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## The Social Contract in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*<sup>1</sup>

Recent studies on Spinoza have focused on the remarkable fact that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*), published anonymously in 1670, includes the notion of a social contract, but that the later *Tractatus Politicus* (*TP*), another political work, left unfinished by the death of the author, contains no mention of this construct. Many authors have argued that the latter work presents an original idea that stands apart from contractarian thought. However, this position accounts for only half of the issue in question. If it is true that Spinoza's genuine political philosophy involves non-contractarian thought, why does the earlier *TTP* draw on social contract theory? Did this earlier reference reflect a mere manner of talking or did it represent a theory that Spinoza originally embraced but later abandoned as obsolete? If neither of these, what does it mean? This is the problem I address in this paper. I will first examine earlier studies and discuss their inadequacies and will then reconstruct the argument presented by Spinoza in the *TTP*. In the conclusion, I will show that Spinoza's social contract is part of a "grammar of piety" which, in my opinion, is the theoretical object constantly present throughout the *TTP*.

### A THEORY OR A TOPIC?

Why is there no mention of a social contract in the *TP* any more? One possibility is that the contractarian construct contained in the *TTP* represented an impromptu theory that was subsequently superseded by the more elaborated Spinozan theory of the state. This interpretation can be found in the reappraisal of the philosophical import of the *TP* presented by A. Matheron and A. Negri, to whom we owe much gratitude.

According to Matheron, Spinoza had not yet completed the theory of emotions found in Part III of the *Ethica* when he wrote the *TTP*, which precluded an explanation of the generation of the state based on the imitation of emotions and caused him to resort to the

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Osamu Ueno, "Spinoza Shingaku-Seijiron ni okeru shakai keiyaku to keiken" [Social Contract and Piety in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*], *Journal of the Literary Society of Yamaguchi University*, Vol.49, 1999, pp.159-172, and rewritten in English for the present version. The text followed is: Benedictus de Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Künrath, 1670; in *Spinoza Opera*, Im Auftrag der Heiderberger Akademie der Wissenschaften hrg. von Carl Gebhardt, Carl Winter, 1925; 2. Auflage, 1972, Bd.3. For citation I used the translation by R. H. M. Elwes.

notion of social contract—that is, that the state emerges when everyone uses natural reasoning to enter into a mutual contract to relinquish individual natural rights to the sovereign. Thus, the social contract outlined in the *TTP* represents no more than a temporary expedient, a prelude to the later-elaborated and radical theory of the state found in the *TP*.<sup>2</sup> Negri places even greater emphasis on this alleged development of the theory, arguing that the *TP* substitutes a certain political physics for social contract, a theory that is radically opposed to the modern theory of natural law insofar as it considers political power to be immanent in the power of the masses whereas natural law is intended, as per Hobbes, to enable the transcendence of sovereign power via social contract.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Matheron and Negri see a significant change or development in Spinoza's theory that proceeds from social contract to the power of the masses. This line of interpretation dismisses the social contract as a rudimentary theory, scarcely deserving consideration. We will refer to this line of interpretation as the “undeveloped theory hypothesis.”

Another interpretive line, however, seeks to refute this hypothesis. D. J. Den Uyl views this ostensible shift in Spinoza's thinking as only a relative change in strategy rather than a drastic change in theory. According to Uyl, the social contract of the *TTP* is implied by the political philosophy of the *TP*; thus, the former is merely an esoteric version of the philosophy espoused in the latter, which represents an application of the same exposition to a more common target.<sup>4</sup> G. Boss reduces the apparent difference between the two works to a difference in perspective or strategy. According to Boss, the *TTP* represents a civic perspective whereby a rational citizen accepts political society in terms of a Hobbesian social contract, whereas the *TP* represents a governmental perspective that is independent of civic awareness. Because the former is intended to educate the citizens whereas the latter is intended to educate the monarch, these notions are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Hence, according to Boss, the assertion that Spinoza abandoned the social contract misrepresents his position. This change in tone can be explained by the scandal related to the *TTP* or by the change in the political climate after the 1672 killing of the republican leader, Johan de Witt.<sup>5</sup> We will refer to this line of interpretation as the “strategy hypothesis.” According to this interpretive train, there is no essential difference between the contractarian tenet in the *TTP* and the physical explanation in the *TP*.

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Matheron, “L'évolution de spinoza du *TTP* au *TP*,” in: *Issues And Directions : The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*, edited by Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau. Leiden; New York : E.J. Brill, 1990, pp.266-269.

