

Benedict Spinoza on the Naturalness of Democracy^{*}

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Abstract

Benedict Spinoza is arguably the first important political philosopher to endorse democracy as the best government. He does so primarily on the basis of the claim that it is the most natural regime. However, there are features of Spinoza's argument that complicate efforts to interpret his understanding of the naturalness of democracy, especially (i) the tension between his claims about the naturalness and rationality of democracy; and (ii) uncertainty about Spinoza's attitude toward the natural end or goal of political life. This study argues that Spinoza's claims about the naturalness of democracy are only fully intelligible in light of the connection between his metaphysics, on the one hand, and his conception of political right, on the other. We conclude that Spinoza believed the naturalness, and hence superiority, of democracy rests on its capacity to promote a formative purpose that includes both the perfection of social construction in the state and the intellectual and moral development of individuals.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Benedict Spinoza's political philosophy is his defense of democracy as the best form of government. Indeed, as one commentator observed with only slight exaggeration, Spinoza is arguably "the first democrat in the history of philosophy" (Feuer 1980: 139). Spinoza bases the superiority of democracy primarily on the claim that democracy is the most natural regime. It is most natural in the sense that democracy "approaches most closely to the freedom nature bestows on every person."¹ It is also the most rational regime in the sense that a large collectivity of individuals is supposedly less subject to irrational and destructive passions than a monarch or aristocratic elite.² For Spinoza, it is the naturalness and inherent rationality of democracy that thus place it at the peak of political possibilities.

However, there are features of Spinoza's argument that complicate efforts to interpret the meaning of his endorsement of democracy. First, as several commentators have noted (Smith 1997: 121-22; Smith 2003: 132-33; Mara 1982: 142; Rosen 1987: 467), despite his claims about the rationality of democracy, Spinoza's writings are replete with pessimistic expressions about the capacity of the "multitude" to act rationally (TP 1.5, 2.18; TTP 16.3).³ More importantly,

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Spinoza's unflattering account of human beings in a state of nature, in which all individuals are "by nature enemies" (TP 2.14), indicates that there is a tension between the naturalness of an institution and its capacity to provide adequately for human needs (McShea 1968: 82; Battisti 1977: 631-2). As Spinoza presents the natural condition it is, among all the possibilities for human life, arguably the least characterized by reason.

Finally, there is considerable debate about how Spinoza's account of democracy relates to the broader question of his attitude toward political life in general. On the one hand, many commentators maintain that Spinoza is essentially a liberal individualist for whom the aim of political life is the rather low Hobbesian goal of providing for basic physical needs, primarily self-preservation (Gildin 1973: 385; Geismann 1991; DenUyl 1983: 166-67; Mara 1982: 135-36; Curley 1996: 331). According to this *minimalist* interpretation, Spinoza viewed any potential higher end for human development as largely independent of political life, the intellectual purview of philosophic individuals rather than mass political society (Strauss 1965: 218-20; DenUyl 2008: 12, 16). Peace and security are the proper goals of government, and democracy simply supplies these better than any other political arrangement.

On the other side of the interpretive divide, the republican reading of Spinoza's political theory emphasizes the *perfectionist* character of his vision of political life as an activity that gives ontological priority to the community over the individual by positing a substantive *telos* or end such as the promotion of moral and intellectual virtue, rather than simply peace (Del Lucchese 2009: 342; Rosenthal 2001: 335; Smith 2003: 144; Smith 2005: 14-17; Kossman 2000: 81; Israel 2004: 26). The meaning of Spinoza's claim about democracy thus obviously depends on whether it is Spinoza's best regime because it most reliably provides for the liberal concern for security of rights, or because it contributes most fully to the classical republican inspired vision of the moral development of individuals, and promotion of civic virtue.

This study addresses these issues by reexamining Spinoza's claims about the naturalness of democracy. It will be shown that his argument is only fully intelligible in light of his conception of the broader aim of political life. This broader aim of political life is, however, illuminated not only in his political writings, but also crucially in his metaphysical works. Despite Spinoza's celebrated attack on the political naiveté of speculative philosophers, we will argue that Spinoza's understanding of the naturalness of democracy depends on metaphysical assumptions embedded in his philosophical accounts of nature and substance. While Balibar (1998), Matheron (1969), Deleuze (1990) and Negri (1991) have previously demonstrated the importance of Spinoza's metaphysics for providing a general understanding of his politics, the present study focuses on the crucial but often overlooked connection Spinoza establishes between democracy and the philosophical conception of substance central to his metaphysics. The naturalness of democracy, then, rests on its capacity to both establish peace and to translate into political and social terms certain formative metaphysical principles.

Spinoza's account of the formative purpose of democracy has two fundamental features. First, democracy is a principle of social construction that he contrasts with the notions of sovereignty and contractualism then regnant in early-modern political philosophy. For Spinoza, democracy is more than just a system of government. Rather the construction of social reality per se is a fundamentally democratic phenomenon, which Spinoza describes in terms of a regime's capacity to form "one mind" from the psychological raw material of self-interested individuals. His argument essentially reduces every political arrangement into categories of more or less

perfect democracies. Thus, democracy is the practical culmination of the philosophical principle of substance. In other words, democracy is the prime socio-political matter out of which all other conceivable arrangements are modifications.

The second fundamental feature of Spinoza's account of democracy is the connection he draws between the formative purpose of democracy, on the one hand, and the proper aim of political life, on the other. According to Spinoza, democracy is the best form of government because it alone among regimes makes the promotion of intellectual and moral development one of the conscious aims of political association. Thus, the superiority of democracy lies in part in its capacity to promote Spinoza's vision of human excellence outlined in his metaphysical work the *Ethics*. Although at first blush metaphysics appears distant from the theoretical concerns raised by democracy, we will demonstrate that Spinoza's ideas of freedom, virtue, and scientific knowledge are in fact deeply embedded in his argument for the naturalness of democracy. Spinoza's conception of democracy thus eludes strict categorization as liberal or republican. It is in the perfectionist mold; however, it is a perfectionism that has roots in the premises of liberal individualism as Spinoza illuminated a complex causal relation between the possibility of human perfection through intellectual development, on the one hand, and the perfection of the political regime embodied in the democratic "free state," on the other.

