

“In Truth the Purpose of the State Is Freedom.”¹

Spinoza on the Political Character of the Relationship Between Religion and Philosophy

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For in truth he is the most slave who
is so torn by his desires that he neither
can recognize his advantage nor act upon it,
and he alone is free who lives with all his
heart only according to the guidance of reason.²

The talk addresses the relationship between religion and philosophy by taking recourse to their *tertium comparationis*, viz., the political. The basic text of reference for the proposed political reading of religion and philosophy is Spinoza's revolutionary and scandalous work, *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (*Theological-Political Treatise*; Amsterdam 1670). Against the background of contemporary religious dissent and disputes Spinoza maintains the political character of religion, the original difference between philosophy and religion and the essential role of both philosophy and religion for political life. In contrast to earlier and later attempts at determining the relationship between religion and philosophy as one of conflict, compatibility or competition, Spinoza stresses the radical heterogeneity of faith and knowledge and the specifically different functions of religion and of philosophy for the maintenance of the commonwealth. Spinoza's ingenious linkage of an Enlightenment critique of religion and a philosophical-political defense of religion is discussed with an eye toward its analytic potential for dealing, in theory as well as in practice, with political, religious and philosophical cultures in the current age of a global exchange of material and immaterial goods. The presentation is in two part. Part One reviews the political course of the relation between religion and philosophy in the West. Part Two presents Spinoza's political defense of philosophy's freedom from religion.³

1 Spinoza, *Opera/Werke*, Latin and German, ed. Günter Gawlick and Friedrich Niewöhner, vol. 2. *Tractatus theologico-politicus/Theologisch-Politischer Traktat* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1979), Chapter 20, p. 604: "Finis ergo reipublicae revera libertas est." In what follows, references to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* employ the standard abbreviation "TTP," followed by the numerical indication of the chapter in question, with additional page references to the Latin-German edition specified above. English translations from the Latin original of the TTP are my own.

2 TTP 16, p. 480.

3 Due to the general and comparative character of the presentation, crucial questions about the relation between Spinoza's political philosophy and his metaphysics-cum-ethics, as contained in the *Ethics* (post. 1677) and about the relation of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* to Spinoza's later, incomplete second work in political philosophy, *Tractatus Politicus* (post. 1677), cannot be addressed here. The same holds for the vexing question of how to read, understand and interpret the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* as a work in and about biblical hermeneutics addressed to philosophers in the presence of a non-philosophical audience. On the latter point, see Leo Strauss, "How to Study Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*," in id.: *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. New York 1952, pp. 142-201.

1. Philosophy Within Religion

Viewed from outside – especially from an Asian perspective – Europe, along with its former descendant and current distant relative – (North and South) America –, appears as a set of cultures steeped in a strong and lasting religious tradition that still permeates many facets of the social, political, intellectual and artistic life in Europe and America today. Regardless of the wide-spread different self-perception of the urban elites in the Old World and the New World, Europe and America present themselves, from the viewpoint of Asia, especially East Asia, as quintessentially Christian, or rather Judeo-Christian: marked by a revelatory monotheism, a theocratic ethics (expressed in the decalogue), a more or less strong belief in a personal afterlife and a sense of individual moral obligation and of the freedom the latter entails. Already at the most superficial level, a visitor to Europe or America from the Far East must be struck by the sheer number of churches and other places of worship – old and new, large and small, richly ornate and of austere simplicity – that can be encountered in every town or village on those two continents.

Conversely, the view from Europe and America toward Asia, especially East Asia, notices not only the staggering signs of modern economic, social and cultural urban life, but also the historical remnants and current indications of religious traditions dating back centuries and even millenia. Cities and the landscape in between them are dotted with shrines and temples. In some parts of Eastern Asia the modes of religious presence are colorful and shrill, in other places they are sober and restrained. But they are in evidence all the same. Life seems infused with religious beliefs and practices. Even in China, where the so-called Cultural Revolution sought to eradicate religious life along with all other forms of “false class consciousness,” religion is coming to the fore again. China, South Korea and Japan, each in their own way, present to the Western observer the image of modern, modernized or modernizing cultures steeped in distinct religious traditions, chiefly those of Buddhism and Confucianism, that link past and present and join them in a common difference from the West dominated by Christianity – or from the Middle East, large parts of Africa and other parts of Asia marked by the third monotheistic world religion, Islam.

