

CHARLES RAMOND

BEYOND TOLERANCE?
SPINOZIST PROPOSALS ON PREFERENCES AND
JUSTIFICATIONS*

INTRODUCTION

Since the “freedom of philosophizing” is the very object of the *Theological-Political Treatise*,¹ and since chapter XX and last of the work² ends with the magnificent picture of man ready to die for this freedom, we readily consider Spinoza as a defender, or at least as a precursor, with Locke, of the notion of “tolerance”. However, the term “tolerance”, taken in this sense, is not part of Spinoza’s vocabulary. The only occurrence of the term *tolerantia*, in

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* This text is a modified English version of Charles RAMOND, “Préférence et Justification – Propositions spinozistes pour une séparation du théologique et du politique” [Preference and Justification: Spinozist Proposals for a Separation between Theology and Politics], published in French in Chantal JAQUET, ed., *La Générosité à l’œuvre – Hommage à Jean-Marie Beyssade* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2019), 151–76. The following proposals are based on my general, quantitative-extensive reading of Spinoza’s philosophy, as well as on my research on “moral feelings”. See the Bibliography below.

¹ *Theological-Political Treatise / Several Discussions / Showing That The Republic Can Grant / Freedom Of Philosophizing / Without Harming Its Peace Or Piety, / And Cannot Deny It / Without Destroying / Its Peace And Piety* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus continens dissertationes aliquot quibus ostenditur libertatem philosophandi non tantum salva pietate, et reipublicae pace posse concedi sed eandem nisi cum pace reipublicae ipsaque pietate tolli non posse*]. My translations are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2 vols., 1985 and 2016; see Mogens LAERKE, *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing* (Oxford: OUP, 2021).

² Chap. XX, entitled *Ostenditur, in libera Republica unicuique et sentire, quae velit, et quae sentiat, dicere licere*.

the *Theological-Political Treatise*, means “endurance”, capacity to endure a trial or pain, and not “freedom of worship”:

What, I ask, can be more ruinous than that men should be considered enemies and condemned to death, not because of any wickedness or crime, but because they have a mind worthy of a free man? Or that the scaffold, the scourge of the evil, should become the noblest stage for displaying the utmost endurance and a model of virtue [*pulcherrimum fiat theatrum ad summum tolerantiae, et virtutis exemplum*], to the conspicuous shame of the majesty?³

This Spinozist “freedom of philosophizing” is a matter of discussion and even of controversy. Jonathan Israel considers Spinoza’s position “radical”, and deeper than Locke’s. But Christophe Miqueu, on the contrary, thinks that the “tolerance” defended by Locke is very close to the “freedom of philosophizing” defended by Spinoza.⁴ Jean-Claude Milner also underlines the proximity of the positions of Locke and Spinoza, who exclude Catholics and atheists from the benefits of “tolerance”, on the pretext that they themselves would be “intolerant”, or because they would endanger the social pact itself.⁵ Either way, one cannot escape a feeling of anachronism when hearing of “tolerance” in the sense of “freedom of worship” in Spinoza. Spinoza never ceases to fight, throughout his philosophy, the notion of “freedom” understood as “freedom of indifference”, in the Cartesian sense, a freedom which could lead indifferently to any belief. But the notion of “tolerance” undoubtedly envelops the notion of “freedom of indifference”, even if it is not to be confused with it. We therefore do not see how Spinoza could have defended a “freedom to believe”, or a “freedom of indifference” in matters of beliefs when he everywhere criticizes such notions as simply illusory. On the other hand, Spinoza, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, in no way fights in favor of “tolerance” in the sense that the 18th century gave to this term, i.e., the freedom granted or recognized to religious groups to practice freely, in private as in public, their respective religions. For Spinoza, on the contrary, priests in the broad sense of the term are threats to the State, i.e., to the citi-

³ TPT XX [34] 350 [= *Theological-Political Treatise* (Curley’s translation), chap. XX, para. [34], p. 350].

⁴ See in Christophe MIQUEU’s *Spinoza, Locke et l’idée de citoyenneté* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), 398–426; the exposition and in-depth discussion of the arguments developed by Jonathan Israel in *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), on the question of “tolerance” in Spinoza and Locke.

⁵ Jean-Claude MILNER, *Le Sage Trompeur: Libres raisonnements sur Spinoza et les Juifs* (La-grasse: Verdier, 2013), 94.

zens and to those who govern them. Spinoza therefore does not advocate “tolerance” for religions, but “indifference” to theology, which is quite different. For him, we should not “tolerate” beliefs: we should declare that they are unimportant, because only actions and “obedience to the true rule of life” matter. It is therefore not so much for Spinoza to make room for religions in the State, as to deprive theologians of any legitimacy in beliefs or opinions. The “*Theological-Political Treatise*”, as its name indicates, is in fact addressed above all to “theologians” or to “theology”. Spinoza’s gesture is basically comparable to that which Feuerbach would do later: to separate the truths stated by the Prophets and by Christ from the lies of the theologians. In this very bitter fight, there is little room for “tolerance”—or at least, the term “tolerance” in its modern sense would be very ill suited to describe it.

The Spinozist separation between “theology” and “politics”, however, encompasses the separation that underpins any conception of “tolerance”, namely the separation between a world of “immanence” and a world of “transcendence”. In this sense, Spinozism—the philosophy *par excellence* of immanence—would offer a particularly pure vision of what we call “tolerance”, but in the form of other concepts, other notions, other names. This will at least be the thesis I will defend in this article. I would like to show, in fact, the conceptual and political consequences of the argument by which Spinoza, to defeat the theologians and restore peace in the State, declares that “opinions or beliefs are of no importance”, and that only “behaviors” (and especially behavior of “obedience” to the “true rule of life”) matter, whatever the beliefs that accompany or justify them. This thesis can indeed lead us towards a very radical form of democracy, perhaps still to come, and which would be structured mainly according not so much to the notions of “relativism” or “tolerance” as to the opposition between “preferences” and “justifications”. Then, perhaps, the democracy sketched in the last pages of the *Political Treatise* will take shape, this pure law of counting, finally freed from all transcendence?