The argument in this study develops in three main stages. First, we will examine Spinoza's claims about the naturalness and rationality of democracy paying particular attention to the tension between these two aspects of Spinoza's argument for democracy. We will then consider Spinoza's reevaluation of the concept of sovereignty in light of his understanding of the connection between democracy and his metaphysical account of substance. We will conclude by examining Spinoza's presentation of the formative purpose of democracy, and its role in the promotion of human happiness.

Spinoza's Conception of Nature

The argument that democracy is the most natural form of government is central to Spinoza's claim for its superiority. But how exactly is democracy natural and why is what is most natural superior in terms of political arrangements? In order to address these questions, we need to consider how the two distinct accounts of nature presented in Spinoza's political theory, on the one hand, and in his metaphysics, on the other, relate to his idea of democracy.

For our purposes, the key treatment of nature in Spinoza's political writings is his seminal account of the state of nature in chapter 16 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* for it is here he argues that while the foundations of every state derive from "the natural right which everyone possesses," it is democracy that most closely approaches the "freedom nature bestows on every person" (TTP 16.1, 11). By nature, "each individual thing has sovereign right to do everything it can do," and thus natural right is simply "the rules determining the nature of each individual thing" (TTP 16.2). These rules are not moral or ethical, but rather the innate characteristics of species or natural kinds. As Spinoza explains: "fish are determined by nature to swim and big fish eat little ones" (TTP 16.2). The natural root of the political equality associated with democracy is clearly visible in the "supreme law of nature," which requires nothing more than that "each thing strives to persist in its own state so far as it can" (TTP 16.2). This morally blameless natural preservationist striving or "*conatus*" is possessed by every creature and is subject to the same universal limitation: "what no one desires or no one can do" (TTP 16.4).⁴

Not only are all fish constrained to inhabit water and big fish blamelessly eat little fish, but as Spinoza relates: "There is in Nature no individual thing that is not surpassed in strength and power by some other thing...by which the said thing can be destroyed" (E 4.ax. 105), i.e., there is always a bigger fish. The logic of the *conatus*-driven striving in the state of nature culminates in Spinoza's striking claim that "the right of each thing extends so far as its determined power extends" (TTP 16.2), or in other words "the natural right of every individual is coextensive with its power" (TP 2.4).

Does this mean that in the state of nature (and by extension democracy) might makes right, so that if a being can physically do something, it must have a concurrent moral right to do it? The answer appears to be that in principle might or power does indeed constitute the natural basis of right insofar as Spinoza does not identify any other external principle of natural justice to control or even justify actions. Equality then is problematic in Spinoza's state of nature because so little actual power, and thus right, does the individual have relative to the rest of nature that Spinoza admits "as long as human natural right is determined by the power of each single individual and is possessed by each alone, it is of no account and is notional rather than factual" (TP 2.15). Spinoza concludes that human beings are "by nature enemies" (TP 2.14) because of this relative equality, which makes all individuals competitors for survival.

The naturalness of democracy is thus in one sense simply a logical deduction from the natural right that lies at the foundation of every state. Democracy is natural insofar as it rests on the simple but compelling logic that majorities have the power, and thus the right to compel obedience from minorities (Matheron 1985: 168; Smith 1997: 133, 136). Compared to other regimes built on anything less than a popular foundation, democracy theoretically at least produces a greater capacity to secure the preservation of individuals by collecting their power as a multitude. As Spinoza reasons: "The greater the number of men who thus unite into one body, the more right they will all collectively possess" (TP 2.15, 2.13; cf. McShea 1968: 82). The naturalness of democracy is then demonstrable in an inverse relation to the state of nature as individual right means very little in the totality of nature, but acquires greater salience literally with the size of the collectivity to which the individual is united.

Here Spinoza seems to admit that the superiority of democracy is based at least partly on the premise that the individual in a democracy has very little power or right compared to the collectivity. However, could the claim that right is coextensive with power not also easily justify the rule of a heavily armed minority or "enforcement cadre" (Curley 1996: 326; contra Matheron 1985:176)? Or as Gatens observes, "if 'right' and 'power' are coextensive, what, if anything, can justify the normative claim that a community of rational beings is superior to a tyrannical state?" (Gatens 2009: 190). At the very least, it is not clear solely on the basis of Spinoza's treatment of the state of nature why non-democratic regimes would not satisfy the requirements of rightful rule, if they can secure obedience and support.

Nature is also, of course, the central concept in Spinoza's metaphysics. In fact, Spinoza highlights the metaphysical assumptions underlying his state of nature account quite explicitly when he claims: "the power of nature is the very power of God who has supreme right to all things" (TTP 16.2). In the *Ethics*, Spinoza's doctrine of substance identified God with the unity of substance "consisting of infinite attributes" such that "nature" or God amounts to the totality of all things in the world of which every particular is simply a mode of universal and eternal substance (E1.def6.4; E1.P33s2.22-23). The salient features of Spinoza's idea of substance are

that it is indivisible, solitary and expresses “eternal and infinite essence,” which “necessarily exists” (E1.P5, 8, 11-13). In other words, the central thrust of Spinoza’s account of substance is that his metaphysics, similar at least formally to monotheistic religion, forecloses the possibility of multiple substances.

At first glance, the philosophical monism animating Spinoza’s metaphysics seems to be the very opposite of what he associates with democracy; namely, its capacity to imitate the state of nature by harnessing the power of diverse human types, each with “the sovereign right to do everything it can do” (TTP 16.2; Rosen 1987: 467). However, Spinoza’s account of substance does not eliminate diversity so much as it points to deeper complexity in nature than a specious version of diversity recognizes. Underlying the formal unity of substance is the principle of a necessary connection among infinity of distinct singularities. As Balibar observes, the infinity of attributes including both physical things and ideas means that substance is not “*la négation d’une pluralité*” (Balibar 1990: 73). The essential interiority of *conatus*-driven individuals in the state of nature would thus be intelligible as modes of the “infinite attributes” of substance (E1def6). Substance is then not an all encompassing and homogenizing form, but rather it is a dynamic power or as Balibar once more puts it, a “*cause productrice*” (Balibar 1990: 71, also Smith 2003: 32). As a concept signifying both the material reality of being and the productive forces of becoming, Spinoza’s idea of substance clearly attempts to integrate unity and diversity in the totality of God and nature.

