to explicitly involve a greater degree of independence and self-control. For one (or many) to possess their own right (*sui juris*),<sup>88</sup> they require a relative power of self-determination or autonomy to withstand the rights of others who might otherwise seek to exploit them. In concise fashion, Spinoza offers a new foundation with which to tackle the problem of political servitude introduced in the TTP, through independence of mind.

From this, Spinoza restates his previous arguments for the possibility and advantages of collective power (‘if two men come together...’)<sup>89</sup> and mutual assistance,<sup>90</sup> from which he derives the necessity of acting together – ‘the more they agree as one in this way, the more right they will all have together’ – and arrives at his first formulation of collective power. While a late addition to *Ethics* also pointed to

---

<sup>85</sup> TP 2.8.

<sup>86</sup> TP 2.10.

<sup>87</sup> TP 2.11.

<sup>88</sup> Aristotle also limits citizenship to those deemed ‘self-sufficient’ (1275b13).

<sup>89</sup> TP 2.13; cf. E4p18s.

<sup>90</sup> TP 2.15.

how, in coming together for a common purpose, men multiply their right (E4p37s2), in the TP this language of coordination and collective right is much more prominent. In holding their rights in common, ‘all are led as if by one mind’, a power that is also greater than the sum of its parts, and foundational to sovereignty in all three state-forms.<sup>91</sup> Such coordination is impossible however unless the state’s laws are ‘prescribed by reason’, and it is in this way that Spinoza’s civil state is one guided by reason, rather than coercive conformity.<sup>92</sup>

But what does this reason amount to? For Spinoza, it refers to the common good, the freedom that all can collectively share in and benefit from. Thus Spinoza writes that the state must be established ‘so that everyone – both those who rule and those who are ruled – does what’s for the common well-being’.<sup>93</sup> Again, it does not matter if this is done willingly, reasonably or not, so long as their common good is realised – ‘whether of his own accord, or by force, or by necessity’, they will all live ‘according to the prescription of reason’. This prescription of reason is what results in the flourishing of the people, echoing Cicero and the TTP (16.10). The ‘people’s well-being [*salus populi*] is the supreme law, or the king’s highest right’ in a monarchy,<sup>94</sup> and it is an elementary standard of the strength of any given polity in the TP.<sup>95</sup>

These, in themselves, are not uncommon in early modern republicanism: what’s interesting is how they become interlinked with organicist metaphors of the multitude as acting, led or guided ‘as if by one mind’ [*una veluti mente*] – a phrase that appears

---

<sup>91</sup> TP 2.16; TP 2.17.

<sup>92</sup> TP 2.21; cf. TP 5.4, which makes this clearer.

<sup>93</sup> TP 6.3.

<sup>94</sup> TP 7.5.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. TP 3.17, 4.6, 5.7, 6.3, 6.8, 7.3-5, 8.20, 8.44; cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), XXX.1.

numerous times, particularly in Chapters 2-3 – and as one body of citizens.<sup>96</sup> While on an elementary level one can agree with Curley that acting by one mind connotes a ‘commonality of purpose’, if this were merely Spinoza’s point then such a vivid and oft-repeated metaphor would not be expected in an otherwise austere and unsentimental writing style. Spinoza’s choice of passive inflections of the verb *ducere* (to lead or guide) instead indicate how a multitude are led and compelled to act in common, and in coordination with one another, through a shared set of true ideas. Led *as one* need not imply that such individuals share the same thoughts. Spinoza’s physical digression explains how groups of bodies can unite as one and share a common *ratio* among each other, becoming one individual through sharing a common order and purpose, while also remaining partially independent and not necessarily agreeing in nature.<sup>97</sup> The emphasis on reason also accords with Spinoza’s epistemology in *Ethics*, wherein knowledge of the second and third kinds is necessarily a basis of agreement.<sup>98</sup> It also draws on the social epistemology of the TTP, for whom the truths of ‘true religion’ and prophecy are those which result in behaviours of justice and loving-kindness, through being relayed at a suitably imaginative level that can stimulate and guide the minds of the many. Within Spinoza’s late politics and its blueprints for secure states, the right of a state is the power of a free multitude, led by one mind or a common set of laws,<sup>99</sup> established in accordance with reason, with the end of their common flourishing.

---

<sup>96</sup> Variants appear at TP 2.13, 2.15-16, 2.21, 3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 6.1, and 8.6. Organicist metaphors of the body politic are common, appearing prominently in Hobbes, Grotius and, ultimately, Aristotle, e.g. 1281b5, 1287b30.

<sup>97</sup> E2p13s.

<sup>98</sup> E2p40s, 4p31-p32 and 4p35.

<sup>99</sup> TP 3.2; 2.21, 3.7.

