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Spinoza on Civil Liberation

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IN THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in the midst of a discussion about the bounds of effective governance, Spinoza declares that “the purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom.”¹ While this remark obviously purports to tell us something important about Spinoza’s conception of the *civitas*, it is not clear exactly what is revealed. What, after all, does ‘freedom’ mean in this context? And how does the state provide or promote such freedom? The way in which one answers these questions will determine, to a large extent, how one conceives of Spinoza’s normative political project as a whole. In this paper, I will provide an interpretation of this passage in particular (hereafter: “passage P”), and of Spinoza’s account of the civil liberation in general, that will enable us to see his political writings as an extension of his larger ethical enterprise. My interpretation of Spinoza’s account of civil liberation will contrast strikingly with what we might loosely call the liberal interpretation of Spinoza that has become prevalent in Anglo-American scholarship.² Whereas this liberal interpretation draws a sharp division between the normative aim of Spinoza’s political writings and that of the *Ethics*, my interpretation reveals Spinoza to be a unified thinker whose overarching concern—from his earliest writings until these political treatises—was with how human liberation could best be achieved. Specifically, I will show that, according

¹TTP 20/232. All quotations from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [TTP] are taken from Samuel Shirley’s translation (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998). Citations refer to the chapter, followed by page number (e.g., ‘20/232’ refers to chapter 20, page 232). All references to the *Tractatus Politicus* [TP] are to Shirley’s translation (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). Citations of the TP refer to the chapters/sections (e.g., ‘5/4’ refers to chapter 5, section 4). All references to the *Ethics* and to the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* are to *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. I. ed. and trans. E.M. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). I adopt the following abbreviations for the *Ethics*: Roman numerals refer to parts; ‘P’ denotes proposition; ‘C’ denotes corollary; ‘D’ denotes definition; ‘dem.’ denotes demonstration; ‘S’ denotes scholium (e.g., ‘EIII P59S’ refers to *Ethics*, part III, proposition 59, scholium). All Latin passages refer to *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).

²I shall take the liberal interpretation of Spinoza to be one that attributes to him the view that the primary goal of the state is to protect individual liberties rather than to advance a certain conception of the good. The liberal interpretation was first fully developed in Lewis Feuer’s *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), but has been revived and reconfigured by several recent commentators. See, for instance, Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* [*Liberalism*] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), and Douglas Den Uyl, *Power, State and Freedom: An Interpretation of Spinoza’s Political Philosophy* [*Power*] (Assen: Van Gorcum & Company, 1983).

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to Spinoza, the state can promote liberty by influencing the behavioral patterns and affective dispositions of its citizens. The ordinary citizens of a well-organized state may come to be guided by a species of *fortitudo*, or strength of mind, even if they are not capable of obtaining the elusive third kind of knowledge presented in part five of the *Ethics*.

This paper comprises four sections. In the first section I present, in rough outline, the liberal interpretation, as well as the auxiliary interpretations of passage P that support such a reading. In order to reveal the shortcomings of this liberal reading, I must show both that (i) the state can positively liberate its citizens, and (ii) the extent to which it can is considerable. In order to establish (i), I consider (in section two) the graduated account of freedom that we find in the *Ethics*. This is followed (in section three) by a discussion of the various ways in which the Spinozistic state can liberate its citizens, in which I establish (ii). Notably, a well-organized state brings about prudential (as-if rational) activity and directly enhances the affective conditions and cognitive powers of its citizens. In order to show this, I trace some of the relevant features of Spinoza's moral psychology, highlighting, for instance, the distinction between hope (*spes*) and fear (*metus*). In the fourth and final section, I examine some of the particular institutional features that facilitate civil liberation. Ultimately, in addition to revealing Spinoza's view of the liberative capacity of the state, I intend also to present some of the important mechanisms for civil liberation and to explain why Spinoza takes them to be so effective.