But the mutual perception of the religiously defined identity of (Judeo-)Christian Europe and America, on the one side, and Confucian and Buddhist Eastern Asia, on the other side, is not limited to culture at large. It also pertains to art, which for the longest time and for the most part has been religious art or religiously influence art in the West as well as in the East. In a world-historical perspective the dissociation of art from religion and the development of an first aristocratic and then a bourgeois art scene and art market still occurs against the background of established religions, which can be seen as thereby supplementing or sublimating their prescriptions and practices in a worldly mode.

The same holds, in essence, for the philosophical traditions in the West and the Far East. Considered on a global scale, Western philosophy has been for the longest time and still remains these days informed by Christian beliefs, while Far Eastern thinking still reflects the shaping influence of Confucian and Buddhist cultural assumptions and practices. Even where Western philosophy seeks to emancipate itself from religious tutelage, the resultant product, seemingly secular to the point of being religiously indifferent or even anti-religious, still reflects the particulars of the religious traditions from which liberation is sought. As the very origin of the term, “emancipation,” in the Roman legal practice of disenslavement reveals: a *freed* slave is still a freed *slave*. A catholic turned atheist is still a catholic atheist. And so, *mutatis mutandis*, with other world philosophies and their continued clandestine complicity with other world religions.

To be sure, Western philosophy has not always been Judeo-Christian in character. The very origin of philosophy in the West predated the emergence of Christianity by half a millennium and develops over many centuries without undergoing an influence by Jewish or early Christian teachings and beliefs.

Philosophy first emerges in the West among the flourishing Greek colonies in Asia Minor (today's Western Turkey) and in Southern Italy, including Sicily. It arises in a socio-historical situation marked by the encounter and exchange of different cultures, in particular through cultural contacts of the Ionic Greeks with Asia under the shape of the Persian Empire. Early Greek philosophy – the Presocratics, as they are labeled after their *terminus ante quem* – arises in an intellectual climate of rapidly increasing cognitions and expanding horizons. The first Greek philosophers are innovative scientists (*physiologoi*) and social reformers, and highly individual and prominently visible characters at that.

With the political reforms in pre- and proto-democratic Athens and the ensuing culture of public debate and decision making philosophy, in moving to the Greek motherland, becomes more civic and geared toward matters of ethics and politics. At the same time, classical Greek philosophy turns away from the particulars of a given state of social order to critically assess traditional and current claims to insight into the nature of things natural and cultural. The very term, "philosophy," as coined and self-applied by the students of Socrates, chiefly among them Plato and Xenophon, already reflects the distance taken by philosophy as the "loving pursuit of wisdom" from the pretense to natural science and social knowledge on the part of self-proclaimed wise men ("sophists").

In its relation to religion pre-Socratic philosophy – in particular, Ionic philosophy of nature – had taken up traditional polytheistic beliefs and cultural practices into cosmological and theogonic speculations on the origin and gradual growth of the world and its divine order. What might appear as materialist explanations of nature through one or more elements – such as water, air or fire – actually functions as philosophical transformations of established religious beliefs into an emerging scientific discourse about the origins (*archai*) and causes (*aitiai*) of things. In essence, early Greek philosophy is intent on an intellectual purification of religious beliefs and practices. Philosophy's critical relation to religion is one of sympathetic amendment rather than an antipathy against religion. This might even be said to hold for Xenophanes, whose critique of the anthropomorphism inherent in polytheism can be seen to prepare the path toward a more adequate and genuinely philosophical conception of the divine.