Spinoza insists that democracy is uniquely natural among political possibilities because the idea of infinity characterizing his theory of substance finds its political manifestation in the democratic principle of universality. Insofar as God is “the universal power of the whole of nature” that brings “all individual things together,” then democracy is the most God-like or natural regime for it alone can be “defined as a united gathering of people which collectively has the sovereign right to all it has the power to do” (TTP 16.8). As the greatest collected power of individuals, democracy would then be the best translation in political terms of the central metaphysical claim embodied by Spinoza’s concept of God. This emphasis on democratic inclusiveness is, however, qualified by Spinoza’s truncated account of democracy in the unfinished eleventh chapter of the posthumously published *Political Treatise* in which he seems to suggest that democracy could have a more restricted franchise than aristocracy (TP 11.2). While sadly Spinoza left this commentary on excessive democratic legal formalism unexplained, we can at least surmise that he did not mean to suggest that the legal basis of citizenship was the essence of democracy for as Spinoza observes elsewhere about democracy: “That sovereign power is bound by no law” (TTP16.8).

Indeed, the more important implications of Spinoza’s metaphysics as it relates to democracy appear to be two-fold. First, if democracy is the most natural regime, then it is also in Spinoza’s terms the most unstable government. Or more positively, democracy is the form of government most reflective of the fluid dynamic of change in power relations caused by natural right. As we know from the *Ethics*, Spinoza did not view fluidity as debilitating instability because complex bodies require change in order to preserve their essence. The unity of complex bodies, including political society, presupposes individual parts that “preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves” (E2.P13def). The capacity to adjust to changing conditions, while preserving a degree of internal cohesion, would then seem to be one of the defining characteristics of a successful polity. Second, there is the problem of individuation. Even allowing for infinite diverse attributes of substance, how much does the finite individual really

matter if in the grand scheme of Spinoza's metaphysics they are all merely modes of a singular substance? The problem can be restated that insofar as democracy stands as Spinoza's closest approximation of the state of nature, then the status of individual rights, as a subset of natural right, appears more precarious in democracy than in any other regime for in democracy the inverse relation of the natural power of the individual to the power of government is most acute. Democratic government is naturally powerful precisely because the practically negligible natural right of individuals in the state of nature is somehow pooled to produce a genuinely effectual form of power. Understood solely in terms of its resemblance to the overarching metaphysical principle of substantial unity, democracy thus appears to threaten the virtual disappearance of the individual into much larger social forces.

The Reasonableness of Democracy

The crucial corollary to Spinoza's argument for the naturalness of democracy is his claim that it is also the most rational form of government. In this respect, he dramatically departs from the venerable tradition of philosophical anti-democrats dating back to Plato. Our task, however, is complicated by the need to make sense of the theoretical implications of this argument in light of Spinoza's contention that the state of nature is a condition dominated by passion not reason. How then can democracy be at once the most natural and the most rational regime?

We should begin by recognizing that Spinoza calls democracy the most rational government in two different senses. First, he extrapolates from the natural right to self-preservation that a majority in any society is rational in the sense that it would never seek to harm itself (Spinoza 2000: 6.3). This is analogous to the classical republican argument, which contrasts the public virtue of the citizen with the corruption of self-interested courtiers.⁵ Yet the historical charge against democracy from philosophers was never really about the motives of the people, but rather about popular ignorance and intemperance. Thus, the second and more controversial claim Spinoza makes for democracy is that irrational ideas are unlikely to filter through the popular legislative process: "For it is almost impossible that the majority of a large assembly would agree on the same irrational decision" (TTP 16.9). This assumes that a common impulse or passion will not work through a large group, but given the centrality of the passions in Spinoza's account of *conatus*, what could give him any confidence about this?

Spinoza's radical claim is that democracies have the capacity to control human appetites and desires by bringing individuals within the "limits of reason, so that they may dwell in peace and harmony" (TTP 16.9). The inherent rationality of democracy thus reduces on one level to an empirical question for Spinoza assumes that a large group of people can only unite around laws that are based on sound reason (TP 2.21, 3.7). This theoretical imperative toward inclusiveness allows for the creation of stable rational consensus that filters out extremes; that is to say, reason serves as a unifying force in democratic society. But upon what specific rational conclusions does Spinoza expect a democratic people to unite?

We must be careful to distinguish between the argument that reason is constitutive of right, which Spinoza emphatically rejects for "men are led by blind passion more than by reason" (TP 2.5; TTP 16.2), and an argument about right that discards any rational standard whatsoever, an argument that Spinoza does not make. Even within the power based logic of Spinoza's natural right theory there is a role for reason to help determine the limits of right; namely, "what no one desires or can do" (TTP 16.4). Thus, while Spinoza's account of nature precludes any

transcendent normative standard, it may be possible, as Curley suggests (1996: 318-22), to identify a rather weaker, but by no means negligible, claim for reason's role in determination of right insofar as self-destruction limits right for both the individual and the state bound by the "universal rules governing natural things in general and *reason in particular*" (TP 4.4, italics added). Both the political state and the individual in the state of nature can do wrong, not by violating a transcendent moral code, but rather if "it does, or suffers to be done, things that cause its downfall" (TP 4.4).

By insisting that nothing does right when it acts self-destructively, Spinoza indirectly introduces into his argument a notion of right that is not simply reducible to power. Individuals and states have the power in the strict sense to do all manner of stupid and self-destructive actions, but in doing so they contradict some vital rational element of their own drive for survival. However, Spinoza insists that the political community alters the individual's relation to questions of right for as a relational construct, the state brings many individuals under the rule of reason by their complex interaction with the laws (Del Lucchese 2009: 340, 353). Likewise, when a government acts contrary to reason, and thus "falls short of its own self, or does wrong" (TP 4.4), it impacts more people than could any private individual. Democracy, then, would be the most rational government if it does one or both of two things. First, if it brings more individuals under the rule of law than any other government. And second, if it provides the most consistently rational policies to secure its citizens.

Both of these possibilities are complicated by Spinoza's expressed pessimism about the rationality of the multitude. Can democratic government be rational, if the multitude who are the base of its power are not? Power is not identical to right and, as several commentators have observed, Spinoza's statements about the multitude are hardly encouraging (Smith 1997: 121-22; Smith 2003: 132-33; Mara 1982: 142).⁶ Distributed liberally throughout Spinoza's corpus are references to the "capricious mind of the multitude...governed not by reason but by passion alone" (TTP 17.4), to the "fairy tale" belief in the reason of the common people (TP 1.5, 6.1), and Spinoza's classic contribution to the anthem of bourgeois distrust toward the masses: "The mob is fearsome, if it does not fear" (E4.P54s.129).