<sup>3</sup> Antonio Negri, *L'Anomalie sauvage*, P.U.F., 1982, pp.298-307.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Den Uyl, *Power, state, and freedom: An interpretation of Spinoza's political philosophy*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1983, ch. III.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Boss, “Les fondements de la politique selon Hobbes et selon Spinoza,” *Les Etudes Philosophiques*, janvier-juin, 1994, pp.187-188.

However, these two controversial hypotheses share one point. They both take the social contract of the *TTP* as an explanatory theory of the state, whether impromptu or esoteric. Otherwise, discussions about theoretical development and strategic complementarity would not make sense. This premise, however, should be questioned. Doesn't Spinoza himself warn that it is not his intention to treat the state expressly in this treatise?<sup>6</sup> Moreover, isolating the social contract from the whole context of the *TTP* may blur the plan asserted within the treatise. References to a social contract appear in Chapter 16, the political part of the treatise (Chapters 16 to 20), which follows the lengthy biblical discussion in the theology section (Chapters 1 to 15). The two discussions are so closely related that understanding one entails understanding the other. Although modern social contract theory is usually interpreted as opposing popular agreement to divine right, Zac<sup>7</sup> notes that the *TTP* identifies the origin of the ancient Hebrew theocracy with that of an ideal democracy. This is hardly understandable if the social contract is viewed as a theory independent of the theologico-political framework presented by Spinoza. Both controversial hypotheses seem to fail in grasping the *raison d'être* behind Spinoza's social contract. Therefore, let us suppose that the Spinozan social contract is something other than a theory designed to explain the generation of the state. Then, what is it?

A possible alternative is offered by Moreau: discussion of a social contract represents a more or less *ad hoc* argument concerning a topic that was widely discussed during the historical period in question. Recent studies of political thought have reported that mentions of a social contract and of the ancient Hebrew theocracy were not uncommon in the milieu of the seventeenth century Dutch republic. The Hobbesian social contract was popular among the Republicans, and the intellectuals of the time often invoked the Mosaic theocracy as an ideal for the republic.<sup>8</sup> During this historical period, people believed that the republic needed to be founded on true religion alone. Moreau shows how Spinoza adapted common contemporary topics of discussion to suit his own objective.<sup>9</sup> The social contract is one of them. We will refer to this interpretation as the "topic hypothesis."

This interpretation is more plausible than the other two but is not optimal. According to this hypothesis, the social contract in question is no more than an adaptation of a Hobbesian theory of state for a polemical purpose.<sup>10</sup> Whereas the *TTP* may be a complex text

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<sup>6</sup> *TTP* XVIII, p.221.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sylvain Zac, "Le chapitre XVI du Traité théologico-politique," reprinted in: *Philosophie, théologie, politique dans l'oeuvre de Spinoza*, Vrin, 1979, pp.207-208.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980, pp.120-121.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre-François Moreau, "Spinoza et le *Jus circa sacra*," *Studia Spinozana* I, 1985, pp.335-344.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza: L'expérience et l'éternité*, PUF, 1994, pp.410-426.

containing various approaches to specific contemporary controversies, this does not account for the unified argument that serves as its framework. Indeed, we will never grasp the meaning of *trait-d'union* in the “theologico-political treaties” in the title unless we suppose the unity of the whole argument. Moreover, the third hypothesis leaves our question unanswered because if it were true that Spinoza's argument represents an adaptation in the service of polemics, the social contract would be merely an expedient adopted by Spinoza for the purpose of convincing his contemporaries, and consequently a matter of minor importance in philosophical perspective.

The aforementioned reflections lead in the right direction. In order to identify the role that Spinoza assigns to the social contract, we should retain the theologico-political framework Spinoza presents in the *TTP*. It seems promising to pursue the line that leads from the theological section to the political section and to reconsider the seemingly contractarian tenet by subjecting it to the same prolonged line of argument. This will reveal the philosopher's insights into theologico-political matters and, eventually, the reason that the treatise raised such an enormous chorus of complaints from contemporaries and gained a reputation of atheism.