A POSTERIORI VALUES: DARWIN, POPPER, SPINOZA

One could relate, from the point of view of their common immanentism and anti-theological character, the political philosophy of Spinoza, the Darwinian theory of evolution, and the epistemology of Karl Popper. These comparisons might be surprising: I am only proposing them by way of high-

lighting the patterns of thought common to these three doctrines, and which all amount to maintaining that the “value” of something whatsoever should not be appreciated *a priori*, but only *a posteriori*. It seems to me (to sum up all that I will try to develop in the rest of this presentation) that we will succeed in separating theology from politics only if we manage to admit that it does not exist of *a priori* values. This is probably more difficult than one might think, and that is why we find it so difficult to completely free ourselves from theology even in the most contemporary forms of politics.

With Darwin—as with Popper—everything is in fact equal *a priori*: all species in Darwin and all hypotheses in Popper, have their opportunity and their legitimacy at the origin. This is the joyous moment of the abundance. Next comes selection: in Popper, by crucial experience, in Darwin, by the death or disappearance of individuals or species in the struggle for life. In either case, whether it is a question of scientific laws or of surviving species, no finality, no transcendence, no pre-established scheme intervene, even if retroactively one can always have the illusion that nature was well and intentionally organized, through the simplicity of the laws which allow it to be foreseen, or through the harmonious balance of species. Darwin and Popper, on the contrary, propose strictly immanentist and anti-theological explanatory mechanisms, which shed some light on those found in Spinoza’s philosophy, concerning “singular things” in general and politics (and democracy) in particular.

Concerning “singular things” (*res singulares*), the typical Spinozist scheme is the *conatus* / destruction duality. Any “singular thing” considered in itself, however small and weak, could indeed last indefinitely; but in fact, it is statistically much more likely to make a “bad encounter”, and therefore to be “destroyed”, than something more powerful. On the other hand, even if *Ethics* IV Axiom declares that every singular thing can be destroyed by another singular thing more powerful, this destruction can be deferred, thus giving certain singular structures, for example democratic political bodies, a great stability, and a great *de facto* sustainability. As Spinoza emphasizes, rationality is the place of concord (as I say in my own way, in Spinozism “all existence is alliance”), while irrationality is the place of discord and therefore of weakness. Hence Spinoza’s famous statement that if the Devil existed, he should be pitied, because he would be very helpless and very miserable...

For us seeking all that is “sustainable” (especially “sustainable development”), the Spinozist indexing of rationality to sustainability therefore offers a remarkable conceptual resource. The magnitude of the phenomenon deserves emphasis. The definition of “duration”, thus, in *Ethics* II definition 5:

Duration is an indefinite continuation of existing

Duratio est indefinita existendi continuatio

envelops the idea of an “indefinite” continuation. On the other hand, the definition of “the effort to persevere in being” in *Ethics* III *proposition* 6:

Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being

Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur

makes “perseverance in being” an extension or a duration, so that the singular things are very exactly hierarchical, in Spinoza, by their degrees of power, that is to say basically, by their capacity to “persevere in being” for a longer or shorter time. Moreover, Spinoza explicitly specifies, in *Ethics* III 8, that

the striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being involves no finite time, but an indefinite time

conatus, quo unaquaeque res in suo esse perseverare conatur, nullum tempus finitum, sed indefinitum involvit

—by which “finitude” (if by that we mean “limitation in time”) is expressly denied from *conatus*, while Spinoza explicitly considers, in the *demonstration* of this *proposition*, the possibility of an indefinite prolongation, in the long term, of such an existence:

Since it will always continue to exist by the same power by which it now exists, unless it is destroyed by an external cause, this striving involves indefinite time

Si a nullâ externâ causâ destruetur, eâdem potentiâ, quâ jam existit, existere perget semper, ergo hic conatus tempus indefinitum involvit.

Moreover, Spinoza gives all the elements necessary to illustrate such a possibility of indefinite prolongation of the existence of finite modes (and this despite the presence of *Ethics* IV Axiom). In *Ethics* V *proposition* 42 *scholium*, the very conclusion of *Ethics*, Spinoza says of the “wise man” that,

conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be “*nunquam esse desinit*”.

And besides, weren't the sages of ancient times always represented as enjoying a particularly long life?

This valuation of duration is found again in the theory of knowledge. Spinoza makes the possibility of pursuing a reasoning without interrupting it a criterion of its rational value:

When the mind attends to a thought—to weigh it, and deduce from it, in good order, the things legitimately to be deduced from it—if it is false, the mind will uncover the falsity; but if it is true, the mind will continue successfully [*sin autem vera, tum feliciter perget*], without any interruption, to deduce true things from it.⁶

Spinoza had already stated, in § 44/29 of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*:

To prove the truth and good reasoning, we require no tools except the truth itself and good reasoning. For I have proved, and still strive to prove, good reasoning by good reasoning [*nam bonum ratiocinium bene ratiocinando comprobavi, et adhuc probare conor*].

“Perseverance in being” is therefore, in reasoning as in life, a criterion of rationality and power: an indefinite chain of consequence itself attests to its own validity, just like, no doubt, the indefinite prolongation of a life would itself attest to an incomparably increased power.

The Spinozist “*conatus* – destruction” schema is therefore very comparable, in its strictly immanent principle, to the Darwinian “mutations – selection by death” schema, or to the Popperian “trial and error” (or “conjectures and refutations”) schema: whether it is a question of crucial experiments, of selection by death, or of destruction by some other “singular thing”, nothing “is worth” *a priori*, but only as the result of selective tests: confronting predators (Darwin), or some crucial experiences (Popper), or the possibility of destruction (Spinoza).

⁶ *TEI* § 104/60. For the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, I give a double reference: the first number corresponds to the numbering (most generally adopted today, including by Edwin Curley) proposed by Karl Hermann Bruder in his edition of 1843 in Leipzig; the second gives the numbering followed by Charles Appuhn in his translation, *Traité de la réforme de l'entendement* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1904), of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, namely that of the edition of Van Vloten and Land (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1882–1883).

The same pattern is to be found in politics. In Spinoza, there is indeed a valuation of the duration of political regimes. It is true that Spinoza declares in *Ethics* IV Preface:

For no singular thing can be called more perfect for having persevered in existing for a longer time

Nam nulla res singularis potest ideo dici perfectior, quia plus temporis in existendo perseveravit.