I. THE LIBERAL INTERPRETATION

I.1 *The Civil Liberties Interpretation of Passage P*

Some commentators have supposed that when Spinoza says that the purpose of the state is freedom he means freedom in the sense of civil liberties. Let us call this the Civil Liberties Interpretation. Henry Allison, for instance, maintains that, in passage P, "freedom must be understood primarily as freedom of thought and speech."³ Steven B. Smith understands the passage in roughly the same way:

"So the end of the state," Spinoza boldly declared, "is really freedom." The boldness of Spinoza's conception is that not the individual alone but society as a whole will benefit from a policy of maximum liberty of opinion and belief. The *Treatise* [*TTP*] is perhaps the first work in Western political theory that defends the proposition that *the exercise of free speech is the goal of social policy*. (*Liberalism*, 160; my emphasis)

It might be tempting to read the passage in this way. After all, it follows a provisional defense of the freedoms of conscience and speech in which Spinoza states that the task of the remainder of the chapter is to "enquire to what extent this freedom can and should be granted to all."⁴ This leads the reader to suppose that the freedom that is "the purpose of the state" is precisely the same freedom that "can and should be granted to all," namely, freedom of thought and speech. But, however natural this reading might be, it is mistaken for a couple of reasons.

³Henry E. Allison, *Benedict de Spinoza: An Introduction*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 191.

⁴*TTP* 20/231.

First of all, it is not clear what it would mean to say that the purpose (*finis*) of the state is the maximization of civil liberties. According to a conventional view, the scope of “the state” is inversely related to the scope of civil liberties: such liberties or rights limit state power. If the purpose of the state is the protection of civil liberties, the purpose of the state will lie in its own restriction; this sounds like taking the expression ‘rules are made to be broken’ literally. Such a view would be both paradoxical and highly un-Spinozistic. For Spinoza, there is nothing internal to a thing that can destroy or limit it;⁵ and insofar as a thing can have a purpose or aim, that purpose cannot in any way be self-negating or self-limiting.⁶

Furthermore, Spinoza’s arguments for the preservation of these personal liberties are thoroughly pragmatic. He makes it clear in chapter 20 of the *TTP* that civil liberties are merely instrumentally, not intrinsically, valuable, even though the preservation of certain negative liberties is an essential feature of any healthy polity. Freedoms of conscience and speech must be protected if civil order is to be maintained and if the arts and sciences are to flourish—indeed, if philosophy is to be possible. But while these freedoms must be protected if the state is to fulfill its end, civil liberties are nevertheless not to be mistaken as (intrinsically valuable) ends in themselves, let alone *the* end of the state.

1.2 *The Deflationary Interpretation*

A more compelling interpretation of passage P is what I will call the “Deflationary Interpretation.” According to the Deflationary Interpretation, the purpose of the state is in fact liberty, and ‘liberty’ denotes a desirable civil condition; nevertheless, it signifies something weaker than the liberty of the *Ethics*. This point is expressed most vividly by Douglas Den Uyl:

Since freedom is itself defined in terms of security and harmony, ‘freedom’ and ‘peace’ are virtually synonymous terms in Spinoza’s political thought. Freedom, like reason, has a political as well as an ethical sense. In book five of the *Ethica* freedom means not being subject to the passions. Since it would be utopian to expect a social condition where men are not moved primarily by their passions, freedom takes on a more limited normative content in the politics. In the political writings ‘freedom’ means merely peace—that is, security and harmony. (*Power*, 114)

Simply put, on this interpretation, ‘freedom’ in passage P ought to be understood as *mere* peace.

As I see it, there are two basic reasons for supposing the deflationary account to be true. The first reason is that some sort of deflation of the concept of freedom seems to be in order, since freedom in the *Ethics* appears to be a matter of forming adequate ideas or acting from the dictates of reason, and, as Den Uyl notes, it would

⁵*E* III P4.