## CONTRACT AND THE GRAMMAR OF PIETY

It is important to remember that the notion of a social contract represents only part of the theory outlined in the *TTP*. It is only in the context of understanding the central issue addressed in this work that we can grasp the *raison d'être* of the contractarian exposition. The issue emerges clearly in the Preface:

Now, seeing that we have the rare happiness of living in a republic, where everyone's judgment is free and unshackled, where each may worship God as his conscience dictates, and where freedom is esteemed before all things dear and precious, I have believed that I should be undertaking no ungrateful or unprofitable task, in demonstrating that not only can such freedom be granted without prejudice to the public peace, but also, that without such freedom, piety cannot flourish nor the public peace be secure.<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt that the burning issue in Spinoza's eyes concerned the conflict between freedom of thought and piety, an issue that resonated deeply with the public peace of the republic. This can also be inferred from the circumstances. At that time, the Dutch republic was possibly the most tolerant state in seventeenth century Europe, as illustrated by the

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<sup>11</sup> *TTP* Praef, p.7.

relative freedom enjoyed by Amsterdam's Jewish community, into which Spinoza was born and from which he was later excommunicated; this degree of freedom was hardly imaginable in other places. The more or less liberal government sometimes experienced conflicts with orthodox Calvinist clergy, who regarded freedom of thought as dangerous to the true religion of the republic. These clergy monitored those believed to be free thinkers and often urged the civil authority to accuse them of "impiety," precipitating a series of harsh disputes in the context of an extant longstanding controversy between the republican regents and the clergy. The relationship between piety and freedom to think thoughts suspected of impiety represented the central issue in these disputes.<sup>12</sup> This issue was at the core of the *TTP*, which was intended to demonstrate that freedom of thought, far from undermining piety and peace, represents the *sine qua non* of such conditions. We can now interpret the social contract as a part of this demonstration; isolated from this intellectual enterprise, the contract makes no sense, as we will see below.

First, we will treat two terms appearing in the transition from the theological to the political section as if they connected the two parts; these terms, justice and charity (*justitia et charitas*) serve as clues. The lengthy discussion of biblical interpretation in the first half of the treatise, reflecting a part of the basic teachings of the Bible, is embedded in these terms. Spinoza shows that it is not the intention of Scripture to demonstrate what could be the divine essence, existence, and power. Because the prophets were not scholars in a classroom, they no doubt delivered messages that were easy for the ancient common people to embrace. These consisted of moral messages with such evident righteousness that no one could resist them; for example, "to love God above all things and one's neighbour."<sup>13</sup> Although Scriptural text has been corrupted over time, the core teaching of obedience through the practice of justice and charity has remained intact as the cornerstone of religion. The teaching required no demonstration because "men's nature is so constituted that everyone (be he king or subject) who has committed a base action, tries to deck out his conduct with spurious excuses, till he seems to have done nothing but what is just and right." Thus, Spinoza concludes that "no error sufficient to vitiate it can have crept in without being instantly, observed by all; nor can anyone have succeeded in tampering with it and escaped the discovery of his malice."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. J.L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp.184-201.

<sup>13</sup> *TTP* II, p.42; *TTP* VII, pp.114-115.

<sup>14</sup> *TTP* Praef, p.10; *TTP* XII, pp.165-166.

If obedience to God and the practice of justice and charity represent the constants in Scriptural teaching, two questions necessarily follow: what is the God we should obey, and what should we do in practicing justice and charity? We would anticipate that Spinoza would not expect a popular consensus in response to these questions. Indeed, according to Spinoza, biblical teaching has nothing to do with the truth of reality, and thus a mathematical answer to these questions is not possible.<sup>15</sup> Only opinions, deriving from individual attitudes and imaginations and without the prospect of achieving universal agreement, are available in this regard.<sup>16</sup> Some believe God to be light, and others believe God to be a spirit or a thinking being. Thus, the first question about the nature of the Deity prompts endless debates about the dogmas of faith. The second question also precipitates conflicts between civil and theological authorities. Who decides justice? How can one discriminate the pious from the impious? The entire text of the *TTP* attests to Spinoza's clear insight into this matter by noting the paradoxical structure whereby increasing numbers of people become trapped in controversies because they embrace the same teaching. Universal agreement about fundamental moral teachings, on one hand, and endless disagreement about the questions such teachings entail, on the other, comprise this paradox. It is this paradox that Spinoza tackles throughout the treatise. His proposal consists, as we shall see, not in pretending to dissolve the structure, but in envisaging a certain theologico-political system that may defuse a permanent threat by clarifying the paradoxical nature of the structure. Let us see how that works.

