



SPINOZA'S TTP: POLITICS, POWER AND THE IMAGINATION

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List of Abstracts

Antonio Salgado Borge (University of Edinburgh), “God or *Natura naturata*? Spinoza on the Numerical Identity Between God’s Essence and all Things in Nature”

Spinoza believes that God and Nature are numerically identical. But in the *Ethics* he distinguishes between two ways in which Nature can be qualified: by *natura naturans* Spinoza understands the essential attributes of Nature, whereas by *natura naturata* he understands what follows from those attributes – all their modifications. Confronted with this distinction, some commentators posit that God is to be identified with *natura naturans* only, and not with *natura naturata*. Others believe that God or Nature is numerically identical to the sum of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. I argue that the *TTP* supports the view that God or Nature is numerically identical to each *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

My plan is as follows. First, I show that both in the *TTP* and in the *Ethics* Spinoza identifies God’s essence – *natura naturans* – with God’s power. But I contend that in the *TTP*, unlike in the *Ethics*, Spinoza explicitly does this by positing first that God’s power is numerically identical with the power of all natural things. Thus, for Spinoza the power of the sum of all things – *natura naturata* – is numerically identical to the power of God. Consequently, he must accept that God’s essence is numerically identical to all things in nature; that is, that *natura naturans* is numerically identical to *natura naturata*. I argue that, although Spinoza does not assert this textually in the *Ethics*, the fact that he identifies God’s essence with God’s power only after dealing with the realm of the modes shows that his strategy there is consistent with that of the *TTP*. Finally, I address two potential objections to this interpretation: if each *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* are numerically identical to Nature, how can existence belong to the essence of the former but not to the essence of the latter? How can the former be indivisible when the latter is divisible?

Emanuele Costa (Vanderbilt University), “Spinoza on Prophecy and Belief Justification”

A dominant contemporary conception of truth defines it as justified true belief. This concept involves a triple requirement for a certain state of affairs to qualify as truth. First, it must be a belief, i.e. it must involve an intentional relation between a knower and a known state of affairs. Secondly, it must be true, i.e. the state of affairs described by the belief must correspond to a state of affairs existing independently of the subject-knower. Third, in order to qualify as truth, the belief cannot “happen” to be true, but it must be supported by some sort of evidence that justifies the knower in selecting it as the content of her belief.

In this essay, I illustrate how Spinoza, in his *Theological-Political Treatise*, offers an alternative view of truth, which applies exclusively to prophecy in his gnoseological system. To be clear, this prophetic truth does not share the same epistemological value enjoyed by a priori deductive reasoning, which is obtained by means of intellect or intuition. However, the “other” image of truth that emerges from the TTP provides a utilitarian portrait of prophecy, which nonetheless employs strict epistemological criteria to be identified as true prophecy.

I shall argue that Spinoza’s definition of true prophecy implies a suitable process of verification, which establishes the justification procedure for a given state of affairs, endorsed by a prophet. Moreover, I will argue that Spinoza avoids the establishment of prophecy as “true” in the proper sense (i.e. correspondence between a belief and an independent state of affairs). Nonetheless, he inserts the notion of goodness (i.e. usefulness) as an important criterion for determining which prophecies can be believable.

Jimena Solé (Universidad de Buenos Aires), “Truth, Obedience and Freedom. Some considerations on Spinoza’s concept of politics and its relation with philosophy”

One of the central theses of Spinoza’s TTP argument in favour of the freedom to philosophize is the separation of philosophy from theology and politics. According to Spinoza, the aim of philosophy is *truth*, while theology and politics pursue *obedience*. Whether in view of the common good, or in view of the interest of those who govern, political authorities enforce laws that regulate the conduct of citizens through mechanisms of coercion based on fear and hope. Thus, even in what Spinoza calls a democratic society, whose government is in the hands of all and whose laws are the product of common consent, political authority is indispensable since, as Spinoza points out, human beings are not easily led by reason alone and are often dragged by passions that threaten the peace (TTP 73, 193). On the contrary, understood as the investigation of truth, philosophy consists in conceiving adequate ideas, that is, in exercising autonomously one’s power to think. Freedom of thought is therefore a necessary requisite for the development of philosophy and insofar as words have no seditious intent, no civil authority has the right to limit freedom of expression.