But for him the effective duration of a State, like of any singular thing, ultimately depends on its “virtue”, that is, on its “power”.⁷ If therefore, ideally speaking, singular things are equal in that they all envelop an indefinite duration, in fact, according to their degree of power, they are more or less able to withstand the encounters and accidents of fortune. In other words, they will last more or less depending on whether they are more or less powerful. From this point of view, one could argue in favor of democracy, from a Spinozist point of view, not for reasons of moral superiority or values, but because such a regime establishes, by the law of counting, the permanent and constant settlement of conflicts that could weaken it from within—democracy thus revealing itself, despite the weakness and indecisiveness we often believe we can blame it for, a durable and powerful regime, more durable and powerful even than the most despotic regimes.

But in a striking way, democracy presents in its very functioning, like a mirror as it were, the immanentist schema we have just seen at work in singular things. To the “*conatus*/destruction” schema which indeed characterizes any singular thing, corresponds, or responds, in democratic functioning, to the “opinions/vote” or “preferences/political selection” schema. After a first stage of strict equivalence, where all opinions or preferences are equal, a second stage takes place, where only the opinions having received the greatest number of votes (the vote or “political selection” being here the equivalent of Popperian “crucial experience” or of Darwinian “natural selection”) can “persevere in their being” as laws of the State (as well as the species which prevailed in the struggle for life pursue their destiny, or as the hypotheses not yet refuted continue to be used by scientists).

⁷ See *PT* 5/3 [= *Political Treatise*, chap. 5, para. 3] and 10/1.

POLITICS AND THEOLOGY: PREFERENCES AND JUSTIFICATIONS

All of this has already introduced us to the distinction between “preference” and “justification”, which is at the heart of what I am trying to highlight here. I propose to define the “theological” by the attachment to *a priori* “values”, to a form of transcendence, to which one will reach either by religious “belief”, or by consultation of his “conscience” or of his reason, which will in all cases give “justifications” or “legitimations” of the action. Reason as well as morality can be in this view at the source of theological dimension in politics; and according to an only apparent paradox, Spinoza will perhaps help us delivering politics from reason as well as from morality. The politics will, on the contrary, be the rejection of any transcendent value as well as of any finality knowable *a priori*, and being unable to offer ultimate or *a priori* “justifications” to action, will stick strictly to the immanent “indifferent preferences/political selection by vote” scheme.

Seen in this way, a good part of contemporary politics retains something theological by the constant appeal it makes to “values” which would be above all else, which one should respect, and which would legitimize or justify our political choices. In this sense, the separation between theology and politics is still far from being effective or completed in our societies, despite the laws on secularism that have separated Church from State. This separation would be complete, such would be the Spinozist proposal of this intervention, only if we collectively renounced all transcendent value, or at least (because, to follow Spinoza, it is absurd to want to deal with politics without wanting to take people as they are), if we collectively declared (and, often, solemnly reminded people) that the values we respect and inscribe on the pediments of our public monuments are relative, temporary, changing in time and place, and above all chosen and decided in a collective and democratic way, and that they are therefore not above any democratic vote, but on the contrary that they derive and depend on democratic votes. The politics will be separated from the theology when the immanence and relativity of values will be proclaimed as often as needed.

The “values” that we respect (as for example in France “liberty/equality/fraternity”) are often considered as the deep “justification” of individual or public action, and constitute a kind of “red line”, of limit not to be crossed, a transcendence that even the vote should not be able to call into question. This is probably why “justification” remains so important in our societies

and our thoughts, so much so that it has become difficult, not to say shameful, to act or think without justifications.

Of course, very few of us would explicitly and directly appeal to an established theology or religion to provide ultimate justifications for our political choices. This is still in force in quite a few countries, but not in ours. In this sense, we have unquestionably begun to separate theology from politics. But we have, in the dual form of “moral conscience” or “deliberative democracy”, found fairly good substitutes for the somewhat old-fashioned explicit theology. On the side of “moral conscience”, a few citizens, for example, happily claim to be endowed with “moral feelings” or “moral sentiments” (shame, anger, indignation, sympathy) that put them in direct contact with “values” that cannot therefore be the object of negotiation or compromise on their part (like some mystics who had the chance to see God directly and were ready to martyrdom for him). Such claims inevitably give rise to violence on the part of these citizens when the values they intimately believe in are judged by them, flouted or not respected by other citizens, even if the latter respect the laws of the State. On the side of “deliberative democracy”, a little more affable, everyone is enjoined (in the countless debates and discussions we take part in) to justify one’s positions or votes by “arguments”, as if a political position could be legitimate only if it was rationalizable, arguable, resulting from a deliberation in which the best arguments would have won.

However, whether it is done by reference to moral values or in relation to rational deliberations, this constant valuation of “justification” in our deliberative and moral democracies can only be done on condition of carefully masking the other pole, the other pillar, of these same democracies: namely the fact that the vote is unjustified and preferential. In the voting booth, I vote for whoever I want, for whatever reason, even the stupidest. I am here the sovereign people. When I vote, I am not obeying the law, but I am making it. Democracy is the opposite of technocracy: there is no “voter’s license”, and no exams are required to vote. Democracy is by definition, it is all its paradox and all its greatness, the reign of the incompetent, who vote according to their “preferences”, so that the vote of the most uneducated person is worth exactly as much (one vote) as that of the most learned and cultured person, and the vote of the least moral person is worth exactly as much (one vote) as the vote of the most moral person, assuming there is any sense in speaking of “degrees of morality”, a matter that I will leave aside here.

Our deliberative and moral democracies do not content themselves with leaving the pole of “preference” in the shade as much as they highlight that of “justification”: they seek to shame us with our preferences. Very strikingly, in France, the term “preference”, as preempted or simply used by the “National Rally”⁸ in the expression “national preference” (“*préférence nationale*”, once its program slogan), has in itself, for several years, been the subject of some sort of taboo—as if simply expressing a “preference” was in itself suspect, which is particularly strange, I allow myself to insist, before perhaps making my case worse by trying to explain soon why we should “prefer preference” to “justification”... We are constantly and everywhere called upon to say why we vote in one direction rather than in another. They try to shame us for our inner feelings. We are forced to be consistent. The only unacceptable, inadmissible speech is “because I prefer it to be that way”, or, as children sometimes say, “because yes”, or “because because”. From this point of view, the highlighting by Deleuze of Melville’s short story “Bartleby the Scrivener”, who makes himself absolutely odious and unbearable to others by the simple fact of sticking to an unjustified “preference” (“I would prefer not to”), is particularly significant and sounds to me very Spinozistic. As in the explanation of the falling tile, in *Ethics I Appendix*, they want to silence us by dint of questions. Gentle inquisition... A kind of schizophrenia is thus installed among citizens by trying to make them believe that the only valid vote is a justified or justifiable vote, at the very moment the material organization of the vote sends the opposite message: you vote as you see fit, depending on your “preferences”, and we will not ask you for any “justifications”.