The theological part of the *TTP* tackles the first question about God. Spinoza's solution is to disengage dogmas of faith from truth-demands; weighing the conflicting narratives of prophets in order to decide speculative matters is of little use, he argues, because these narratives are imaginative products derived from habits and attitudes of the prophets. Nevertheless, the teaching contained in the narratives is simple and invariable: obedience to God by practicing justice and charity. Thus, "the dogmas of the universal faith" should be identified as "certain beliefs about God such that, without these beliefs, there cannot be obedience to God, and if this obedience is posited, these beliefs are necessarily posited."<sup>17</sup> As I discussed elsewhere<sup>18</sup>, the seven dogmas Spinoza proposes in Chapter 14 of the *TTP* are nothing but beliefs derived logically from the necessary condition of obedience: 1) That a supremely just and merciful God exists, otherwise one cannot know whom to obey; 2) That God is one alone, otherwise exclusive devotion would be impossible; 3) That God is

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<sup>15</sup> *TTP* XV, p.187.

<sup>16</sup> *TTP* Praef. p.11.

<sup>17</sup> *TTP* XIV, p.175.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Osamu Ueno, "On the 'Credo Minimum' in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*", *The Philosophical Studies of Yamaguchi University*, vol. X, October 2001, 47-74.

omnipresent, otherwise belief in universal justice would be groundless; 4) That God has supreme right and dominion over all things, otherwise the demand for unexceptional obedience would lose power; 5) That obedience to God consists solely in love towards one's neighbor; 6) That only those who obey God are saved, otherwise there would be no reason to obey God; and 7) That God forgives the repentant, otherwise there would be no reason to return to obedience. Spinoza has no scruples about noting that these beliefs need not to be true.<sup>19</sup> They are genuine dogmas not because they tell the truth about the nature of God but because anyone who can be construed as obedient to God must, logically, subscribe to them. It should be noted that universal agreement in this matter is grammatical rather than consensual in a theological sense. Questioning opinions about God is not necessary because those who obey God are, as a matter of logic, understood to be in agreement about dogmas on the basis of their obedience and, consequently, to be pious. This is why Spinoza declares that universal faith has nothing to do with what God, or the Exemplar of the true life, may be: fire, spirit, light, thought, or whatever. Everyone may contemplate such questions without prejudice to piety.<sup>20</sup>

Next, we turn to the question of how we identify obedience to God's commandment. It is this question that the last half of the *TTP* addresses. In concrete cases, it is not always clear which deed deserves justice and charity and which does not according to God's commandment. The belief that a deed is consistent with justice and charity is not sufficient to decide whether this is so in reality, because acts committed from such a belief may eventually result in disaster for fellow citizens. Judgment of such issues requires established laws that apply to everyone and every case. In other words, the prophetic teaching of obedience cannot be put into practice unless it has the force of law to inform people about what is right and what is not. Just as the dogmas represent the logical conditions for obedience, the force of law represents its practical conditions. Spinoza is very clear in this matter. Social contract serves as a grammatical component for satisfying the latter condition.

The social contract appearing in Chapter 16 differs little from the Hobbesian contract in terms of logic. Because the mutual help that is indispensable for secure life is impossible in the natural state, where everyone has a natural right to do what s/he pleases, it was necessary to decree "that they will restrain any desire which is injurious to a man's fellows, that they will do to all as they would be done by, and that they will defend their neighbour's rights as their own." Because words alone cannot guarantee this state of affairs, the compact must involve the transfer of individual power to the society so that the latter will possess sole and unquestioned dominion that is powerful enough to bind everyone to obedience under threat

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<sup>19</sup> *TTP* XIV, pp.177-178.

<sup>20</sup> *TTP* XIV, p.178.

of the most severe punishment. Spinoza refers to the society thus constituted as a “*Democratia*.”<sup>21</sup> However, his aim was not to explain the origin of a body politic—this will be addressed later in the *TP*—but to articulate a certain logic implied by the piety in question. According to Spinoza, the contract was necessary so that “the true Divine doctrines might obtain absolutely the force of law and right (*vis juris*).” Then, and not until then, do the meanings of justice and injustice, equity and iniquity, emerge. This is consistent with the understanding of the ancient Hebrew state:

Thus, in order that the religion revealed by the prophets might have *the force of law* among the Jews, it was necessary that every man of them should yield up his natural right, and that all should, with one accord, agree that they would only obey such commands as God should reveal to them through the prophets.<sup>22</sup>

Spinoza adds that this is what occurs in a democracy. It is now clear that a social contract to establish the supreme power of the state forms part of the conditions under which the meanings of piety and impiety should be discussed. No accusation of impiety by the clergy should be valid unless it accords with civil law, and conversely, no citizen who obeys law should be taken as impious because of his thoughts. Those who obey the law agree, as a matter of logic, with these practices of justice and piety by virtue of their lawful conduct. Again, agreement is grammatical, rather than constituted by unanimous consent about the content of various theological tenets.