It will hardly do to observe that Spinoza can be a committed democrat without being naïve about the rational capacities of the multitude (Feuer 1980: 133). This is undoubtedly true, however, the anti-populist sentiments in these passages cannot be dismissed so easily. The more fundamental problem involves making sense of Spinoza's claim that democracy is both the most rational and the most natural regime. It seems that the more Spinoza gives to the natural power of reason, the less intelligible his state of nature account becomes for while, on the one hand, Spinoza insists à la Hobbes that all human beings are naturally enemies because of the primacy of the passions, especially fear, he also endorses the traditional scholastic view of natural sociability (TP 2.14-15). Reason shows "men's true interest" is to escape the "misery of solitary life" for "nothing is more advantageous to man than man" (TTP 16.5 [see also TTP 5.7-9]; E4.P18s.112). Reason indicates the way to exit the state of nature through a contract by which everyone surrenders their natural freedom and reaches an agreement "to decide everything by the sole dictate of reason" (TTP 16.5). Even if individuals do not naturally desire what is to their advantage, they can be brought to see it by "hope for greater good and fear of greater loss" (TTP 16.5) supporting the conclusions of reason.

Spinoza's argument for natural sociability helps to further clarify his understanding of the naturalness of democracy. The intrinsic reasonableness of democracy means that it is more natural than monarchy and aristocracy, but not that it is actually natural. Democracy is at best an approximation of natural right, rather than a "microcosm" of nature per se. Neither democracy nor the state of nature is nature in its totality. The fact that democracy can never be more than an approximation of the forces of nature reminds us that the naturalness of democracy is tied to Spinoza's conception of the immanent causality of social construction; that is to say, to the process of collecting powers that is at least formally the exact opposite of the state of nature. His primary theoretical concern is not to explain how the irrational multitude can attain sufficient reason to form society. The passions of fear, hope and his confidence in a democratized epistemology by which "everyone has the power of clearly and distinctly understanding himself and his emotions, if not absolutely, at least in part" (E5.P4s.146) probably suffice in this respect. Rather by insisting that "it is impossible that men should ever utterly dissolve" civil order (TP 6.1), Spinoza posits a conception of human reason that undermines any effort to present contract in the Hobbesian mode as a legitimating instrument for government power, or even simply as an explanatory device to account for the transition from the state of nature to civil society. Democracy can be both the most rational and the most natural form of government only on condition that it fully reflects the requirements of human sociability.

Sovereignty and Democracy

Among Spinoza's contemporaries, contract theory and the doctrine of sovereignty were the primary conceptual devices through which they sought to explain the legitimacy of government and the political obligations of subjects and citizens. However, while Spinoza employs the vocabulary of contractualism and sovereignty in both of his major political writings, he systematically denudes these concepts of their conventional meaning.⁷ Indeed, the central point of Spinoza's treatment of sovereignty and contract is to show their inadequacy as explanatory devices for political legitimacy. It is the concept of democracy that provides the basis of Spinoza's alternative account of political phenomena.

Spinoza's treatment of the origin of government is complicated by the fact that while he initially presents a decidedly absolutist reading of contract and sovereignty, he then proceeds almost immediately to undermine the practical conditions that make this formal absolutism possible (Gildin 1973: 378, Curley 1996: 317, Prokhovnik 2004: 228). The starting point for this formal account is the recognition by a number of individuals of the need to leave the conflict-ridden state of nature. Reason combines with the passions of fear and hope to inform individuals of the need to honor their promises and, most importantly, that individuals cannot retain their natural right entire (TTP 16.7, TP 3.6). Spinoza presents this act of contracting as a kind of transfer of power whereby individuals "transfer all the power they possess to society," and thus effectively surrender to the sovereign their right to be judge of the means of their own self-defense (TTP 16.7-8, TP 3.3). Spinoza concludes this formal account of contract with a Hobbesian flourish by requiring absolute obedience to the sovereign without any reservation or institutional check that would erode the unity of sovereign power (TTP 16.8, 16.21). Reason apparently requires nothing less.

However, Spinoza's further reflections on the state includes the admission that while his treatment of contract and sovereignty generally conforms to practice, these concepts in many

respects “will always remain merely theoretical” (TTP 17.1). This largely theoretical character assumes particular salience when we recall that for Spinoza “the democratic republic” expresses the essence of social construction, and thus it is the only form of government that he feels the need “to discuss explicitly” in the context of his treatment of contract and sovereignty (TTP 16.11). The naturalness of democracy is then in some sense dependent upon a certain understanding of the naturalness of consent underlying the construction of any political arrangement. This emphasis on the exemplary status of democracy puts Spinoza’s earlier quasi-Hobbesian rhetoric in a certain context for it turns out that democracy is the only regime that Spinoza believes can practically fulfill Hobbes’ theoretical requirements of absolutism. Anything less than a majority in society is unlikely to be capable of securing obedience of the whole society in the long-term.

But does Spinoza’s argument that democracy establishes the most felicitous proportion of rulers and ruled not suggest a largely functional or instrumental case for democracy that does not depend on a metaphysical argument about nature? That is, does Spinoza’s account of what we have termed *social construction* really differ from standard seventeenth-century contract theory in anything apart from a preference for democratic over monarchical absolutism? While Spinoza shared the common early-modern contractualist concern to root social organization in the principle of consent, as opposed to pre-modern notions of classical or theologically inspired teleology, he differed from other contractarians in the degree to which Spinoza was prepared to refer the legitimacy of political power directly to the current organization of social forces rather than a seminal expression of consent that putatively grounds political obligation. Thus, those commentators who believe that Spinoza rejected in any meaningful sense the idea of contract are basically correct (e.g. Negri 1981: 109, Matheron 1990: 258, Balibar 1998: 57-8, Israel 2006: 235). The naturalness of democracy does not presuppose the existence of a democratic community preceding any and every other arrangement. The latter proposition was the typically implicit premise of contractarians such as Hobbes, Grotius and Pufendorf who employed contract as a device primarily to explain how equal individuals in the state of nature go from naturally democratic conditions to their eventual rightful place in the non-democratic sovereign state (Matheron 1990: 259).⁸ Spinoza rather presents democracy as an activity of social construction in which “all remain equal as they had been previously in the state of nature” (TTP 16.11). The dynamic character of democracy means that it can never be reduced to simply a transitional stage in the contractual process, nor even set apart as a logically necessary first principle of practical reason.