SALVATION THROUGH OBEDIENCE

Let us take these two sources of justification one after the other and see what a Spinozist point of view could be on this subject.

1. Justification by reference to values, insofar as it encompasses the refusal of discussion and deliberation, is first logically contradictory with deliberative justification. We should therefore, if we were consistent, choose between justification by values and justification by deliberation, because

⁸ Originally “National Front”, now “National Rally”: sovereigntist and nationalist party existing in France since the 1970s, representing between 20% and 40% of the electorate, and whose candidates arrived in the second round of the presidential election in 2002, 2017, and 2022.

these are two contradictory principles. On the other hand, justification by values looks much more than it would like to justification by preferences, that is, an absence of justification. Justification by values, which can be accessed by one's moral conscience, or by moral feelings declared unchallengeable, is in reality, obviously, a "good preference" which is opposed to the "bad preference" of those who go vote according to their instincts, their impulses, their selfishness, their interests, their fears or their hatreds, or the interested suggestions of the system (advertising, money, propaganda, communication, polls). This position of a "good preference" as opposed to a "bad preference", however fragile it may be at bottom, like any opposition of a "good x" to a "bad x" (good and bad will, good and bad capitalism, good and bad violence, medicine and poison, religion and superstition...), is nonetheless at the heart of the moral justifications to which many of us plan to submit politics.

Justification by moral conscience and by reference to untouchable values, superior even to the law, free examination, individual capacity to resist any political injunction in the name of higher injunctions, to disobey, to revolt, are without doubt at the heart of our conception of modernity and politics. We have made freedom of conscience, if I dared this paradox, the new sacred... Our tutelary figures are rebels, resistance fighters, being indignant: Antigone, Joan of Arc, Gandhi, De Gaulle, Rosa Parks, l'Abbé Pierre, Mandela... No one would dare to touch such a dogma or such characters, without taking the risk of being unanimously rejected and hated. Artists have understood it very well: "Are you looking for an institutional funding? Be innovative, disturbing, rebellious..." The contradictory injunction "disobey me" is undoubtedly tiring to apply in the long run, but artists are often smart and enduring...

In this position of resistance and rebellion, would we have Spinoza as an ally? The *Theological-Political Treatise* ends with the picture of the free man who resists the priests, even on the scaffold, and for us these magnificent pages have become a sort of structuring affective diagram. We want to see in it the defense of the freedom of examination, even the freedom of conscience, against all dogmas, all religious obscurantism. For us it is a figure of freedom, conscience, and resistance, so attractive and so strong that we do not easily see in it the birth of the "new sacred" I have just spoken of. But it seems to me that that would be to misinterpret Spinoza's positions. Spinoza, in fact, far from valuing an individual conscience based on "values" and capable of challenging the laws of the State (which amounts to

making this conscience a new sacred place and therefore reintroducing theology into politics), separates theology from politics by means of his striking theory of full obedience.

Obedience is indeed the heart of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, even if this cannot fail to hamper somewhat our cult of rebellious thought, of free examination, and of the sacredness of moral values... I sometimes wonder if, in the event that Spinoza would come back among us today, he would not suffer from us a new Herem (the reverse of the first) for inappropriate cult of obedience, bad thinking, immoralism, lack of faith in all that we absolutely want to believe... We now often see the birth, among readers of Spinoza, of little herems about what he said about women, servants, madmen, children, a “black and filthy Brazilian”, rabid people that it would be “legitimate to strangle”, blind people who would complain wrongly about their fate, the nonsense of “excuses”, and so many passages where Spinoza would not be as close to our values as we do might wish.

Spinoza, in the *Political Treatise*, his latest work, consistently gives a very severe judgment on “sedition”. Indeed, he sees a good political system as capable first of “keeping its shape” as long as possible:

So when I speak of the means required to preserve the State, I understand the means necessary to preserve its form without any notable change.

*Quare media, quae ad imperium conservandum requiri dixi, ea intelligo, quae ad imperii formam absque ulla ejus notabili mutatione conservandam necessaria sunt.*⁹

This conservatism appears with clarity in chapter 8/7 of the *Political Treatise*, where Spinoza indicates his ambition to build lasting regimes, which would be “in no danger from the multitude” and from which “there’s no doubt that he’ll have removed all causes of sedition”. In this, the *Political Treatise* draws lessons from the analyzes of the *Theological-Political Treatise* which centrally develops a theory of sedition and counter-sedition. Priests, in the most general sense of the term, have an interest in seditions and their triggering, because they have an interest in dividing the State to weaken it and to be more powerful in it. The hysterical, unconscious, blind, manipulated, fickle and furious mob [*vulgus*] is the actor of seditions. To provoke seditions, it is enough for priests to proclaim that the sacred texts teach something theoretical about God (for example, about his nature), or on

⁹ PT 6/2.

any other subject, and that it is of the utmost importance to have on these subjects this or that belief rather than this or that other. Suddenly the State is divided and weakened. If indeed what one believes matters to the State, specialists in sacred texts and therefore in beliefs will have great influence. Some opinions or beliefs will become approved, and even sanctified, while other opinions will become prohibited, and even cursed. Freedom of opinion being ruined, liars, Tartuffes, hypocrites, and concealers will flourish, but also necessarily fierce resistance to such oppression, and therefore discords, endless quarrels, seditions, division and ultimately the ruin of the State.