The gap between Greek philosophy and Greek religion, and for that matter between philosophy and religion in the West, first opens up through the trial by jury, the condemnation to death and the execution of Socrates on, among other accusations, charges of impiety (*asebeia*) or of disrespects for the gods worshipped by the citizenry of Athens and believed to sustain the city in its functioning and flourishing. The lack of piety on the part of Socrates, as perceived by his fellow citizens, is a lack of reverence for the guarantors of the civic order and hence a lack of civil obedience. Socrates is on trial for a *déformation professionnelle* that has the philosopher investigate and question every alleged authority in and about the city, from the rhetorician, sophist and politician to the priest and mantic, and implicitly challenge and threaten the social and civic order.

The trauma of Socrates' trial by Athen's democratic judicial system on politico-religious charges of civil disobedience contributed greatly to the distance that his two most important and influential students and followers, Plato and Xenophon, took from Athenian political life and its democratic values. Xenophon became an admirer of the Spartan way of life, extolling its manly virtues of bravery, militarism and a rustic mind-set and implicitly critiquing Athen's focus on urbanity, artistry and politicking (*polituein*). Plato turned tyrant advisor, failing in his attempt to reform Syracuse by reforming its rulers, before establishing on the outskirts of Athens the prototype of Western higher learning through the linkage of research and teaching in splendid social isolation, viz., the Academy. In Plato's work religion mainly is present as the mythical element and medium of philosophy – as tall tales to be told and shared under the willing suspense of disbelief.

In Aristotle, the scientist-philosopher *par excellence*, the philosophical treatment of religion turns theoretical, religion becoming theology and theology becoming metaphysics. By contrast, religion

figures only marginally in Aristotle's practical philosophy, which, separate from the scientific claims of metaphysics, deals with the social forms and norms of individual and civic life in the *polis* under external circumstance no longer favorable to the requisite political freedom (*eleutheria*). The politically motivated dissociation of philosophy and religion increases with the inclusion of formerly free Greece into the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great and his multi-dynastic successors (*diadochi*) and eventually into the Roman Empire. Hellenistic philosophy is private and personal rather than public and political, even where – as in Stoicism – the ethically self-disciplined wise person dutifully fulfills the social obligations of governmental offices. In the other main post-classical Greek philosophical movement – Epicureanism – the philosophical retreat from the political is even more extreme and, moreover, coupled with the removal of the things divine from the world entirely. The Epicurean therapy against fear and trembling locates the Gods in the splendid isolation of some intercosmic outer space where no amount of sacrifice and veneration is able to reach them just as little as they show concern for the world of the humans that is governed by the mechanical laws of a materialistically conceived nature.

After the Greek and Roman integration of religion into public life and the allied social separation of philosophy from religion, the advent of Christianity, first in the Mediterranean world and eventually in the north of Europe and beyond, involves a strong and lasting suffusion of public and private life with the new religion and a dominant role of religious beliefs in the further development of philosophical thinking in the West. A major step toward the systematic subordination of philosophy under Christianity is the transition of the new creed from the religion of a politically persecuted and socially marginal minority to a state religion designed to occupy the emptied spiritual center left void by the decentralized polytheistic, multiethnic and pluritraditional religious cults of the later Roman Empire. In the process Christianity evolves from a small devoted community expecting the imminent establishment of the realm of peace and the kingdom of the heavens to a church gathering and guiding its growing number of believers and bent on exercising worldly influence and control.

Accordingly, medieval Europe north and south of the Alps and in the West-Roman, Roman-Catholic as well as the East-Roman, Orthodox sphere (Byzantium) is dominated by a church turned worldly empire and an empire turned Christian (*imperium sacrum*). Philosophy, once the prerogative of the educated elite of the free Greek city states and the Roman equestrian and senatorial classes, is domesticated into the role of the handmaiden of Christian theology (*ancilla theologiae*). Divine revelation as preserved in wholly scriptures (Old and New Testament), and not the free human being, is the measure of all things. Even where a separate realm of truths to be discerned by reason alone is conceded, the ultimate epistemic value resides with revealed truth and its doctrinal codification in dogmatic theology.