⁶The only purpose that a thing can have on Spinoza’s view is self-realization. A full discussion of Spinoza on teleology would take us too far afield. Fortunately, there is already a wealth of literature on this topic. See, for instance, Don Garrett, “Teleological Explanation in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. Charles Huenemann and Rocco J. Gennaro (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310–35; Edwin Curley, “On Bennett’s Spinoza: The Issue of Teleology,” in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*, ed. E. M. Curley and Pierre-François Moreau (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 39–52; and Jonathan Bennett, “Spinoza and Teleology: A Reply to Curley,” in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*, 53–57.

be wildly unrealistic to suppose that the state could bring it about that men are led more by reason than by the passions. The other primary reason for adopting the Deflationary Interpretation is textual: in the later work, the *TP*, Spinoza identifies a much more modest aim for the state, namely, “peace and security of life” (*pax vitaeque securitas*).⁷ By deflating ‘freedom’ in passage P to “peace,” Den Uyl is able to reconcile these apparently disparate remarks. I will return to respond to each of these sources of support for the Deflationary Interpretation later. On the face of it, though, this interpretation appears to be somewhat plausible.

1.3 *The Liberal Interpretation of the Spinozistic State*

Both the Civil Liberties Interpretation and the Deflationary Interpretation of passage P tend to feed into a liberal interpretation of Spinoza’s normative political philosophy, according to which the most that the state can and ought to do is provide the preconditions for moral development by protecting personal liberties and providing peace and security. The view is well-captured in Den Uyl’s claim that “in essence, Spinoza’s prescriptive political philosophy amounts to little more than the recommendation that the *civitas* focus its attention on what is most fundamental to social order—namely, peace—and leave people free to pursue their own desires on all other matters.”⁸ Barbone and Rice also yoke Spinoza together with Adam Smith as a theorist of the “minimal state,”⁹ since on their reading the state is concerned primarily with the civil protections and institutional structures that preserve stability. But Steven Smith’s statement is the clearest expression of this liberal interpretation:

The *Treatise* [*TTP*] does not answer the question of how people who are described as naturally credulous and prone to superstition can be made rational. By what leap of faith could Spinoza maintain that men who are driven by nothing other than “desire and power” could conclude an agreement to curb their passions and “live wholeheartedly according to the guidance of reasons?” Unlike Plato or Maimonides, Spinoza does not advocate the rule of a philosopher-king or a prophet who might educate his subjects to a lofty vision of human perfection. *Spinoza’s politics are, by contrast, starkly anti-perfectionist. He is not bereft of an idea of human perfection, but he does doubt that politics or law is the appropriate means by which to achieve it.*¹⁰ (*Liberalism*, 136–37; my emphasis)

⁷*TP* 5/2; cf. *TP* 1/6.

⁸*Power*, 118. See also Den Uyl’s claim that “Spinoza does not consider the ‘final cause’ of the *civitas* to be the development of individuals; nor does he regard good citizenship as the end of personal development. Rather, he sees the *civitas* as a foundation for one’s development. *Spinoza does not ask the civitas to make men virtuous, nor does he believe the civitas could do so if it wanted to....* [T]he purpose of the *civitas* is peace rather than the shaping of virtuous men” (*Power*, 128; my emphasis).

⁹Steven Barbone and Lee Rice, *Introduction and Notes to Spinoza’s Political Treatise* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), 29.

¹⁰I should note that Smith offers a rather nuanced view with respect to the liberative potential of the state. While he does defend an anti-perfectionist reading of the Spinozistic state, he also recognizes that the Spinozistic state is concerned with the autonomy of citizens (*Liberalism*, 160). And Smith’s discussion of the “political or public dimension” of virtue of *fortitudo* (*ibid.*, 162) illustrates his awareness that the state does have a moral function.

According to Smith, it is a grave mistake to associate Spinoza's "anti-perfectibilian" politics with his ethics.¹¹ Ethical perfection is a "deeply private matter . . . for which the requirements of political rule are inappropriate."¹²

It is certainly tempting to cut off Spinoza's politics from his perfectionist ethics in precisely this way. However, in my view, this would be to misunderstand the fundamental nature of Spinoza's political project. In the remainder of this paper, I want to offer an alternative interpretation, according to which, when Spinoza writes that the purpose of the state is freedom, he means freedom in the full, ethical sense, and supposes that the state liberates not only by providing conditions for the preconditions for philosophizing, but also by aiding moral development in more direct ways. In order to make the case for this I will briefly consider Spinoza's account of liberty in the *Ethics* so that we can see that there is nothing absurd about supposing that the state could liberate in this way, even if it is absurd to suppose that the state could be the proximate cause of the adequate ideas of citizens.