Thus, politics (whose end is obedience to civil laws, which can only be guaranteed by means of mechanisms of external coercion) and philosophy (whose end is truth, which can only be attained through the free, autonomous activity of the mind) appear to have nothing in common. However, this opposition seems to blur when, in the last chapter of the TTP Spinoza declares that *the true purpose of the state is freedom* (TTP 241). Based on this somewhat paradoxical statement, I propose to re-examine Spinoza’s conception of politics and reflect on its relation to philosophy. My hypothesis is that Spinoza handles a plurivocal concept of politics that extends from despotic to democratic political orders and that, in the same way that he redefines the concept of faith in the

first part of the TTP, he also provides a redefinition of politics based on a resemantization of the concept of obedience allowing to challenge its opposition to freedom (TTP 74; TP 283) and thus, to rethink its connection with philosophy. Moreover, I consider that Spinoza's concept of philosophy is plurivocal as well, since the developments of his *Ethics* make it clear that philosophy's aim is not just the search for true knowledge, but also virtue and happiness. The emphasis on the separation and opposition between politics and philosophy in the TTP can be seen as a result of its context, of its intention to defend freedom of thought and speech in the face of an eventual monarchical restoration that would imply the hardening of censorship. However, the paradox that has motivated this paper allows to discover in this work what I believe to be Spinoza's original conception of the inseparable link between philosophy and politics, which points to the collective character of the effort to know the truth, already established in the TIE, and to the impossibility of attaining the ends of philosophy outside a democratic political order.

Yifan Song (Fudan University), "The Radicalization of Action and Social Transformation: A Spinoza-Hess-Marx Triangle"

The paper investigates into the pre-history of the radical social theory by dating back to the resurrection of Spinoza around 1840s in Germany among the Young Hegelians. This legacy of Spinoza motivates a radicalization of philosophy of action and potentiality of revolution, especially in the context of Moses Hess and Karl Marx. They show a possibility of how Spinoza's ethics can be applied to real social life.

In his *Philosophy of Action* and *On the Nature of Money*, Hess asserts "The basis of the free act is the *Ethics* of Spinoza," and later he redefines human nature in terms of interaction, in this collective form the power of individual action increasing and love appearing as the fundamental principle. Meanwhile, Marx studied *Theological-Political Treatise* in 1841, but it was only through Hess that Spinoza entered his theoretical horizon, and this explicit reference to Hess can be found in *On the Jewish Question* and also *Paris Manuscripts*. By comparing the reception of Spinoza by Hess and Marx, a genealogy as "*Affect-Action-Praxis*" will be recognized inside the intellectual history and bring us back to the reflection on the very nature of social practice.

However, this paper will also illustrate that Hess' Spinozan reconstruction would be highly problematic in the following three dimensions: (1) By resorting to a radical "break" in the history, Hess violates the Spinozan teaching of immanence and steps into a philosophy of future. Accordingly, in the ethical and normative area, he emphasizes on the transcendence over natural history and therefore denies the transformation between passions and actions, imagining human being could be God-like absolute active beings. (2) Hess, and also Feuerbach, fell into an anthropological illusion in their use of "species-being" (*Gattungswesen*), namely, that humans are at the center of nature and that God is merely the mirror of humans. This is an imagination that Spinoza severely rejects. (3) As the result of absolute action and radical break, Hess constructs his political philosophy on anarchism, while Spinoza insists on the virtue of commonwealth as peace and security.

On the contrary, Marx locates himself in a far more immanent framework than Hess, bringing the Hess' pure moral will into the internal determination of social economic system (Yovel, 1989). To start with, the paper tests Marx's unique idea of ontology of passion in Paris Manuscript, in which passivity and activity overcome the traditional and rigid dualism and unify in the so-called "objective activity". In contrast to the humanist reading, this affective practice implies the openness to the other, or that our bodies are frequently undergoing other bodies.