We are now in the position to identify the whole structure of the argument. Spinoza demonstrates in the *TTP* a kind of grammar that Scripture contains, which is the only way to address the paradox of the discrepancy between the universal acceptance of the irresistible divine commandment, on the one hand, and the irreducible divergence of opinions it produces, on the other. We may call it the *grammar of piety*.<sup>23</sup> I use the term grammar because, according to Spinoza, Scripture cannot teach piety without following a certain logic no less than men cannot make sense of their words without complying with certain grammatical rules. In fact, the prophets could not profess divine doctrines otherwise and the Mosaic theocracy could not be possible without resorting to a compact more or less equivalent to a social contract. If there were a remedy for a republic weary of controversies over piety and impiety, it should be found in Scripture itself. Such was the quest of Spinoza, and Scripture yielded the grammar of piety.

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<sup>21</sup> *TTP* XVI, pp.190-193.

<sup>22</sup> *TTP* XIX, pp.229-230. Emphasis is mine.

<sup>23</sup> Terms reminiscent of Wittgenstein.

## THE OTHER SIDE OF SOCIAL CONTRACT

It may seem paradoxical that freedom of Biblical interpretation is to be established by enumerating the dogmas of universal faith, and that this freedom of thought is to be secured by establishing a supreme power. The intellectual trick here involves converting divergence in opinion into agreement in grammar. Irrespective of the opinion entertained by an individual about faith and piety, s/he is to be understood as conforming to the practice of piety as long as s/he obeys the civil law. Only those who overtly negate the civil authority of the republic are to be judged as impious because that negation implies, as a matter of logic, the breach of the social contract, which is equivalent to *lese majesty*.<sup>24</sup> Agreement thus conceived is always of a grammatical sort. It does not dissolve actual divergence of opinion, but only encapsulates it within a free space that is logically irrelevant to piety, thereby omitting the nature and the cause of the divergence itself. This is why Spinoza also remarks to the reader on the ideological nature of the contractarian device at the beginning of Chapter 17. “Though it corresponds in many respects with actual practice, and though practice may be so arranged as to conform to it more and more, it must nevertheless always remain in many respects a mere theory.” For, “no one can ever so utterly transfer to another his power and, consequently, his rights, as to cease to be a man; nor can there ever be a power so sovereign that it can carry out every possible wish.” Spinoza's return to the ancient Hebrew state in this chapter represents more than a discussion of a timely topic. This return was indispensable for underscoring the other side of the grammatical device.

Let us now examine this move in detail. The grammar of piety adopted by the ancient Hebrews involved politics no less than religion. Their history cannot be reviewed without including the compact these people made with God. In the natural state following the Exodus, they made, at Moses' initiative, a compact with God agreeing that everyone would relinquish her/his natural right and transfer it to God alone. This compact was the foundation for a theocracy in which God alone had the sovereign power. As alluded to above, Spinoza regards a democracy to be of the same nature insofar as it would be God or society that assumed the natural rights relinquished by the people. In response to popular request, Moses assumed the position of the vicar of God to relay divine commandments. Thus, in their imagination, God alone retained the inviolable sovereign power, even over Moses who obtained the *de facto* sovereignty. In fact, Moses left no successor to his dominion, but distributed his prerogatives so that “those who came after him seemed, as it were, regents who administer the government when a king is absent but not dead.”<sup>25</sup> All this comes down

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<sup>24</sup> *TTP XX*, p.242; *TTP XX*, p.245.

<sup>25</sup> *TTP XIX*, p.236.

to an ingenious theologico-political system such that the people imagine themselves to be governed not by a king but by the delegates of an absent vicar of the invisible Absolute that commands justice and charity. So, in this republic of God, divine laws were the laws of the country, and patriotism was piety.<sup>26</sup>

This description may imply that the Hebrew theocracy wielded absolute power over the people. But history tells us that “men have never so far ceded their power as to cease to be an object of fear to the rulers who received such power and right; and dominions have always been in as much danger from their own subjects as from external enemies.” In reality, the sovereign power must continuously strive for the obedience of its people to secure its own existence. This constraint also holds in regard to the Mosaic theocracy.<sup>27</sup> In Scripture, Spinoza found various ways in which the Hebrew theocracy addressed this difficulty.<sup>28</sup> Moses' ingenious inventions—or rather, things revealed to him—were abundant: the divine Law concerning every detail of everyday life, the stimulating periodic rituals, the power-balanced confederation of the tribes, the people's army headed by God, and so on. These functioned with great finesse to obtain constant and spontaneous obedience and consequently promoted the security of the government. Spinoza gives the Mosaic theologico-political system high marks but he does not hesitate to point out that the sovereign power operates within limits, even in the context of all these devices.