2. RECONSIDERING FREEDOM IN THE ETHICS

As I mentioned above, one of the two main reasons for supposing that passage P must operate with a deflated conception of freedom is that, as Den Uyl and Smith point out, freedom in its full normative sense seems to be possible only for a select few. There is good reason to be suspicious about the state's ability to procure this sort of liberty. For instance, when Spinoza discusses man's "highest freedom" in *Ethics* V, he writes that such freedom consists "in a constant and eternal love of God, or in God's love for men,"¹³ which itself arises from the third kind of knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*; see *EVP*32, *EVP*33). The famous closing lines speak to the uncommonness of this liberty: "what is found so rarely must be hard. For if salvation [*salus*] were at hand, and could be found without great effort, how could nearly everyone neglect it? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."¹⁴ The liberty described here is severely prohibitive, open only to the few truly wise. And even the best state could not possibly directly liberate in the sense of begetting this intellectual love of God (*amor Dei intellectualis*). Spinoza himself seems to suggest this when he claims at the opening of the *TP* that "the path taught by reason is a very difficult one, so that those who believe that ordinary people or those who are busily engaged in public business can be persuaded to live solely at reason's behest are dreaming of the poets' golden age or of a fairy tale."¹⁵ It is on the basis of passages like this that Den Uyl and Smith build the case for an "anti-perfectibilian" interpretation of Spinoza. This constitutes a fair challenge: if freedom is a matter of becoming fully rational, it would seem that the state could not possibly hope to bring about such liberation directly; it can, at best, prevent destruction.¹⁶ What I

¹¹Cf. "no one should confuse Spinoza's democratic politics with his conception of the highest good" (*Liberalism*, 137).

¹²*Liberalism*, 144.

¹³*EVP*36S.

¹⁴*EVP*42S.

¹⁵*TP* 1/5.

¹⁶By 'direct liberation' I mean liberation for which the mechanisms and institutions of the state would be the primary, though not the sufficient, cause.

want to suggest now is that there is a more general account of freedom that one finds in the *Ethics* that admits of a wider scope of application.

2.1 Freedom as Causal Self-Sufficiency or Power of Acting

To get a better understanding of Spinoza's general account of freedom, let us start by recalling the definition of a free thing (*res libera*) that Spinoza gives us in part one: "That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner."¹⁷ To be free is to be causally self-sufficient. Causal self-sufficiency is rendered in the *Ethics* in terms of a thing's power of acting (*potentia agendi*), or its ability to produce effects from its own nature alone. God's freedom consists in the fact that his power of acting explains and encompasses everything. The production of these effects depends upon no power extrinsic to him. Human beings, as finite modes, cannot be self-sufficient in the sense outlined in *E ID7*.¹⁸

Nevertheless, insofar as we *are* at all, we will necessarily possess a certain degree of power of acting.¹⁹ This point is captured by Spinoza's claim that "the power [*potentia*] of each thing, or the striving [*conatus*] by which it (either alone or with others) does anything . . . is nothing but the given, or actual, essence of the thing itself."²⁰ And this follows in part from *E IP36*, which states that "nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow," since to be is just to "express in a certain and determinate way the power of God."²¹ Of course, the scope of our reality or power will be deeply restricted, as our power is "infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes."²² Nevertheless, the more we are able to increase our power of acting, the more God-like (or God-expressing) we will be. Such power of acting denotes at once causal efficacy and resistance to the power of (potentially destructive) external causes. Michael Della Rocca offers the following helpful, compact statement of the same basic point (using 'independence' to refer to what I am calling "causal self-sufficiency"):

Given Spinoza's determinism, no action of a human being can be completely independent of external causes. Nonetheless, for Spinoza, independence of external

¹⁷*E ID7*. In the *TP*, he gives a similar rendering of freedom as necessary, internal causation, but in a manner more suitable for conceiving of human freedom: "the more free we conceived man to be, the more we were compelled to maintain that he must necessarily preserve himself and be of sound mind, as will readily be granted by everyone who does not confuse freedom with contingency. Freedom, in fact, is virtue or perfection; so anything that signifies weakness in man cannot be referred to his freedom" (2/7).