Thus, Marx's definition of human nature as “social relations” goes beyond the general anthropological and teleological perspective. Human nature only generates in a plural, dynamic practical activity, including labor, language, love, conflict, as Balibar suggests the term “transindividuality”. And the history that man creates is no longer a divine history, but a natural-history of human desire, namely production and interaction and their conflict, which echoes the naturalized reading of the Bible in *Theological-Political Treatise*. As for the radical transformation of society, Marx never tries to replace the abstract universality with the concrete individuality, but turns the anarchism of Hess and also Stirner into a scientific study on the genesis of domination and abstraction, a collective social condition that produces our life. This detour via Hess will illuminate the relationship between Marx and Spinoza.

Jason M. Yonover (Johns Hopkins University), “Hegel and Spinoza on Religion and the State”

Although the importance of Spinoza's metaphysics for Hegel's theoretical philosophy has been recognized in recent work, e.g. by Bowman 2013, the same cannot be said of Spinoza's politics with respect to Hegel's practical philosophy. However, the historical evidence is decisive here, as we know that Hegel worked on Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP) at least by the 1802-3 edition of Spinoza's Opera (ed. Paulus). He tells us as much himself in lectures on the history of philosophy; and the preface to this important edition of Spinoza's works from the turn of the century—read by Schopenhauer, Marx, and many others—also specifies that Hegel contributed philological efforts concerning the “adnotationes” that Spinoza added, by hand, to copies of his edition of the TTP as well as those of friends. In other words, Hegel must have known the TTP well, as he compared Latin and French versions of these annotations by Spinoza, and surely engaged with the TTP more broadly, either first in this context or likely also earlier. In this paper, I stage a dialogue between Hegel and Spinoza on this historical basis, concerning the position of religion with respect to the state.

Following an introduction clarifying the historical circumstances referenced above, I turn in the second section to provide an overview of Spinoza's political theology (Melamed 2013, contra Israel 2006). According to Spinoza, a “national religion” shall be incredibly useful because human beings are primarily ruled by the affects, and religion taps precisely into those with extraordinary success. As Spinoza repeatedly emphasizes, religion is most effective at eliciting obedience—which is so valuable. Spinoza even goes so far as to argue that “it is very important that the temples which are dedicated to the national religion be large and magnificent, and that only Patricians or Senators be permitted to officiate in its chief rituals” (*Political Treatise*, henceforth TP, VIII 46). The potential religious significance of political figures cements Spinoza's emphasis on the utility of religion in the political context.

In the third section, I show that the situation in Hegel is undoubtedly much more complicated (following Jaeschke 1981, who convincingly traces important transformations in Hegel's views), but that Hegel arguably learns certain lessons from Spinoza in his *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel carries forward Spinoza's political theology in fundamentally associating religion with feeling, and arguing that it may further—or alternatively threaten—the state's development. More specifically, for Hegel, the state must be both secular and consecrated (on which see Bayefsky 2013). It is founded on objectivity rather than merely subjective “faith and authority” (PR §270a); but, after all, it also infamously “consists in the march of God in the world” (PR §258a). Hegel follows Spinoza in taking the Erastian stance that “whenever individuals of the same religious persuasion join together [...] the latter will in general be subject to the policing and supervision of the state”

(PR §270r). But Hegel departs from Spinoza insofar as he rejects political theology as too unpredictable with respect to its power: “Religion as such should not hold the reins of the government,” according to Hegel, because the former is associated with “arbitrariness [and positive opinion]” (PR §270a), which will also rule out a prominent political position for religion. Hegel takes a Spinozistic stance on tolerance for the same reason. Only “a state which is strong [...] can adopt a more liberal attitude” as concerns religious minorities (PR §270r). Otherwise, one makes room for powerful religious communities to generate a contagious instability. Still, interestingly, state and religion need not be in tension; the two can also work together. Hegel’s temple of freedom (the state) may “have need of religion and faith” to motivate respect, and the state can in turn offer assistance and protection that the religious community needs. In such cases, “the religion in question is of a genuine kind and does not have this negative and polemical attitude towards the state [an accusation Hegel directs at certain radical Protestants], but acknowledges and endorses it” (PR §270a).

I conclude in a fourth section that further investigation of the relationship between Hegel and Spinoza as concerns matters in political thought is warranted.