It is not until the rediscovery of the learning, the literature, the arts and the philosophy of the ancient world in the twin miracle of the modern world – scholarly *humanism* and cultural *renaissance* – in northern Italy and Northwestern Europe that the historical originality and contemporary actuality of Greek and Roman philosophical thought is being ascertained and appreciated anew, albeit still under conditions that do not favor philosophically motivated religious dissent or criticism. Further philosophical freedom from the fetters of religion comes about as the result of the unitary and all-encompassing, catholic church undergoing dissension and division in the Protestant reformation and its political fall-out, viz., the division of Europe along confessional lines and the analogous internal division of the German lands.

To be sure, the weakening of Rome's hold over Christian Europe goes together with, and in fact enables, the rise to eminence of the sovereign European nation states, effectively shifting the social control of philosophical thought from the church to the state and hence from theological to political grounds. Moreover, in modern Europe religion in its multiple confessional modes has served and often

still serves the essentially political function of ensuring civil obedience and controlling curiosity and originality in matters of science and art. Under these circumstances it should come as no surprise that often the arena for modern philosophical thought has been the theory and critique of political power. From Machiavelli and Hobbes through Locke and Montesquieu to Rousseau and Kant modern philosophy, to a large extent, has been political philosophy, a sustained philosophical reflection on the grounds, the justification and the limits of the sovereign territorial state, including the possible or actual role of religion in the modern state and in relation to the modern state. Under the conditions of modernity the relation of philosophy and religion has been mediated by politics and examined by political philosophy.

2. Philosophy Without Religion

The most radical and original early modern contribution to political thinking about the place of religion in the state and about the relation between religion and philosophy in view of the nature of the state is Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, which appeared anonymously in Amsterdam in 1670, with a false identification of the name and place of the publisher. Spinoza was well advised to hide his authorship and cover up the circumstances of its publication, which however were revealed soon enough. The book undertakes a thorough and unrelenting examination of the origin, the nature and the function of religion as based on the revelation contained in the Hebrew bible and its Christian sequel, the New Testament. In particular, Spinoza examines the composition and authorship of the Bible with an eye toward the political, social and cultural circumstances surrounding it. Besides being one of the earliest and most daring examples of biblical criticism, the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is a substantial piece of political philosophy, both in the historical and descriptive perspective of elucidating the political conditions and goals of Hebrew religion and in the systematic and normative perspective of justifying and adjudicating the proper place of religion in the civil society of the modern state.

In many ways Spinoza was uniquely suited to the formidable task of a critique of religion from the perspective of political philosophy. As a member of the Amsterdam Jewish community whose merchant family had fled Portugal for fear of persecution in spite of their earlier nominal conversion to Catholicism, Spinoza, who lived from 1632 to 1677, grew up in an economically and culturally flourishing trade town at the center of the United Provinces (*Generalstaaten*) of the Netherlands, which had only recently achieved their independence from Habsburg rule. For a brief period of time the northern half of the Low Countries were a commonwealth or republic in the ancient vein, almost democratically governed and involving widespread governmental participation of the populace. Moreover, after its separation from the southern, Catholic, Habsburg-governed Low Countries the Dutch Republic, for a brief period of time, became a place of religious toleration in a surrounding world still marked by the close association of religious creed and political rule. Already within a few years after the publication of the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, the Dutch Republic ended in a mass revolt and the reinstatement of bigotry and prejudice. In 1674 the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* was banned by the Dutch government, along with Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Needless to mention that Spinoza's works, in fact all of his posthumous works –comprising all but one of his publications – were placed on the index of books forbidden by the Catholic Church (*Index librorum prohibitorum*), an honor he shares with, among others, Immanuel Kant, specifically the latter's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