After having thus described the illness, the remedy imagined and proposed by Spinoza in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (which is therefore indeed a treatise on anti-sedition) will consist in showing that, contrary to appearances, the Scriptures and the sacred texts do not teach anything particular in terms of faith, opinions and beliefs, but only deliver a practical teaching, which consists in living according to the “true rule of life”. Like the sentence of Christ before the male crowd ready to stone the adulterous woman (“Let him who has never sinned cast the first stone”), Spinoza’s thesis that “beliefs have no importance” disarms the hostile and seditious mob. Indeed, if one admits that the Scriptures do not teach anything about the nature of God, nor about any speculative subject, then opinions and beliefs, all of a sudden, are released. The “freedom to think what you want and to say what you think”, which is the object of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, becomes effective. The “priests” lose all control over opinions. There are no longer sacred or heretical opinions. So, there is no reason to fight for opinions, and the State ceases to be weakened or divided. Basically, says Spinoza, beliefs do not matter: only behaviors matter. And behaviors are the sole responsibility of political power, the only one that can determine what behavior is or is not in accordance with the pact or the laws, regardless of intentions. The question, then, is not what people “believe”, but whether or not they “obey” the orders or commands of the sovereign. Everything is therefore brought back by Spinoza to the question of obedience, a question so central in the *Theological-Political Treatise* that it explicitly makes the link between the chapters devoted to the interpretation of the Scriptures, and the chapters devoted to freedom of thinking.

Scripture primarily teaches obedience. These are very well-known passages, on which I allow myself to insist:

The purpose of Scripture was not to teach the sciences.... It requires nothing from men but obedience [*nihil praeter obedientiam eandem ab hominibus exigere*], and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance [*solamque contumaciam, non autem ignorantiam damnare*].... Obedience to God consists only in the love of your neighbor. From this it follows that the only knowledge Scripture commends is that necessary for all men if they are to be able to obey God according to this prescription, and without which men would necessarily be stiff-necked, or at least lacking in the discipline of obedience [*et qua ignorata, homines necessario debent esse contumaces, vel sine disciplina obedientiae*].¹⁰

Conversely, the end of chapter XIII of the *Theological-Political Treatise* reduces all beliefs to only two categories of behavior: those which show obedience and those which show disobedience. This is the supreme criterion, and the condemnation of disobedience is unequivocal in this particularly remarkable passage:

So, we must not for a moment believe that opinions, considered in themselves and without regard to works, have any piety or impiety in them. Instead, we should say that a person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel [*licentiam ad peccandum aut rebellandum sumit*]. So, if anyone becomes stiff-necked by believing truths [*si quis vera credendo fiat contumax*], he is really impious; on the other hand, if he becomes obedient [*obediens*] by believing falsehoods, he has a pious faith.¹¹

Disobedience is thus the main “sin” that one can commit in the State. The term *peccatum* is synonymous with “civil disobedience”:

Sin, then, can be conceived only in a State, i.e., where the common law of the whole state decides what’s good and what’s evil, and where ... no one acts rightly unless he acts in accordance with the common decree or agreement. For (*as we said in the preceding section*) sin [*peccatum*] is what can’t be done rightly, or what’s prohibited by law. And obedience [*obsequium*] is a constant will to do what by law is good and what the common decree says ought to be done.¹²

This is, moreover, exactly the meaning of the only passage in the *Ethics* where the term *inobedientia* (“disobedience”) appears, and where, once again, “sin” is associated with “disobedience” while “obedience” is considered a “merit”:

¹⁰ *TPT* XIII [8] 258 15–21.

¹¹ *TPT* XIII [29] 263 19–25.

¹² *PT* 2/19.

Sin, therefore, is nothing but disobedience [*est itaque peccatum nihil aliud, quam inobedientia*], which for that reason can be punished only by the law of the State. On the other hand, obedience is considered a merit in a Citizen [*et contra obedientia Civi meritum ducitur*], because on that account he is judged worthy of enjoying the advantages of the State.¹³

This over-valuing of obedience, unexpected or even incongruous for us citizens of contemporary liberal democracies, who have insubordination as a value if not supreme, at least very high in the hierarchy of our values (think for example of the popularity of such notions as “civil disobedience”, “objection of conscience” or “withdrawal clauses”), alone allows us to understand that Spinoza makes disobedience, in the episode of Nero’s matricide, the very heart of what one can imagine the worst in human behavior. In fact, referring to the assassination by Nero of his mother Agrippina, Spinoza writes in *Letter 23* to Blijenbergh:

For example, Nero’s matricide, insofar as it comprehends something positive, was not knavery. For Orestes, too, performed the [same] external action, and with the [same] intention of killing his mother. Nevertheless, he is not blamed, or at least, not as severely as Nero is. What, then, was Nero’s knavery? Nothing but this: he showed by that act that he was ungrateful, without compassion, and disobedient [*inobediens*].

It is very striking to see that the term *inobediens* (“rebellious” or “disobedient”), is considered by Spinoza as what is specifically criminal in the crime of Nero, even more than its ungrateful dimensions and ruthless.

Spinoza cannot therefore in any way, in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and in the *Political Treatise* (but I also mentioned an important passage from the *Ethics*), be considered as a theorist of the “justification” of political action by reference to “values” that could reach an “enlightened conscience”, or “morality” and which could be opposed by this same conscience to the laws of the State. The “remarkable men” at the end of the *Theological-Political Treatise* do not oppose their freedom of conscience to civil power, but to seditious crowds who want to overthrow it. The term “seditious” is judged so demeaning by Spinoza that he sometimes apologizes just for using it:

One thing, though, I can’t pass over in silence: how wretchedly they’re deceived when they try to confirm this seditious opinion (if I may be excused for speaking

¹³ *E IV 37 sc 2.*

rather harshly) [*hanc seditiosam opinionem (veniam verbo duriori precor)*], by appealing to the example of the high Priest of the Hebrews.¹⁴

The “seditious” try to make the Magistrates “hateful to the common people.”¹⁵ The “devotion” of the crowd is easily turned into “rage” by the seditious who cannot stand the “free minds.”¹⁶ What the righteous love, finally, is hated by the seditious, which amounts to opposing the “righteous” and the “seditious”, or to posit that no sedition can be “just”.¹⁷ No “sedition” can thus, in Spinoza’s eyes, attract thoughtful, courageous, lucid, balanced, and sincere men. The crowd wants the punishment of the reasonable man, the crowd wants the cross—the crowd pushed by priests to kill or lynch for beliefs.¹⁸ The upright man obeys the sovereign but resists the crowd. He is not on the wrong side.