Dimitris Vardoulakis (University of Western Sydney), “On the Sources of Spinoza’s Account of Social Formation”

The closest Spinoza ever comes to providing an account of how societies are formed occurs in a brief passage in chapter 5 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. The account, however, is so strange that it has received scant attention in the secondary literature, presumably because scholars do not know how to place it. I will argue that Spinoza’s argument exhibits the same structure as the sole account of social formation that has survived in the epicurean tradition, namely, Hermarchus account. I will draw some implications about this account, in particular about how it avoids the two main ways in which social formation is approached, the naturalist (the human is a “social” animal) and the constructivist (the political “man” is an “artificial” animal). Further, the resonances between Hermarchus and Spinoza reinforce the argument that Spinoza was particularly influenced from the epicurean tradition.

Matthieu Angevin (University of Aberdeen), “Spinoza against Hippocrates?”

In stark contrast with the rigid demonstrative logic of the *Ethics* and with the cold analysis of the State offered by the *Tractatus Politicus*, Spinoza is pretty loquacious in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and this loquacity provides curious readers with golden opportunities to get to know Spinoza better, about whom a lot still is uncertain. For example, what is Spinoza referring to when he notes in that texts that ‘Only laws and customs can lead a nation to have its particular ingenium’? Is he simply dismissing language as playing any role in the formation of a common ingenium, as the surrounding text seems to indicate, or is there more to that odd insistence? Although it remains a hypothesis with small ground to support it, I think it is possible to read Spinoza’s take in that passage as an intervention within another debate, that opposing followers of Hippocrates and their contradictors on the importance of the role of the ‘climate’ in shaping such common ingenium. At the occasion of this short talk, I will share and discuss the few elements which lead me to hold this seemingly farfetched reading as nevertheless credible.

Ahmad Bostani (Kharazmi University), Political Philosophy and the Imagination from Al-Farabi to Spinoza

Spinoza, as one of the founders of modern philosophy, was significantly influenced by classical traditions. Some scholars have discussed the impact of medieval Jewish theology, especially Maimonides' thought, on his philosophical system, specifically in his *Ethics*. But, only few studies have been devoted to the influence of Islamic philosophy on Spinoza. My paper aims to discuss this inspiration with a special focus on the status of the imagination in political philosophy.

Compared to the Greek philosophers, Muslim scholars gave a more ontological and epistemological role to the imaginative faculty since through the imagination they sought to justify spiritual phenomena such as revelation and prophecy in a philosophical way. Alfarabi could be construed as the first philosopher who insisted on the role that imagination plays in forming the identity and the integration of a community. That is why the supreme ruler, according to his political philosophy, must be a man who not only possesses the perfection of the rational faculty but also one whose imaginative faculty is in its most perfect state because it is through the imagination that citizens learn about the virtues and how to achieve happiness. Thus, for most people happiness and the knowledge to achieve the ultimate ends should take the form of imaginary representations rather than rational concepts.

It seems that Spinoza was influenced by Alfarabi's doctrine of political and social imagination, especially in his critique of theology and religious exegesis in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Spinoza's distinction between the elite and the vulgar, which is rooted in the epistemological distinction between the intellect and the imagination, was adopted from Alfarabi's political thought. In Spinoza's ideal political community all men live and act in accordance with rationality, not based on the imagination or passions. However, since people do not always act reasonably, the imagination is inevitable to achieve a well-ordered community. Thus, rational politics cannot be realized without recourse to the imagination. It is imagination that provides the link between the social creation of integration and the stability of the state.

Drawing on Paul Ricoeur's conception of the social imaginary and its socio-political functions (integration and legitimization), my paper aims to demonstrate Spinoza's theory of imagination and its political implications with a special focus on its Islamic origins. I will claim that, although Spinoza, as a rationalist philosopher, did not have a positive attitude toward the imagination in his epistemology, as a political philosopher he was the first thinker of early modernity who accepted the significance of the imagination, both in the social integration of the civil society and in the political legitimization of the state. I will also argue that, in this regard, Spinoza was to a great extent inspired by Islamic (and particularly Farabian) philosophy. In the final section, I will discuss the differences between the classical-Islamic conception of the imagination and the modern conception provided by Spinoza. In Islamic philosophy, the focus is either on imaginative faculty or ontological aspects of the imagination while in Spinozist philosophy, what is of relevance is a social and intersubjective theory of imagination.