But rather than simply enjoying the liberal political and religious climate of his home country Spinoza sought to profit of the Dutch freedom in religious matters by critically distancing himself from the orthodox views of his own religious community. As a result of his dissenting views becoming known, the Jewish community formally excommunicated Spinoza from their midst (the Hebrew term for the ban is *cherem*) on 27 July 1656 (almost to the day 354 years ago), at the age of 23, setting him onto a

solitary course of life that was to lead him to radical philosophical work undertaken in complete liberty from the structures and strictures of traditional communal life. So intent was Spinoza on preserving his intellectual freedom that he declined the offer of a professorship at the University of Heidelberg in 1673, citing his concern that the academic freedom which had been promised to him might not extend far enough to cover religious matters.⁴ To maintain his personal freedom, Spinoza trained himself as a lens grinder, who became famous and sought after by leading scientists of the day for the quality and precision of his optical work.

The biographical constellation of (short-lived) communal religious tolerance and (continuing) personal religious dissent also animates Spinoza's project in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. The general reflection on biblical interpretation and the particular points about the political theology of the biblical Hebrews serve the larger purpose of rationally determining the essence of religion, the origin and nature of the state and the relation between religious and political authority. The particular focus for the double investigation of religion and politics in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is the special status of philosophy with regard to religious and political matters. For Spinoza the civic and social status of philosophy turns on its essential requirement of free thinking unfettered by prejudice and superstition. Philosophical freedom (*libertas philosophandi*) consists in the ability to engage in critical thinking geared at the discovery of the nature of things as they are, unperturbed by the admixture of prior positions, presuppositions and preferences.

Moreover, the freedom of philosophical thinking envisioned by Spinoza is not to be limited to personal reflections in the solitude of one's private life but includes the freedom to present one's philosophical work to a learned audience or readership for scrutiny and discussion. Spinoza here prepares the way for the theory and practice of free intellectual exchange developed further in the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Some one hundred years after Spinoza Immanuel Kant was to tie the unfettered use of one's own understanding constitutive of enlightened thinking to the ability and requirement of the public use, rather than the merely private employment of one's intellect and hence to the exposure of individual thinking to socially mediated conditions of supra-individual assent or dissent.⁵

In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* Spinoza's ulterior concern with the political conditions of the possibility of philosophical thought finds its most poignant expression in the double thesis expressed in the work's subtitle, which anticipates the work's climax and conclusion. Spinoza announces on the title page that the otherwise unnamed disquisitions contained in the work (*dissertationes*) are to show that the freedom to philosophize (*libertas philosophandi*) not only can be granted without harm to (religious) piety (*pietas*) and peace in the republic or state (*pax reipublicae*) but that the freedom to philosophize can be taken away only together with that very piety and peace in the state. Hence Spinoza's central claim in the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* is twofold: it asserts, negatively, that philosophical freedom does not pose a threat to religion ("piety") and politics ("peace in the republic"), and it maintains, positively, that philosophical freedom is an indispensable condition for both religious and political prospering.

The first half of Spinoza theologico-political double claim about philosophy and the freedom it requires mainly concerns the immunity of religion from philosophy, while the second half chiefly affects the political benefits of unfettered philosophizing. In order to address the former claim Spinoza undertakes a critical reevaluation of revealed religion. In order to deal with the latter assertion he

4 See letter 48 to J. Ludwig Fabrius. German translation Baruch de Spinoza, Briefwechsel, transl. and annotated Carl Gerhardt. 3rd ed. with introduction, appendix and extended bibliography Manfred Walther (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986), pp. 206f.