Spinoza’s consideration of the theoretical issues raised by the problems of contractualism suggests that his argument for democracy cannot simply be reduced to a functional or instrumentalist logic of proportion between rulers and ruled. This is shown most clearly by his effort to challenge the assumption that the transfer of natural right from individuals to the sovereign can ever be complete for the transferee never “ceases to be a human being” possessing an element of natural freedom (TTP 17.1). Spinoza herein identifies a basic principle of subjectivity or interiority which ensures that regardless of the theoretical pretensions of contractual absolutism, no individual can ever fully surrender their “faculty of judgment,” or cease to be “master of their own thoughts” (TTP 3.8, 20.4). This is the meaning of Spinoza’s famous claim in Epistle 50 that the main difference between his political theory and that of Hobbes is that Spinoza “always preserve[s] natural right intact” (Spinoza 1955: 369). Thus, any rigorous natural rights theory must limit the extent of obligation that contract can produce. For instance, promise breaking is, contra Hobbes, a matter of right for Spinoza, if the violation of

trust serves a rational purpose such as self-preservation (TTP 16.6).⁹ Spinoza's association of reason with the common good, on the one hand, and violence with particular interests, on the other, supplies the context for his remarkable claim that "no one has maintained a violent government for long" (TTP 16.9). This argument goes beyond merely making gestures toward some expression of consent being necessary to found legitimate governments. Rather Spinoza's aim with regard to illuminating the conflict between reason and violence is to make a specific point about the nature of democracy.

Spinoza's idea of democracy involves the practical recognition that every government is "at greater risk from its own citizens...than from its [external] enemies" (TTP 17.1). In democracy, no individual "transfers their natural right to another in such a way that they are not thereafter consulted but rather to the majority of the whole society of which they are a part" (TTP 16.11). It is the centrality of consultation rather than consent, a process of communication rather than a single constitutive expression of intent that appears to distinguish democracy from every other political arrangement. However, democracy also emerges as the fullest expression, or even theoretical perfection, of the immanent principles of every stable regime for in democracy the permanent communicative relation of rulers and ruled is part of "the explicit mode of operation of the political system" (Walther 1993: 55). It is not surprising then that, with this democratic principle of consultation as a model, in his comparative regime analysis in the *Political Treatise* Spinoza makes the incorporation of consultative principles into monarchy and aristocracy, that is to say their democratization, practically the sole basis for their improvement (TP chs. 6-10; Balibar 1998: 72-74).

If the real test of political success lies in "devising a form of government that was not in greater danger from its own citizens than from foreign foes," then the key to establishing a durable state "depends chiefly upon the loyalty of its subjects" (TTP 17.4, 17.2). Indeed, one important aim of Spinoza's extended discussion of the biblical Hebrew Republic in chapters 17 and 18 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is to demonstrate the ways in which the Mosaic regime succeeded and failed in securing the loyalty of the people. By replacing obedience with loyalty as the prime political imperative, Spinoza reinforces the central role of human subjectivity and psychological interiority in his naturalistic account of the state: "Obedience is less a question of an external than an internal action of mind. Hence he is most under the dominion of another who resolves to obey every order of another wholeheartedly" (TTP 17.2). To the extent that a meaningful consultative, and perhaps even electoral, process is required to secure this loyalty, then for Spinoza democracy reflects a flesh and blood political truth, which can never be reduced to the formal abstractions of contract and sovereignty doctrine.

There are two principal conclusions that we can draw from Spinoza's account of sovereignty and contract. First, while Spinoza retains some rhetorical features of contract theory, the tension between the formal unity of power expressed in sovereignty and the actuality of power relations due to the natural force of society is, according to Spinoza, irresolvable within the theoretical terms of contractualism. Thus the state of nature remains a feature of political life not as the vestige of pre-civil individual rights, but rather as a concrete manifestation of the irreducible subjectivity in human psychology: "Everyone who does not have the use of reason lives in a state of nature" (TTP 16.19). Second, for Spinoza the concept of democracy reflects both existing power relations and the constantly unfolding process of change underlying any formal political arrangement. Indeed, Spinoza goes so far as to claim that the "foundations of the other forms of government" are "clear enough" from what we know about democracy (TTP

16.11). This statement begs the question however, in what way does knowledge about the causality immanent in democracy provide insights about non-democratic government and even about political life per se?

Once again, the connection between Spinoza's political theory and his metaphysics is illuminating. The dual character of Spinoza's treatment of nature extending to the doctrine of substance, on the one hand, and the doctrine of natural right, on the other, provides the theoretical connection between the political and the more speculative aspects of Spinoza's philosophy. This is not, of course, to suggest that Spinoza viewed democracy as a direct translation of metaphysical principles into the political realm. For Spinoza, political life contains far too much contingency to ever allow such conceptual homogeneity. Moreover, Spinoza famously doubted whether it is desirable to project speculative principles into political analysis, for "no men are esteemed less fit to direct public affairs than theorists or philosophers" (PT 1.1). It would be a mistake, however, to interpret this praise for experience as a rejection of any connection between metaphysics and political theory. Quite the contrary, Spinoza identifies what he takes to be the problem with classical moral philosophy; namely, that it was too idealistic because not based on principles deducible from actual human nature. In what follows, we will demonstrate that Spinoza's idea of democracy is embedded in a theoretical framework weaving together metaphysical, ethical and political reflections upon the proper grounds of political community and the good life for individuals.

The Formative Purpose of Democracy

For Spinoza democracy is a concept encompassing multiple phenomena in relation to the rational expression of power; in particular it reflects a principle of equality that operates at both the material and psychological level. On the material level, democracy expresses the equality deriving from the calculus of physical power inhering in natural right. Democracy thus is the strongest form of government because it is structurally disposed to collect the greatest mass of individual powers into a social force capable of securing loyalty to its rule. With respect to human psychology, it is the government most consistent with the principles of subjectivity and individual freedom that simply cannot be surrendered to society.

The remaining question for our purposes is: Does Spinoza's account of democracy harmonize the two distinct aspects of nature; namely, the communal pressures of weight and number (not to mention brute force), on the one hand, and the incipient anarchy of irreducible subjectivity, on the other? We propose that for Spinoza the superiority of democracy lay precisely in its formative purpose in the reconciliation of individual development and social good; that is in harmonizing the "free state" and the "free man."