Gil Morejón (DePaul University), “Imaginary Authority and Critical Immanence: Spinoza’s Critique of Miracles”

Much recent scholarship has emphasized the positivity and productivity of the imagination in Spinoza’s philosophical anthropology and political theory. While I want to grant that this productive power is real, I will argue that this productivity is necessarily ambivalent, insofar as the imagination always amounts to inadequate knowledge at best. Spinoza is particularly concerned about the political authority that can accrue around these imaginative fictions, and he encourages us to develop adequate knowledge in place of such imaginary representations. In this paper I will analyze Spinoza’s critique of miracles in chapters IV and VI of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to explore this ambivalence of the power of the imagination in the constitution of social life. I will show that one of Spinoza’s primary concerns in developing this critique is to undermine the efforts of agents and institutions to utilize imaginary fictions in order to assert and secure their epistemic and political authority. For Spinoza, invocations of miracles are a paradigm case of this operation. My aim in the paper is to argue that the genuine recognition of the creative and productive powers of the imagination in Spinoza’s theory of political life should be tempered by his insistence on the essential inadequacy of the imagination and his rationalist commitment to disempowering inadequate ideas through philosophical analysis and criticism.

Ki-myung Kim (Freie Universität Berlin), “What Would The Institution Of The Universal Faith In Democracy Look Like?”

In this presentation, I first look into the problem of the apparent contradiction between Spinoza’s proposal of state-authoritarian religious policy in TTP 19 and his liberal conviction of religious freedom and tolerance in TTP 20 and read this as a product of his republican political strategies: 1. Weakening the power of clerical leaders, top-down and bottom-up at the same time. 2. Making/educating democratic citizens through religious institutions, practices of love (tolerance/solidarity) and obedience (loyalty), and everyone’s open and free reading of the Bible. Spinoza coined doctrines of the universal faith (*fides universalis*, TTP 14) as a part of this political strategy. However, in TTP, he was silent about the concrete form of religious institutions based on the doctrines. It is TP where he mentions such matters in relation to the three different constitutional forms. He designs for the aristocratic constitution a religious system consist of a single state church of patricians and statesmen based on universal faith and small sects of the ruled (TP 8:46), whereas for the monarchy, the framework of universal religion or state church is disregarded (TP 6:4). Unfortunately, we cannot find what Spinoza concretely drafted as the multitude’s religious life in a democratic state because the TP is not complete. However, we can see two general principles in both cases and in TTP for deducing the democratic one: 1. There needs to be a common religious fundament, especially in a state where the political sovereignty is not in the hands of a single individual but of the plural subjects because the religious diversity among the rulers has the potential for conflict. 2. The multitude’s freedom of belief cannot be abolished entirely in any form of Government because the extent of its diversity and the magnitude of its power make that an impossible task. Democracy is a political constitution in which a multitude both rules and is ruled. Therefore, the common religious fundamental in Democracy does not mean an established institution such as a state church, but rather a civic movement that should continuously make up common practices in the multi-confessional society.

Steph Marston (Birkbeck, University of London), “Recognition-rebellion-freedom – emergent identities in Spinoza’s political philosophy”

I have argued (‘Identity, Agreement and Othering: Spinoza’s Politics of Recognition’, *In Circolo* 8, 2019) that Spinoza’s philosophy frames a politics of partial recognition in which collective entities, from community groups to states and supra-state bodies, may be understood as outcomes of shared imaginings of empowerment grounded in partial recognition of agreement in nature among people. One challenge presented by this reading of Spinoza is that the process of forging such collective entities in effect reifies political imaginaries which include some people at the expense of excluding others: in effect, some people are recognised as not agreeing in nature, and are consequently excluded from full participation in the collective. In this situation, we might wonder whether and how, on Spinoza’s account, it is possible for excluded or oppressed groups of people to claim and achieve the kind of positive recognition which is an essential precondition for realising freedom and empowerment in the state. If exclusion is intrinsic to the existence of a state – if, for example, its laws place limits on some groups’ political, social or economic rights relative to others – then on Spinoza’s own account in the concluding chapters of the *TTP*, people within those groups risk being cast as rebels merely by seeking, or indeed wishing, to live in the same way as their neighbours.