The entrance of ‘free multitude’ is also intentional. In TP 5.6 Spinoza compares a ‘free multitude’ from a ‘slave’ one, who live in a state gained by right of war. In a distinction that echoes the conflict of the free man and slave in *Ethics*,<sup>100</sup> the free multitude lives by hope and for life, and live for themselves; in contrast, the subjugated multitude live by fear and to avoid death, and for the benefit of the victor. This distinction is important, indicating how Spinoza positively draws on the common people (*multitudo*) as the basis of political sovereignty where previous references in the TTP and *Ethics* were often scathing and dismissive. A peaceful and secure commonwealth is one where the free multitude are guided to live in accordance with reason; a warlike and disorderly one where they are subjugated externally by the right of another, and internally by a turmoil of fear, prejudice and hatred. While we can agree with Matheron that the multitude are the ‘immanent’ power of a commonwealth, there is no inherent rationality or ‘democratic conatus’ in a multitude, who can just as easily be led through servility by a tyrant.<sup>101</sup>

Thus the distinction drawn between *citizens* (*cives*) and *subjects* (*subditos*) is important: whereas citizens ‘enjoy, by civil right, all the advantages of a commonwealth’, the remaining *multitudo* are merely subjects, ‘bound to obey the established practices of the commonwealth, or its laws’,<sup>102</sup> an inherently passive state, obeying the laws out of fear, not free and willing consent. It is akin to the discussion of being ‘subject’ in mind to another’s right earlier. The citizen possesses *sui juris* whereas the subject remains passive and unfree. When Spinoza writes that ‘the right

---

<sup>100</sup> E5p41-42.

<sup>101</sup> Matheron, “The Theoretical Function of Democracy in Spinoza and Hobbes”, *The New Spinoza*, ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 217; Negri argues similarly in *Savage Anomaly*, 194-8.

<sup>102</sup> TP 3.1.

of a commonwealth is determined by the power of a multitude that is guided as though by a single mind',<sup>103</sup> from the preceding discussion we can understand that such a freedom or unanimity arises from a life in common that is peaceful and mutually supportive, but one also led by the citizens and imposed on subjects.

Thus the 'union of minds could in no way be conceived unless the chief aim of the commonwealth is identical with that which sound reason teaches us is for the good of all men'.<sup>104</sup> The virtue of the state is one with the virtue of the individual. The conclusion is shared with Aristotle, who asked 'whether we are to say that happiness is the same for the individual human being and for the state, or not'.<sup>105</sup> He gives a forthright answer, and one which Spinoza might accept: 'all would agree that it is the same'. The reason of the individual, and of the community, are of the same order. The 'end of the civil condition', writes Spinoza, is 'peace and security of life', a state of 'freedom', where men 'pass their lives harmoniously'.<sup>106</sup> Yet while the TTP argues that the fundamental instruction of true prophetic revelation and scripture is 'justice and loving-kindness' in our dealings with others, the TP travels further in its vision of harmony, of passing a *human* life, defined by the true virtue and life of the mind. Whereas Part 5 of *Ethics* wrote in similar terms of a freedom that would be enjoyed by the philosopher prepared to undergo its difficult and rare path, here Spinoza emphasises the role of the state in providing and promoting the peace, security and harmony of the multitude, one with 'laws established with the prescription of reason'.<sup>107</sup> But if many individuals are guided as if by one mind by the state's laws,

---

<sup>103</sup> TP 3.7.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> 1324a5.

<sup>106</sup> TP 5.1, 5.5.

<sup>107</sup> TP 2.21.

what is to separate Spinoza's endorsement of obedience from the monarchies he also attacks, which lead subjects like 'sheep' and turn them into 'slaves'?<sup>108</sup> What are the rights of the individual or community who might find themselves in opposition to the laws or decisions of their state? And what precisely is the role of the state in educating its members to reason for themselves?

A call was made for hermeneutic charity earlier. Spinoza does not emphasise the good of public education in the ways that contemporaries John Comenius, Bathsua Makin or John Locke later would;<sup>109</sup> however he viewed a sufficiently free, tolerant society in which science and philosophy flourished as achieving comparable effects. For Spinoza, following Hobbes, there is a subtle emphasis on citizenship, which may conjecturally have necessitated a separate chapter treatment, following the proposed chapter on laws. Spinoza writes that 'Men aren't born civil; they become civil', echoing Hobbes' *De Cive*, that men require 'training' for society, albeit based on a social contract founded in escaping fear and violence.<sup>110</sup> Instead, for Spinoza, human beings are the same everywhere, a claim later made in Chapter 7,<sup>111</sup> and differences in civil behaviours reflect the institutions that determine them to act in a certain way. This making of the citizen follows consequentially from the reasonable constitution of the state and its laws. Rebellions, violence or disorder are to be attributed 'not so much to the wickedness of the subjects as to the corruption of the state', a claim originating in Machiavelli.<sup>112</sup> But the true virtue of the state is in its continual sensitivity and

---

<sup>108</sup> TP 5.4, echoing *Politics*, 1280a21.