Spinoza thus allows us to pursue, in each of us, the separation between theology and politics. He does not in any way promote the idea of a moral justification for our political actions, justification in the name of which we could enter into disobedience or sedition *vis-à-vis* the Sovereign of the State. Emancipation through obedience will obviously seem paradoxical... Moreover, as Alexandre Matheron admirably showed in *Christ and the Salvation of the Ignorant* [*Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*], Spinoza’s philosophy, that is to say, rationality, shows incapable, in Spinoza’s own eyes, of understanding, that is, of demonstrating the salvation of the ignorant through obedience, which is the only message delivered by the Scriptures when correctly

¹⁴ TPT XIX [35] 339.

¹⁵ TPT XX [15] 347: “If someone shows that a law is contrary to sound reason, and therefore thinks it ought to be repealed ... to accuse the magistrate of inequity and make him hateful to the common people [*vulgo odiosum reddendum*], or if he wants to nullify the law, seditiously, against the will of the magistrate, he’s just a troublemaker and a rebel.”

¹⁶ TPT XX [33] 350: “Laws of this kind, which command what everyone is to believe, and prohibit people from speaking or writing something contrary to this or that opinion, have often been instituted to make a concession to—or rather to surrender to—the anger of those who can’t endure free minds [*eorum ira, qui libera ingenia ferre nequeunt*], and who can, by a certain grim authority, easily change the devotion of a seditious mob to madness [*seditiosae plebis devotionem facile in rabiem mutare*], and rouse it against whomever they wish to.”

¹⁷ TPT XX [36] 351: “What kind of precedent is established by the death of such men, whose cause those lacking in spirit and weak-minded know nothing about, whose cause the seditious hate, whose cause the honorable love [*seditiosi oderunt, et honesti amant*]?”

¹⁸ TPT XX [42] 352: “These examples show, more clearly than by the noon light, that the real schismatics are those who condemn the writings of others and seditiously incite the unruly mob against the writers [*et vulgum petulantem in scriptores seditiose instigant*], not the writers themselves, who for the most part write only for the learned and call only reason to their aid.”

interpreted. But Spinoza helps us to understand that one can free oneself from the theology only by freeing oneself from the sacred in all its forms, including the absolute valorization of moral conscience or moral feelings. This is not to make Spinoza a fatalist or a conservative in the most ordinary sense, even if a Stoic acceptance of necessity is to be found in *Ethics* IV Appendix 32. This would be contrary to common sense and to the unanimous feeling of a liberating and emancipating force that one feels when reading this philosophy. Obedience is therefore not valorized for itself, but in that it desacralizes the laws by renouncing to justify them.

There would be here in Spinoza, it seems to me, something of the Pascalian attitude, to add an argument to those that can be read in a volume devoted in 2007 to the rapprochement of the two authors.¹⁹ The ignorant obey the law because they believe it to be good; the half-skilled resist the law when they believe it to be bad; the wise men obey the law even though they know (or because they know) that it is neither good nor bad, but only necessary. These three figures do not designate distinct individuals. They coexist and struggle in each of us, depending on the occasion and the moment. The ignorant and the semi-skilled, in each of us, remain prisoners of the theological-political field, because they regulate their obedience to the law on their appreciation of the law as “good” or “bad”. Only the clever (or the “wise”, to use the Spinozist and traditional term), who obeys the law without subjecting it to a work of external “justification”, theological or moral, achieves from time to time the freedom which results from the separation of theology and politics.

POLITICS BY NUMBERS

I now come to the second source of justification most often opposed to simple “preference”, namely argumentative or deliberative justification.

It may seem surprising to call an author like Spinoza in support of anti-argumentative and anti-deliberative theses, or to put it more positively, in support of an attempt to rehabilitate “preference” in our conceptions of democracy. And yet, in many ways, Spinoza’s political philosophy shows an utterly striking and significant indifference to the justifications we might be tempted to give to our opinions or preferences.

¹⁹ Laurent BOVE, Gérard BRAS, and Éric MECHOULAN, eds., *Pascal et Spinoza – Pensées du Contraste: de la géométrie du hasard à la nécessité de la liberté* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2007).

Two sentences of Spinoza are central to understanding his radicalism in terms of the separation of theology and politics. On the one hand, *Political Treatise* 2/23 reads:

Therefore, like sin and obedience [*peccatum et obsequium*], taken strictly, so also justice and injustice can be conceived only in a State.

Spinoza here explicitly declares the anteriority of politics over morality or theology: one can never submit laws to a moral assessment that preexists them—which amounts to denying any transcendence of the morality over the politics, and therefore any subordination of the politics to the morality. This declaration of the *Political Treatise* echoes the famous declaration of *Ethics* III 9 scholia:

From all this, then, it is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it.

—which could be the slogan of a democratic preference theory.

The second key reading I would suggest here is *Political Treatise* 7/18:

For the power of a State, and hence its right, are to be reckoned by the number of its citizens

Imperii potentia et consequenter jus ex civium numero aestimanda est.

The obsession with quantity, present everywhere in Spinoza in the doctrine of “singular things”, and at the highest point in the *Political Treatise*, is concentrated here explicitly in the declaration of equivalence of the power and the law of the State, on the one hand, and the “number” of citizens—on the other. This is an entirely immanent conception, indifferent to any question of “good”, “bad”, or “better” regime. Numbers alone make power—and law. The Spinozian formula that democracy should be viewed as *imperium absolutum*, that is, “absolute State” or “absolute regime”²⁰ can only be appreciated from the point of view of such digital radicalism.

Such indifference to justification or to the ends of political action compels us, it seems to me, to take up these questions for themselves.

²⁰ *PT* 11/1: “I come, finally, to the third, and completely absolute state [*omnino absolutum imperium*], which we call Democratic.”