The effects of states enacting such partial recognition have been articulated by liberation struggles past and present. In the *TTP* Spinoza offers various grounds for critiquing a state which fails to respond to claims for recognition from among its citizens, but ultimately none of these seems to function as a constraint on those who rule. I suggest that the rebel in Spinoza’s philosophy functions as a negative exemplar, disrupting established narratives and institutions and gesturing towards the inadequacy of their origins. A rebel thus stands at the limit of the political, where the emergent *potentia* of lived experience transcends the constituted *potentia* of the state. I hope to offer an indicative exploration of how this reading can be seen to impose an imperative on those who hold political power to respond to excluded groups’ claims to recognition.

Nicolas Lema Habash (University of Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne), “Spinoza’s Political Exception? The Problem of Sovereign Interruption in the *Theological-Political Treatise*”

In chapter 19 of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (TTP), Spinoza says: “I explicitly warned that everyone is bound to keep faith even with a Tyrant, *except* [excepto] someone to whom God, by a certain revelation, had promised special aid against the Tyrant.” (G. III, 233; trans. Curley. My italics). The notion of “exception” in this passage stands as a problematic aspect of Spinoza’s account of political authority. How could we explain this idea of “exception” within a philosophical system that (1) rejects the presence of any exception in the realm of nature as a whole (hence Spinoza’s denial of the belief in miracles), and that likewise (2) criticizes any act of disobedience in the domain of politics? Following the spirit of this conference, my aim in this presentation is to develop two related hypotheses which shape the argument of a work-in-progress paper. First, in analyzing the concept of “exception” in this fragment of chapter 19, I argue that this notion relates to a Spinozist account of rebellion in the face of a violent sovereign. Such a conception of rebellion is anchored in a political analysis of the true life (*vera vita*) of Christ and his disciples, but it extends into the role of resistance against the sovereign played by other figures depicted towards the end of the TTP, such as the “honest ones” (*honesti*). The second related hypothesis I will develop establishes that Spinoza’s notion of exception could be fruitfully studied in light of more contemporary theories of political exception. In this sense, I argue that

this Spinozist idea of exception should be understood as close to Walter Benjamin's idea of "divine violence." It thus implies an interruption in the order of authority from an immanent perspective, founded in the bodily experience of those suffering sovereign violence. This Benjaminian-Spinozist perspective of exception should be contrasted with Carl Schmitt's, where political exception is considered as a miracle-like event, performed by the sovereign himself. I conclude that the link between Spinoza and Benjamin, in relation to this specific issue of an imminent exception and rebellion, opens up new perspectives to study the problem of counter-power in Spinozist political philosophy.

Marie Wuth (University of Aberdeen), "Daily Invectives: The State of Bitter Hate"

Hearts cannot be commanded but they still are under the control of the supreme power and so it is in the State's hands what the citizens are passionate about. In the TTP, Spinoza describes how day in, day out, through rituals and worship not only patriotic love but also hatred for other nations was written into the hearts of the citizens of the Hebrew State. Daily invectives engendered ingrained hate that was all the more tenacious and fatal as it was believed to be a religious duty. In this concatenation with piety and love grows the bitterest hatred there is. Following Spinoza, the Hebrews lived in a State of bitter hate and even though hate contributed to the State's durability and resilience it was also a pivotal cause for its downfall.

In this paper, I shall elaborate on the contributive role of institutionalized ethnic hatred in the corrosion of a body politic from the inside and outside. Daily recurring, publicly performed invectives represent forms of such institutionalized hate and belong to a politics of images. The latter refers, among other things, to the targeted dissemination and instrumentalization of images, pictorially or mentally, for political purposes, but also to the deliberate affective connotation of images and the determination of their meaning. I shall show that the narrative of the Hebrew's election and exceptional position as God's children are examples for such politics and inextricably linked to the Hebrew's hate for other nations. Against this background, I shall focus on two aspects of institutionalized ethnic hate that are i) the governance of hearts and ii) the strive for separation and displacement of others. I will conclude that Spinoza's explanations of the demise of the Hebrew State provide the basis for two arguments against institutionalized ethnic hatred and racial imaginaries that are oriented towards external affairs and domestic affairs.