In order to understand this formative purpose, we need to distinguish the social and individual aspects of Spinoza's idea of democracy. In terms of social reality, Spinoza presents democracy as the perfection of the state because of its capacity to advance the primary goals of the state; namely, to promote peace, security, and personal freedom. Understood simply as a function of natural right, democracy is the logical conclusion to the idea of social construction for if each individual "has that much less right the more he is exceeded in power by the others collectively," (TP 2.16) then democracy is the strongest government because it produces relatively the weakest individuals. Democracy is both the perfection of collective human power and a kind of normative force, for the state seeks to guide all citizens in regard to "what is good,

what is bad, what is fair and what is unfair” (TP 4.1). Spinoza thus presupposes that the reason of the individual is in some sense subsumed in the cognitive framework of a democratic community, which assumes its own unique form of rationality “arising from magnitude and quantity” (Del Lucchese 2009: 347). From the multiplicity of opinions and interests inherent in any organized multitude, Spinoza deduces a certain intellectual force epitomized by democracy.

However, how can we reconcile Spinoza’s claim that the “true purpose of the state is in fact freedom” (TTP 20.6) with his contention that the perfection of the state aims toward molding the citizens into “one mind” about the “rights of sovereigns” (TP 2.16,4.1)? Spinoza seems to have seen little difficulty in balancing his theorizing with awareness that human knowledge is so contingent that there are serious epistemological limits set on what we can know with any real certainty. Indeed, Spinoza’s treatment of the “divine law” in chapter 4 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* aimed precisely to illuminate the contingency of human knowledge. However, while Spinoza recognizes limits on the authority of truth claims as the basis to support religious toleration and free scientific inquiry, notably he did not extend these limits to the conclusions reached by philosophically informed political theory. That is to say, Spinoza’s philosophy unequivocally endorses democracy as the best regime (*Theological-Political Treatise*) and democratic principles as the best means to improve non-democratic regimes (*Political Treatise*). Thus, Spinoza endorses philosophical partisanship in favor of democracy, or civil freedom more generally, despite his skepticism about a host of other truth claims including theological ones.

Spinoza’s metaphysics helps us to understand how he conceived of the complex relation between unity and diversity for he insists that the idea of body presupposes internal diversity of bodies differentiated by virtue of variable motions, rather than in respect of substance. All of nature is one individual whose parts “vary in infinite ways without any change in the individual as a whole” (E1.P13s). By “without any change” Spinoza means without detracting its totality. He emphatically does not mean that unity of body requires a lack of variation among the composite parts of a body. When we apply this aspect of the doctrine of substance to political terms, it is apparent that for Spinoza the achievement of “one mind” is admittedly a social or political ideal. But it is an ideal of unity that presupposes internal diversity with respect to multiple forms of power, the most important of which are the diversity of distinct physical entities striving for preservation and the intellectual diversity of beings whose thoughts are as much an expression of their power as is physical force (Matheron 1985: 168).

Spinoza assumes that the state cannot represent one mind unless “its laws are such as prescribed by reason” (TP 2.12, 3.7). Democracy is the best state precisely because the unity of its social power is “founded on and guided by reason” (TP 5.1). In democracy the individual participates in this unity not simply due to the coercive power of the state, but rather primarily because the perfected state encourages a way of life characterized “by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind” (TP 5.5). The epistemic and cognitive basis for this unity lies in Spinoza’s assumption about the universalizing properties of reason; namely, that “passive emotions” are different in nature and contrary to one another, but “insofar as men live under the guidance of reason... they always necessarily agree in nature” (E4.P35.118). The “very nature of reason” makes it apparent that “men’s highest good is common to all” (E4.P36s.120), and thus the intellectual foundations of the state establish a transcendent standard of unity. Needless to say, this singlemindedness is only fully achievable in a democratic government in which “the safety of the whole people” is supreme law, and thus every individual can rationally submit to its rule without prejudice (TTP 16.10). Spinoza assumes that majority rule is a reasonable

simulacrum of unanimity because it is government by a “majority of the whole of which each individual is a part” (TTP 20.14, 16.11). His conception of reason thus narrows the theoretical criteria of the state, even as it facilitates expansion of its popular foundation.

For Spinoza, democratic unity is an intellectual ideal intersecting individual subjectivity and massive social forces. Spinoza clearly recognizes that democratic governments, perhaps more than any other regime, have the right (i.e., power) to oppress individuals and use violence to secure peace. Spinoza’s fundamental insight about democracy, however, extends beyond empirical observations about its utility, and points rather to the rational sense of right as a function of subjective freedom or autonomy. As he claims: “Everyone by supreme right of nature remains master of their own thoughts” (TTP 20.4). This is, of course, Spinoza’s primary argument for religious toleration, perhaps the most controversial aspect of the debate about freedom of thought in his time. An examination of Spinoza’s complex teaching on toleration is clearly outside the scope of the current study.¹⁰ However, for our purposes it is important to observe the connection between democracy and the culture of freedom Spinoza associates with the “supreme right of nature.” This connection is expressed in both a public commitment to intellectual freedom (especially on religious and scientific matters), as well as the institutionalization of popular consultative processes that incorporate the principle of rational freedom into the direction of the state.

Democracy and Happiness

Spinoza understands the naturalness of democracy at least partly in terms of irreducible subjectivity in human nature. The political implications of this naturalism emerge most clearly in relation to the perfection of the state, which is itself a natural phenomenon only insofar as it embodies the principles of democracy. However, how did Spinoza believe that democracy, or for that matter any political arrangement, impacts the moral and intellectual development of individuals? That is to say, is there is a political, and specifically a democratic, component to the achievement of human happiness?

Once more, it is in the context of his metaphysics that the intellectual foundations of human freedom, so pivotal to Spinoza’s democratic politics, are most fully illuminated. As is well known, “freedom” and “blessedness” are the two central concepts in Spinoza’s account of virtue in the *Ethics*. By freedom, Spinoza means primarily a mental condition involving: “the degree and nature of its [the mind’s] command over the emotions and in checking and controlling them” (E5.pref.143). Conversely, “human bondage” is an essentially passive intellectual state in which individuals are enthralled to their emotions and suffer from the ignorance produced by an inadequate understanding of natural causes (E4.pref.103; E4.P2.106). In his attempt to intellectualize the concept of freedom, Spinoza imports morally charged terms with clear political resonance such as slavery and bondage into what amounts to a philosophy of mind. For Spinoza, the analog for truncated intellectual development is quite explicitly political slavery.