The values that govern our actions are much less clear-cut and stable than one might think. The motto of the French Republic is “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” (Freedom, Equality, Fraternity), which we can therefore consider as the supreme “values” in France, even if without doubt these wouldn’t be the only ones we would adopt, if we were to try to come up with a more complete list, which I will try very briefly now. We would therefore find in such a list, no doubt, “solidarity”, “secularism” and “respect”, including respect of physical integrity. Should we include “honor” and “discipline”? It’s less certain, although for many of us these are values. Likewise, “charity” could no longer be, without doubt, a value of a secular Republic, and yet charity undoubtedly remains a very widespread moral or religious value, and which has, so to speak, reigned over Christian civilization for nearly 2,000 years. It is unlikely that we would put “life” in our list of values today, because of abortion laws, although life is undoubtedly a “value” in our eyes, since the murders are among us the most severely punished crimes. We do not place “beauty” among the “values” of our Republic (because the cult of beauty always has something disturbing and discriminating, apart from the fact that opinions diverge on what is beautiful or not), although it is unquestionably of value to many of us, at a time when individuals spend considerable sums on improving their physical appearance, while States spend even more considerable sums on art, museums, creation, architecture, town planning, landscapes, thus showing clearly that “beauty” is a value which could claim the title of political value. “Transparency” or “sincerity” could also be candidates since those who deviate from them are politically and socially sanctioned. This brief exercise in writing will have been enough to show that there is no agreement or permanence, either in time or in space, on the list of values. Such an agreement could only exist if we had this “sense of justice” on which Rawls and a few others place great value, but which obviously is not infallible, since it can lead to the law of retaliation as well as to the forgiveness of offenses.

Political Spinozism agrees in depth (such would be my thesis) with this relativism or indifferentism in matters of values. If only one testimony had to be given, it would suffice to evoke the most famous declaration of *Political Treatise* 1/4, true manifesto, or philosophical testament of Spinoza:

So, when I applied my mind to Politics, I didn’t intend to advance anything new or unheard of, but only to demonstrate the things which agree best with practice, in a certain and indubitable way, and to deduce them from the condition of human nature. To investigate the matters pertaining to this science with the same

freedom of spirit we're accustomed to use in investigating Mathematical subjects, I took great pains not to laugh at human actions, or mourn them, or curse them, but only to understand them.

In accordance with a very old tradition, Spinoza's philosophy would thus declare itself incompatible with any valuation of astonishment, mockery, detestation... and consequently with *a priori* devaluation of any human action whatsoever.

If we now take for itself this question of the finalities of politics, in all its generality (which of course Spinoza prompts us to do), we will undoubtedly conclude that there is an antinomy between "politics" and any explicit main purpose whatsoever.

Basically, we don't know what politics is for (or what its purpose is). To ask whether we are aware of what we expect from politics, or how we would define it, is to ask a mysterious question. Any positive response in fact (politics has as its finality "happiness", "security", "freedom", "power", "wealth", "health" of peoples), would immediately remove from politics that which makes it specific, namely for a people the freedom and the capacity to change, or to renounce old aspirations. If we posited, for example, that the goal of politics is the "wealth" of a population, the "growth" of its economy, the increase of its gross domestic product, etc., as it is almost always the case nowadays, then politics would be indistinguishable from economics and finance, and would have to be done on the stock market. If we posited that the purpose of politics is "life expectancy", or the lengthening of the life span of citizens, then politics would not be so different from medicine, and should go to the doctor. If it was "security", politics wouldn't be much different from policing, and would have to go to the police and the military. If it was "happiness", it wouldn't be much different from religion or wisdom and would have to go to priests. We can imagine other justifications, other finalities. But any positive justification will be a way of removing politics at the very moment it is posed. So if we want to maintain a specificity of politics (a question that cannot be resolved in advance, whether within the framework of Spinozism or in itself: we could very well imagine that ultimately, politics does not have to be maintained—this is for example the position of Alexandre Matheron in *Individual and Community*), then we can only maintain it as "negative" of all the purposes mentioned above, and indeed of any finality.

Well-understood politics should therefore be defined by the possibility left to peoples to modify their goals as they see fit. One day you want security, the other day you may want freedom; one day you want adventure, even conquest, the other day you may want calm and prosperity. There is an intrinsically revolutionary dimension of democratic politics. This point had in my opinion been noticed by Spinoza in his refusal to subordinate politics to any meaning, to any finality or to any set of values, which enabled him to present in the *Political Treatise* a particularly pure and exact vision of the very essence (all negative) of politics. In this sense, the immanentist and only negative radicalism of Spinoza would find echoes in radical theories of democracy, such as we find them for example in Jacques Rancière or Chantal Mouffe, who themselves also challenge the deliberative models of democracy. The difference, it seems to me, would come from the fact that Spinoza, by the law of the count, always offers a possibility of a non-violent solution to the fundamental divergences of options which characterize democracy, so that we do not remain, with him, in the “dis-agreement” (or the “mis-count”, so aptly named)²¹ of Rancière, no more than in the agonistic of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau.²²

I would personally be inclined to take this critique of deliberative democracy myself so far, as the mere attempt to convince someone on a political issue, by pressuring his choice in any way (whether by fear or publicity, but even by reasoned rational discussion) would seem to me to be condemned, except in case of explicit request. From there we could develop, still in a spirit close to that of Rancière, a critique of militancy and a defense of self-teaching that would be fairly consistent with the defense of “preference”.

The undecidability of the finality of politics is present in a significant way in the very texts of Spinoza, since, if he declares in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (chap. XX) that the aim of the State is “freedom” (which is a way of saying that there is no “purpose of the State”),²³ he declares in the *Political Treatise* (1/6) that the virtue of the State is rather “security”:

²¹ Resp. “Mésentente” and “Mécomptes”. See Rancière’s *La Mésentente* (Paris: Galilée, 1995) or, in English, *Dis-agreement*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

²² See Ernesto LACLAU and Chantal MOUFFE, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London–New York: Verso, 1985, 2001).

²³ *TPT* XX [12] 346: “So the end of the Republic is really freedom [*finis ergo Reipublicae revera libertas est*].”

It doesn't make any difference to the security of the State in what spirit men are led to administer matters properly, provided they do administer them properly. For freedom of mind, *or* strength of character, is a private virtue. But the virtue of the State is security [*at imperii virtus securitas*].