<sup>109</sup> All three emphasise public education for children, with a Baconian interest in pedagogy (Makin for educating girls in England, 1673). While Spinoza doesn't address pedagogy directly, he had worked as a tutor (Ep 9), and his later *Hebrew Grammar* was produced as a teaching guide.

<sup>110</sup> TP 5.2. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, I.2; cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, II.29.

<sup>111</sup> TP 7.27; cf. TTP 17.26.

<sup>112</sup> TP 5.2; *Discourses*, III.29.

calibration of its laws, institutions and decision-making to the common feeling of the multitude, one that can be responsive, but also prepared to lead, pursuing courses of action of longer-term advantage than short-term gain.

All the same, the unfinished account does not explain how passive subjects might, on an epistemic level, become active citizens. Spinoza is non-committal and unclear on the generic eligibility for citizenship in democracies, a point Curley also considers a ‘serious, and perhaps irremediable flaw’.<sup>113</sup> Nor does Spinoza give any account of how a given multitude might be educated or enabled to attain citizenship. While Hobbes attributed some virtue to the education of citizens, considering them ‘clean paper’ to be inscribed with civic values,<sup>114</sup> Spinoza rests faith in the intrinsic rationality of assemblies. In excluding so many, the democratic assemblies would likely reproduce a stale social conformity of members that would inhibit the goods of deliberative plurality argued in the TTP. In place of large, dynamic assemblies that express ideas that ‘no one had ever thought of before’, might arise institutionally defensive and aloof cultures whose ‘one mind that might be guided by reason’, is, in Sharp’s words, ‘counterfactual’.<sup>115</sup> In other words, despite its pressing contextual concerns for an elementary peace and safety, Spinoza’s programme of collective liberation remains fettered by a paternalistic reliance on wise statesmen who might lead, but not necessarily empower, the multitude.

## 6. Conclusion

Spinoza’s late political thought is preoccupied by questions of what constitutes civil order and stability. His conclusions suggest it rests on a common set of ideas and

---

<sup>113</sup> Curley, *Collected Works II*, 501.

<sup>114</sup> *Leviathan*, XXX.6.

<sup>115</sup> TP 9.14; Sharp, “Family Quarrels and Mental Harmony”, 110.

affects in a community, a ‘union of minds’ given form and structure by historical traditions and culture, but above all, by the reasonable organisation and direction of the state. As he remarks later in the TP, ‘the laws are the soul of the state’ (*Anima enim imperii jura sunt*).<sup>116</sup> The sentence is unusual for Spinoza, not only in its concision, but in the singular appearance of *anima* (‘soul’) into the text. There is also a peculiar dualism at play: in its assignation of the state’s material survival to the ‘soul’ of its laws or constitution, it is reminiscent of a multitude being guided ‘by one mind’ earlier. How does this square then with the rule of the affects and desire over human affairs set out forcefully by the TP earlier?

In a recent study, Del Lucchese has perceptively observed the influence of the imagination in both phrases.<sup>117</sup> A mind imagines that it guides the body, just as a community imagines itself to be guided by a common set of ideas or values. We can extend that observation to citizens who imagine that the survival of their state rests on a reasonable and fair constitution and laws. This should make them more receptive to the lessons of political experience, and their underlying theoretical principles in human nature, affects and sociality, of Spinoza’s late political science. For laws are only as powerful as the utility of obeying them. So long as this constitution or set of laws is correctly established and kept ‘inviolable’, then the state can exist in eternal security. Such inviolability is dependent on the collective attachment of a people to the civil order, which in turn is based on a constitution operating according to reason. The laws cannot remain intact unless they are ‘defended both by reason and by the common affect of men’. Without this common affect, those laws that rest ‘only on the support

---

<sup>116</sup> TP 10.9.

<sup>117</sup> Del Lucchese, “The Symptomatic Relationship between Law and Conflict in Spinoza: *Jura communia* as *anima imperii*”, in Kordela and Vardoulakis (eds.), *Spinoza’s Authority: Political Treatises*, 38.

of reason' are 'weak and easily overcome'.<sup>118</sup> Benign dictatorships will collapse unless they are founded in the collective feeling or desire of the people, one unlikely to tolerate long what does not accomplish the common good. It is the political import of this common feeling, decisive for statecraft, that Spinoza's late politics takes a final, incomplete journey towards. While Spinoza's account remains incomplete and unable to supply a model of how passive subjects can become active citizens, its vision of the state as the basis for human freedom goes further than either the statesmen or contemporaries he used as his guides.

---

<sup>118</sup> TP 10.9.