5 On the linkage between enlightenment and publicity in Kant, see Günter Zöllner, "Kant, Fichte und die Aufklärung," in *Fichte und die Aufklärung*, ed. Carla De Pascale, Erich Fuchs, Marco Ivaldo and Günter Zöllner (Hildesheim/Zurich/New York: Olms, 2005), pp. 35-52 and id., "Aufklärung über Aufklärung. Kants Konzeption des selbständigen, öffentlichen und gemeinschaftlichen Gebrauchs der Vernunft," in *Kant und die Zukunft der europäischen Aufklärung*, ed. Heiner F. Klemme (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 82-99.

undertakes a critical reevaluation of state politics. The upshot of the joined consideration of the proper grounds and boundaries of religious and political authority is the "free state" (*libera respublica*), in which everyone is allowed to think what they want and to say what they think.⁶

Spinoza's determination of the boundaries between religion and philosophy turns on the dissociation of the practice of religion from the theoretical enterprise of knowledge about matters divine or theology. In detailed critical analyses of the bible texts Spinoza establishes the general political character and the specific political strategies behind the biblical narrations and prescriptions. In particular, he stresses the historical need of the spiritual and political leaders to address the Hebrew people on their own terms and in a manner consistent with their mode of thinking. Interestingly, Spinoza does not follow the simplistic vulgar Enlightenment ideology of charging priests and prophets with deceit and the willful fabrication and dispersion of untruth. Rather prophets, priests and their people all share, on Spinoza's critical assessment, the limited viewpoint of their times and circumstances, which is responsible for the numerous extraneous additions that the divine law (*lex divina*) has received over time and in different places.

Once the popular translations are identified and removed, the underlying "true primal scripture" (*verum legis divinae syngraphum*) emerges, which contains only the divine law or command itself void of all prejudicial and superstitious interpretations.⁷ According to Spinoza, the original, pure divine law at the core of revealed religion is to love God more than oneself and one's neighbor as much as oneself (*Deum supra omnia amare et proximum tanquam se ipsum*).⁸ Hence the sole divine law limits the exercise of self-love by the imposed consideration of what is above and besides everyone, viz., the divine being and fellow human beings, respectively. On Spinoza's understanding, the one and only divine law is not contained in a particular piece of writing, just as the bible is not to be considered "a letter which God sent to the human beings from the heavens."⁹ Rather the divine command is inscribed into the hearts of human beings, and of all human beings at that, not just that of the Jews or the Christians. The "true religion" (*vera religio*), as reconstructed by Spinoza, is a universal religion involving the universal law of love or the law of universal love.¹⁰ Its revelation is not scriptural but cordial.

The radical consequence to be drawn from the critical reduction of externally revealed religion to universally inscribed religion is the non-cognitivist character of true, purified religion in Spinoza. Religion is not geared toward some cognition that could only be ascertained through divine inspiration and revelation. The sole teaching of religion proper is both simple to grasp and easy to execute. Religion as such does not involve, imply or include sublime speculations, or any philosophical thought for that matter, but only what each and every human being is capable of understanding and carrying out: obedience to the divine law.¹¹ By contrast, the knowledge of God himself is a matter not of religion but of philosophy and is, moreover, not essential to the sole true purpose of religion, viz., to inculcate obedience to the divine law of universal love.

Accordingly, religious faith and philosophical insight are generically distinct, with the former involving claims to obedience and hence the pursuit of piety and the latter involving knowledge claims and hence the pursuit of truth.¹² In political terms, the separation of religion and philosophy, or of faith and

6 TTP 20, p. 600.

7 TTP 12, p. 392.

8 TTP 12, p. 408; cf. also TTP 4, p. 136.

9 TTP 12, p. 392.

10 TTP 12, p. 392.

11 TTP 13, p. 412.

12 TTP 14, p. 442.

knowledge, on Spinoza's view, allows to disengage religious practices from contentious truth claims and to assure that human beings of different religious persuasions can "live in peace and accord" (*pacifice et concorditer vivere*).¹³ Inversely, the practical restriction of religion to matters of obedience and piety leaves everyone the "complete freedom to philosophize" (*summa libertas ad philosophandum*) and limits charges of heresy and sectarianism to those teaching disobedience and impiety.¹⁴