To tell the truth, the opposition is not so clear-cut between the two works: for there are indications in favor of “security” in the *Theological-Political Treatise*,²⁴ while there are indications in favor of freedom in the *Political Treatise*.²⁵ But this hesitation of Spinoza on the finality or supreme value of the State is significant for the thesis that I defend here. Be that as it may, contrary to what Hardt and Negri assert, Spinoza never made joy (*gaudium*) “the goal of politics”—not even that “of philosophy”.²⁶ A Republic, thus, always has values, even if they are often fluctuating; but Democracy, considered in itself, has none. Therefore “tolerance” will always suit a democratic spirit better than a republican one.

CONCLUSION

I would like to mention, to finish, the main objection that one cannot fail to raise against the theses I have defended in this presentation: why “prefer” democracy, why “prefer” the law of the count, why prefer preference to justification? Can the preference for the preference be justified without obvious contradiction?

To answer this, I will give only one argument, but one that seems strong to me. It is impossible to evaluate opinions, to rank them according to their “value”, but on the other hand it is always possible to count votes. So, there is a fundamental difference between the democratic rule of the account, and

²⁴ *TPT* III [17] 114: “This is also established most plainly by Scripture itself. For if you run through it even casually, you will see clearly that the Hebrews excelled the other nations only in this: they handled their *security* auspiciously [*quod res suas, quae ad vitae securitatem pertinent, feliciter gesserint*]; see also *ibid.*: “The end of the whole social order and of the State—as is evident from what has just been said and as we shall show more fully in what follows—is to live *securely* and conveniently [*secure et commode vivere*].”

²⁵ *PT* 5/6: “But note: when I say a rule has been set up for this end [i.e., ‘the end of the civil condition, which is nothing than peace and *security* of life’—*PT* 5/2], I mean that a free multitude has set it up, not that the rule over a multitude has been acquired by the right of war.”

²⁶ Michael HARDT and Antonio NEGRI, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009): “The goal of Spinoza’s philosophy and politics, for example, is joy (*gaudium*), an active affect that marks the intensification of our power to think and act” (translated into French by Elsa BOYER [Paris: Gallimard, 2012], Conclusion, 535).

any other way of looking at politics. The conflict over values is impossible to resolve, by definition, since everyone considers himself guided by a sort of God whom he calls his “conscience” when he wishes to be respected, and his “preference” when he does not care. Since the values are sources of justification themselves unjustifiable and incontestable, they can only lead to violence among those who claim them. The “sense of justice” or “sentiment of injustice” is thus always the antechamber of violence. For very good reasons, of course: how could you accept that some people are sleeping in the streets, while others are lounging in palaces? It is therefore “fair” to break down the doors of the haves, to drive them out, and to install the poor in their place. How could you accept that child murderers stay alive? It is therefore “fair” to put them to death, etc.

If, on the contrary, we accept the law of counting, we immediately place ourselves in the perspective of “obedience” (here we find Spinozist coherence) to collective decisions. We can freely express all our preferences by our votes, however wacky they may be in the eyes of some of our fellow citizens (for example, that two individuals of the same sex can get married). And if the majority wins, well, we’ll go along with it. It’s neither better nor worse, it’s the majority. Like any majority, it may change one day. On that day we will follow other laws than today: it is not because we judge something to be good that we do it, but because we do it that we judge it to be good...

We are thus brought back to a formalist conception of democracy, which has always aroused reluctance.

In a radio program devoted to the “rhetoric of populism”,²⁷ Pierre Rosanvallon (Professor at the College de France) expressed the wish to achieve “post-electoral democracy”. One should not, according to him, become attached to the “magic” dimension of the vote, that is to say to believe that, in a “magic” way, the vote could concentrate democracy. A typical statement of some sort of high priest: those who believe in elections believe in “magic”, they are savages, primitives, idolaters, we will wisely rule in their place, indicating to them the beautiful, the true and the good... We will be able, perhaps, to convert them, to get them out of their obscurantism, to emancipate them...

²⁷ Ariane CHEMIN, Thomas WIEDER, and Vincent MARTIGNY, *L’Atelier du Pouvoir*, France Culture, January 21, 2017, podcast, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/l-atelier-du-pouvoir?p=1>.

Spinoza helps us to grasp the contempt and theological arrogance of such declarations, but also their latent violence. Because if we leave the reign of quantity, of democratic accounts sanctioned/selected by the vote, what will be left to make preferences triumph, if not violence? Spinoza therefore helps us not to be seduced by the opposition between a “formal” and a so-called “real” democracy. From the point of view of the *more geometrico*, the formal is the essential, the reality itself, and it makes no sense to oppose a “formal democracy” to a “real democracy”, because the reality of democracy lies precisely in its strict formalism, in the selection by voting of preferences that are first and foremost all equally legitimate.

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BEYOND TOLERANCE?

SPINOZIST PROPOSALS ON PREFERENCES AND JUSTIFICATIONS

Summary

The term "tolerance", strictly speaking, does not belong to Spinoza's vocabulary, and the notion of "tolerance", in its modern sense, is not part of his concepts either. However, the separation of theology and politics, which is the subject of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, envelops an even more radical separation between immanence and transcendence. An entirely immanent policy would be indifferent to "values" and "justifications" of any kind (moral, religious, rational). It would be based only on the "accounts" of individual "preferences". We show that Spinoza's philosophy can help us conceive (perhaps one day achieve) such a form of radical, or "absolute" democracy.

Keywords: Spinoza; tolerance; religion.

POZA TOLERANCJĘ?

SPINOZJAŃSKA KONCEPCJA DOTYCZĄCA PREFERENCJI I UZASADNIENÍ

Streszczenie

Termin „tolerancja”, ściśle mówiąc, nie należy do słownika Spinozy, podobnie jak pojęcie „tolerancji”. Jednak rozdział teologii i polityki, o której mowa w *Traktacie teologiczno-politycznym*, ukrywa jeszcze bardziej radykalny rozdział immanencji i transcendencji. Całkowicie immanentne ustawodawstwo byłoby neutralne w kwestii wszelkiego rodzaju „wartości” i „uzasadnień” (moralnych, religijnych, racjonalnych). Opierałoby się wyłącznie na „koncepcjach” indywidualnych „preferencji”. Argumentujemy, że filozofia Spinozy może nam pomóc wyobrazić sobie (a być może w przyszłości również osiągnąć) taką formę radykalnej, czy „absolutnej” demokracji.

Słowa kluczowe: Spinoza; tolerancja; religia.