This politicization of mind is, however, less apparent in Spinoza’s famous discussion of “blessedness” in Part 5 of the *Ethics*. Blessedness is the term Spinoza uses to describe the condition produced by the “highest conatus of mind,” namely the intellectual love of God (E5.P25.154). In Spinoza’s doctrine of substance the intellectual love of God amounts to a dedicated striving for a scientific understanding of nature (E4.P57.130). The effect of this intellectual love of God on the individual is, Spinoza suggests, a conception of happiness:

“Blessedness is nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God” (E4.App.139; E4.P37s1.119).¹¹ The upshot of Spinoza’s account of blessedness is that it makes philosophy, or at least modern natural philosophy, the sine qua non of human happiness. It also, however, seems to suggest a radically de-politicized notion of virtue associated more with the rigors of scientific research than with moral philosophy. In this sense, individual perfection not only appears to be unrelated to social virtue (that is to say to justice), but it also raises serious doubts about human equality. The happy individual is a knower whose perfection depends on faculties and opportunities that may or may not be distributed equally among humankind. As Spinoza opines: “All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare” (E5.P42.161).

Given Spinoza’s emphasis on a heavily intellectualized account of virtue, it is natural to inquire what role, if any, democracy plays in individual happiness. Does the political excellence of the best regime have any relation, causal or otherwise, to human excellence per se? This question has generated considerable debate among Spinoza scholars. Some interpret Spinoza’s view of politics as focused almost exclusively on securing peace and order (Gildin 1973: 385; Geismann 1991; DenUyl 2008: 12, 16; DenUyl 1983: 166-67; Mara 1982: 135-36; Curley 1996: 331). In this view, democracy is essentially no better or worse at promoting human excellence, although it does best the less exalted job that politics is meant to do. For others, Spinoza’s endorsement of democracy is connected to his perception that it is the regime that not only best secures peace, but also promotes intellectual virtue, and thus most adequately fulfills the true and highest aim of political life (Del Lucchese 2009: 342; Rosenthal 2001: 335; Smith 2003: 144; Smith 2005: 14-17; Kossman 2000: 81; Israel 2004: 26). What is at stake with this issue is then nothing less than determining Spinoza’s ultimate position on the relation between politics and philosophy.

There is certainly textual evidence to support the argument that politics has very little to do with Spinoza’s idea of happiness and individual perfection. For instance, when he lists the “three principal categories” of human desire as (i) the understanding of things through “their primary causes,” (ii) the acquisition of the “habit of virtue” and (iii) to live “securely and in good health,” Spinoza states that the attainment of the first two desires “depends chiefly on our own capabilities” (TTP 3.5). Not only does living in peace and security depend primarily on external causes that the intellectual desires do not, Spinoza also does not draw any apparent connection between the satisfaction of the last desire and the two others. The impression that political society has little to do with promoting intellectual excellence is only confirmed by Spinoza’s claim that “absolutely no one can be compelled to be happy by force of law” (TTP 7.22).

However, there are also important features of Spinoza’s argument that allow for a prominent role for the state in promoting individual happiness. For instance, Spinoza’s account of natural sociability contains a strong indication that there is a social dimension to individual development. The aim of every state, he claims, is for individuals “to live securely and *satisfyingly*” (TTP 3.6, italics added). What precisely does the qualifier “satisfyingly” add to Spinoza’s apparent focus on security? Significantly, it is in the *Ethics* rather than the political writings that Spinoza clarifies the community’s role in promoting human happiness. Here Spinoza reaffirms the intrinsic rationality of social existence in contrast to the theoretical state of nature: “The man who is guided by reason is more free in a state where he lives under a system of law than in solitude where [he] obeys only himself” (E4.P73.137). As Genevieve Lloyd observes, for Spinoza “individual human powers are realized—and human identities formed—under conditions of sociability” (Lloyd 1996: 89). Moreover, the character of the state makes a

difference for if a person “dwells among individuals who are in harmony with man’s nature, by that very fact his power of [intellectual] activity will be assisted and fostered” (E4.App.139). Spinoza draws a further connection between social forces and intellectual development when he claims that a community that encourages “humility, repentance, and reverence” allows for individuals to “live by the guidance of reason,” and ultimately to “become free men and enjoy the life of the blessed” (E4.P54s.129). While blessedness is clearly a function of personal autonomy and intellectual freedom (Smith 2005: 10-11, 13), we can at least conclude that Spinoza did not intend to claim that individual development is impervious to the influence of social, and even political, forces.

Spinoza’s most striking expression of the formative role of politics on human character is perhaps his reflection that “Men are not born to be citizens, but are made so” (TP 5.2; cf. Hobbes 1991: 110). Spinoza asserts that the state plays an enormous role in the construction of the individual’s civic personality, for even if political obedience is a result of “the internal action of mind,” he hastens to add that “minds too are to some degree subject to the sovereign power, which has various ways to ensure that a very large part of the people believes, loves, hates, etc., what the sovereign wants them to” (TTP 17.2). The state can influence, and even subject, a person’s judgment for good or ill in “almost unbelievable ways” (TTP 20.2).

Does the superiority of democracy derive from its capacity to assist individual intellectual and moral development, in addition to securing peace and unity? Clearly for Spinoza, peace is not primarily an absence of conflict, but rather the virtue coming from “strength of mind,” promoted most emphatically and deliberately as the “highest aim” of society in democracy (TP 5.4). The “best state” allows individuals to pass their lives in “harmony” with physical security, but “especially by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind” (TP 5.5). In effect what makes the “best state” superior is that it allows individuals to live “satisfyingly,” that is to say in a “union and harmony of minds” befitting the dignity of a rational creature (TP 6.3, TTP 3.6, 20.6). With the advantages of a complex combination of political membership and individual freedom, Spinoza proposes that democracy, and the active participation in the life of the state that it makes possible for individuals, establishes social conditions that allow reason to develop fully.