I admit that the judgment can be biased in many ways, and to an almost incredible degree, so that while exempt from direct external control it may be so dependent on another man's words, that it may fitly be said to be ruled by him; but although this influence is carried to great lengths, it has never gone so far as to invalidate the statement, that every man's understanding is his own, and that brains are as diverse as palates.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, the Mosaic theocracy was not spared from internal turmoil. The ineradicable faculty of judgment possessed by humans has been and will be a constant source of disagreement. If the supreme power dared to eliminate freedom of thought by imposing laws, every citizen would be bound to speak against what s/he thinks, and eventually mutual trust, the most precious asset in a republic, would disappear. Using force to achieve consensus is futile.<sup>30</sup> There is no doubt that Spinoza was considering clerical pressure on republican politics in this regard. As the later *TP* illustrates, the sovereign, defined by the power of the multitude, has no effective power over those things that cause indignation among the majority of the masses.

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<sup>26</sup> *TTP XVII*, pp.205-211.

<sup>27</sup> *TTP XVII*, pp.201-203.

<sup>28</sup> *TTP XVII*, p.212-217.

<sup>29</sup> *TTP XX*, p.239.

<sup>30</sup> *TTP XX*, pp.239-245.

Indeed, the sovereign is bound to preserve the cause of fear and reverence lest s/he cease to be a sovereign by turning fear into indignation and the civil state into a state of enmity.<sup>31</sup> This is why the grammar of piety is bound to preserve the free space required for possible disagreement, thus rendering it irrelevant to the specifics of piety. In fact, if such freedom is taken away, both piety and public peace will cease as well. Thus, a certain natural right, inalienable by any contract whatsoever, returns to the contractarian grammar from the outside.

## CONCLUSION

We therefore conclude that the social contract mentioned in the *TTP* does not represent an explicit theory of the state, nor does it represent a discussion about a topic of contemporary interest. It represents part of a logic or grammar, deviation from which necessarily induced controversial ambiguity about piety and impiety. Such was the diagnosis by Spinoza. If so, just as the dogmas of the universal faith are irrelevant to demonstrable truth about God, the social contract need not explain the state in terms of true causes or reasons. Thus, we do not have to merge the dogmas with the propositions of the *Ethica*, nor the social contract with the naturalistic account of the state in the *TP*. The dogmas and the social contract are part of the grammar of piety, which is the public norm for discerning piety and impiety, not truth and falsity.

This discussion also explains why the *TTP* was the target of harsh accusations of atheism, even from liberal republicans such as van Velthuysen, who defended the freedom of philosophy.<sup>32</sup> The logical consequences of Spinoza's argument were at the center of such accusations. As noted above, piety follows a grammar that treats the subjective articles of faith of an individual as irrelevant. In order to establish the divine discipline of piety, the theologico-political system should not question the inner beliefs or piety of individuals in the usual sense but, instead, consider exterior acts alone in the context of the civil law. This paradox, an unavoidable truth characterizing the Dutch republic at this difficult time, was enough to cause criticism among contemporaries who held that true religion formed the foundation of the republic.

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<sup>31</sup> *TP* III, 9; IV, 4.

<sup>32</sup> J. Lagrée / P.-F. Moreau, "La lecture de la Bible dans le cercle de Spinoza," in: J.-R. Armogathe (ed.), *Grand siècle et la Bible*, Beauchesne, 1989, p.98.

In any event, Spinoza's intention to defend piety and public peace was genuine. But it is also true that his exposition was construed as “disguised atheism.”<sup>33</sup> Future discussions about Spinoza's social contract must consider the profound paradox contained in the *TTP*.

### Abbreviations

*TTP* = *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: with chapter-numbers and page-numbers according to *Spinoza Opera*, Bd.3.

*TP* = *Tractatus Politicus*: with chapter-numbers and section-numbers according to *Spinoza Opera*, Bd.3.

*Ep* = *Epistolae* with numbering in the Gebhardt edition *Spinoza Opera*, Bd.4.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *Ep* 42.

• Zac, Sylvain, “Le chapitre XVI du *Traité théologico-politique*,” reprinted in: *Philosophie, théologie, politique dans l'oeuvre de Spinoza*, Vrin, 1979.

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