In the *Tractatus theologico-politicus* Spinoza supplements his extensive defense of philosophical freedom against the traditional excessive claims of religion and theology with an analogous defense of philosophical freedom against the traditional excessive claims of the state and politics. While Spinoza joins Hobbes¹⁵ and other early modern political thinkers in defending the supreme authority of the state in matters of civil life, he understands the pre-civil condition not as one marked by lawlessness and the absence of right but as one in which might and right coincide. Originally the right of every human individual – and hence his freedom - extends as far as his might does.¹⁶ The state comes about when enlightened self-interest in living securely and well motivates the originally free and naturally entitled individuals to vest the right and might that each of them holds individually into the might and will of a social whole or civil society.

According to Spinoza, the most natural form of state governance and the one that remains most faithful to the origin of the might and right of the state in the free acts of free individuals is "democracy" (*democratia*) or "a general union of human beings who in its entirety possesses the highest right to all to which it has the might" (*coetus universus hominum, qui collegialiter summum jus ad omnia, quae potest, habet*).¹⁷ In pragmatic terms, Spinoza maintains the collective rationality of "democratic governance" (*democraticum imperium*) and its relative stability in comparison to tyrannical or dictatorial rule.¹⁸ Given the ultimate origin and the ulterior purpose of the state in freedom, that state is most free, according to Spinoza, the laws of which are based on sound reason and which thereby allows everyone, more precisely, every full citizen, to wholeheartedly pursue a life under the guidance of reason.¹⁹

For Spinoza the transfer of right from the individuals to the state has its natural, normative and its practical, factual limit in the residual freedom of the individual. In particular, no one is able to transfer, or can be forced to transfer, his natural right or ability to free reasoning and judging upon another such individual or a body politic. Any attempt on the part of a state to take total control of the lives and minds of its citizens violating this principal limitation of state action – as undertaken historically in the theocratic regime of the Hebrews after their escape from Egypt – is prone to rebellion and is likely to result in the perishing of such an absolute state.²⁰ For Spinoza liberal democracy - the free state of free citizens - therefore entails the political control of religious life aimed at taming the theocratic, politically theological as well as theologically political ambitions of believers and their leaders who claim exclusive possession of insight and promote or even engage in the suppression of political and intellectual freedom.

In particular, Spinoza argues for the political limitation of religion to the inculcation of (religious) piety

13 TTP 14, p. 440.

14 TTP 14, p. 442.

15 Spinoza certainly knew Hobbes' early work in political philosophy, *De cive* (1642), and may also have been familiar with Hobbes' later master piece, *Leviathan* (1651, Latin edition 1670).

16 TTP 16.

17 TTP 16, pp. 476/478.

18 TTP 16, p. 478.

19 TTP 16, p. 480.

20 TTP 17.

and (political) obedience and denies the right of a religion, in fact, of any religion, to establish a particular realm or empire (*imperium*), in the manner of a religious state of theocracy, among human beings apart from and in addition to the and only empire under which individuals are to live and flourish, viz., the civil state.²¹ At the political level and for political reasons, religion is to be restricted to the outward "exercise of piety" (*pietatis exercitio*) and to the observance of "external religious cult" (*externus religionis cultus*). By contrast, any internal religious service (*Dei internus cultus*), along with or the means for religiously preparing the mind, falls entirely within the right of the individual as guaranteed by the free state and hence eludes regulation through government authority.²² Hence religion and philosophy both benefit from the freedom granted to its free subjects by a state that in turn benefits from and even depends on their respective civic contributions – civil obedience and critical intelligence – and that in permitting and even encouraging to think what one wishes and to express what one thinks, shows itself to be a true state, a state true to its purpose, viz., freedom.²³

Source: <http://philosophie-religion.de/pdf/in-truth-the-purpose-of-the-state-is-freedom.pdf>

For more information on the conference "Philosophie und Religion" see philosophie-religion.de

21 TTP 19, pp. 572, 574, 576.

22 TTP 19, pp. 572/574.

23 TTP 20, p. 604.