Most significant, however, is the connection Spinoza forms between democracy and peace. For Spinoza peace is a function of rational agreement among people on the basis of intellectual premises that command universal assent (TTP 20.6; E4.P35.11). The root of social conflict is the passions or affects. Insofar as peace is a social condition with specific intellectual requirements, and democracy is the “best state” to secure the peace, then Spinoza establishes a link between democracy and the intellectual virtue derived from rational self-control and adequate ideas about the causes of things. Democracy thus reflects the social manifestation of an intellectual, and perhaps even philosophical, awareness of the political dangers of error, superstition and prejudice. Indeed, Spinoza drew these political implications quite explicitly from his metaphysics when he claimed that among the many benefits flowing from his philosophy of mind is “that it teaches the manner in which citizens should be governed and led; namely, not so as to be slaves, but so as to do freely what is best” (E2.P49s.60). Insofar as Spinoza indicates that some measure of philosophy contributes to the achievement of the primary goal of political society, then the superiority of the best regime appears inseparable from the relation of philosophy and politics.

It is thus not surprising that the connection between the two elements of the formative purpose of democracy, that is social construction, on the one hand, and individual development, on the other, culminates in the freedom to philosophize. Near the conclusion of the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza imposes another crucial criterion for political excellence, which is that “the best state accords everyone the same liberty to philosophize” (TTP 20.9). He thus explicitly connects the superiority of democracy to a certain kind of freedom to pursue the highest human activity; namely, philosophy (Mara 1982: 135-36, Rosen 1987: 460). This is the most complete sense in which “the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom” (TTP 20.6). Spinoza applauds the freedom to philosophize at least partly on the utilitarian grounds that the benefits of free speech and free-thinking outweigh any disadvantages, especially as freedom to philosophize contributes to the “advancement of the arts and sciences” (TTP 20.10). However, he concludes that “liberty of judgment” is both “without question a virtue and cannot be suppressed” anyways (TTP 20.10). In a crucial sense, Spinoza’s political naturalism depends on philosophy, an activity that is impossible in the state of nature prior to the establishment of law to control human passions. Yet democracy is, of all governments, the most open to philosophy precisely because it is the form of government most like the state of nature with respect to a climate of freedom and untrammelled individual subjectivity. In essence, the superiority of democracy derives from the fact that it is the only regime that makes the freedom to philosophize an essential condition for the construction of society.

The formation of “one mind” aimed at by democratic society does not mean that Spinoza envisioned mass philosophizing. It more properly demonstrates that the perfection of the state presupposes fundamental societal agreement about the importance of intellectual freedom. This is a vision of society in which philosophy will likely never be central to the lives of more than a few, even as it remains present to all through the intellectual freedom associated with religious toleration and advances in the arts and sciences. However, to Spinoza free expression and civil liberty are not primarily matters reserved for guardian institutions designed to protect individual rights against overweening majorities. Indeed, one of the remarkable features of Spinoza’s account of democracy is the extent to which it presupposes that the individual freedom to philosophize can be incorporated into a broader societal commitment respecting the natural basis of individual mental interiority and freedom. Thus while individual happiness is clearly not reducible to social existence (contra Montag 1999: 63; Balibar 1998: 125; and Del Lucchese 2009: 352)—democratic or otherwise—Spinoza does posit the basis for a distinct causal relation between democracy and philosophy. Spinoza’s democratic society is thus defined in part by its unique capacity to fulfill the task of generating mass public support for the recurring reexamination of the nature of this relation.

Conclusion

This study has tried to demonstrate that Spinoza understood the naturalness of democracy to lie in its properties as a principle of social construction, rather than simply its instrumental value for the achievement of extrinsic goods such as peace or security. Democracy’s formative purpose involves the embodiment of metaphysical principles informing both sound social order and individual intellectual development. Thus, Spinoza maintained that democracy, uniquely among regimes, has as its explicit operating principle the reconciliation of two distinct conceptions of freedom, the one primarily a function of physical preservation and the other an intellectual striving for knowledge of God and nature. In the connection between Spinoza’s metaphysics

and his political philosophy we see arguably the first modern philosophical effort to extend the meaning of democracy well beyond formal institutions of popular sovereignty.

In the seventeenth-century, Spinoza's vision of a nascent democratic political culture strove confidently to harmonize the demands of civic virtue and the claims of individual autonomy, aiming in effect to bridge the gulf between the classical tradition of republicanism and the newly emerging liberal political tradition. Today we are much more inclined than was Spinoza to accept the incommensurability between them. While ever mindful that it would be unfair and anachronistic to impose on Spinoza the narrow terms of interpretive debates that were not his own, we have tried to show that Spinoza's reflections on democracy are a rich source of early modern theorizing about the relation between individual freedom and democratic republicanism. The liberal tradition most familiar to us bequeathed to the present a suspicion of mass democratic politics, as well as a distrust of any political theory that posits a discernible moral or intellectual *telos* to which political society ought to be directed. Spinoza perhaps remains a salutary reminder that many of our assumptions post-1989 about the superiority of liberal democracy rest on more expansive claims about the political requirements of human flourishing than we typically care to admit.

Endnotes

- ¹ Spinoza 2007: 16.11, 20.14 (hereafter TTP chapter and section in notes and text).
- ² TTP 16.9, 20.2 and Spinoza 2000: 6.3 (hereafter TP chapter and section in notes and text).
- ³ See also Spinoza 2006: Part 4. Proposition 54scholia. Page 129 (hereafter E part, then preface [pref], proposition [P], scholia [s], corollary [cor], appendix [App], definition [def] or axiom [ax], and finally page number).
- ⁴ For the central role of *conatus* in Spinoza's account of human psychology, see E 3.P6-7.66-67.
- ⁵ For Spinoza's relation to the classical republican literature, see Blom 1985.
- ⁶ For the contrary view, which emphasizes the centrality of the "multitude" for Spinoza's politics, see Negri 1981 and Balibar 1998.
- ⁷ Some commentators point to what they take to be the centrality of contract in TTP and its virtual disappearance in the later TP (Prokhovnik 2004: 208, Feuer 1980: 139-40). However, this overlooks the fact that the crucial chapter 4 of TP "Rights of Sovereign Powers" deals quite directly with the idea of contract (e.g. TP 4.6).
- ⁸ For the authoritarian theory of contract, see Tully 1993: 17-18, 24.
- ⁹ For more on the complex relation between Spinoza and Hobbes, see James 2009: 215-24.
- ¹⁰ For an in depth analysis of Spinoza on toleration, see Rosenthal 2001 and Balibar 1998: 25-31.
- ¹¹ Of the three kinds of knowledge Spinoza identifies at E2.P40s2.51, that is "imagination," "reason," and "intuition," blessedness or the intellectual love of God is primarily related to the last of these.

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