¹⁸Since "any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause" (*E IP28*), human actions are compelled or "determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner" (*E ID7*).

¹⁹For Spinoza, to be is to be causally efficacious, i.e., to possess a certain power of acting. A thing's "power" is coextensive with its "reality." This is true both for God (whose "power is his essence itself" [*E IP34*]) and for its modes (*E IIP7dem.*).

²⁰*E IIP7dem.*

²¹*E IP36dem.*

²²*E IVP3.*

causes is a matter of degree: one becomes more independent as one increases one's power of acting. Since Spinoza defines freedom in terms of independence of external causes and since such independence is a matter of degree, it appears that freedom, too, is a matter of degree. Thus, even if human beings cannot be perfectly free with regard to the production of a certain effect, we can, by increasing our power of acting, achieve a greater *degree* of freedom with regard to that effect.²³

The upshot of this analysis is again that one's degree of freedom will be coextensive with one's power of acting;²⁴ and being powerful is a matter of both being more capable of producing effects from one's nature—notably, self-preserving effects—and being less at the mercy of external causes, that is, less subject to randomness or *fortuna* (see *E* III P 59 S and *TTP* 3/38). With this general account in mind, I want to make three observations that will help us to see the state as a directly liberating body.

First of all, since one's freedom or power of acting is augmented whenever one becomes more causally self-sufficient, anything that can render one more causally self-sufficient will render one more free. Given that this is the case, there is no reason to suppose that external things cannot empower. As Della Rocca puts it, "external causes can make an object more or less dependent on external causes when it comes to bringing about that thing's destruction."²⁵ So external aids, like a copy of the *Ethics*²⁶ or a wise interlocutor, may prompt one to think more clearly or more adequately and thereby become freer or more powerful.

Still, if one thinks that activity consists exclusively in forming adequate ideas, one may remain suspicious about the state's liberating potential. This leads me to my second observation, namely, that forming adequate ideas is not the only way of expressing one's power of acting. The definition of an action reads: "I say that we act when something in us or outside us follows from our natures."²⁷ And as we have seen, our nature is just our striving (*E* III P 7). This entails that—as Parkinson points out—"[the] *conatus* is an *internal* efficient cause; the agent whose acts follow from his *conatus* is thus in a sense self-caused."²⁸ If we assume that striving is just the tendency of a thing to preserve itself or to augment its power of acting,²⁹ it would follow that a thing's power can be expressed simply through its *striving* or *tending* to persist in its state (what some have called a thing's "existential inertia"). This interpretation fits with the suggestion that striving is constitutive of *all*

²³Michael Della Rocca, "Determinism and Human Freedom" (with Robert Sleigh and Vere Chappel), in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Michael Ayers and Daniel Garber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1231.

²⁴As Robert McShea rightly claims, "'Power' and 'liberty' have for Spinoza convergent meanings" ("Spinoza on Power," *Inquiry* 12 [1969], 142).

²⁵Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 212.

²⁶Also, those external causes that have primed our minds to recognize the truths of the *Ethics* play a significant role in our ability to be powerful, which is why Spinoza claims in the *TdIE* that "attention must be paid to Moral Philosophy and to Instruction concerning the Education of children" (§15).

²⁷*E* III D 2.

²⁸G. H. R. Parkinson, "Spinoza on the Power and Freedom of Man," *The Monist* 55 (1971), 541.

²⁹See Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Metaphysical Psychology," and Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," in *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Central Themes*, ed. John I. Biro and Olli Koistinen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 127–58.

singular things. After all, peach trees and ping-pong paddles may not be capable of coming to know and love God, but they can express God's power through their tendency/ability to preserve themselves.³⁰

What emerges from this analysis is a graduated account of power or freedom. At one end of the spectrum is the power or freedom of God, who is maximally active and fully independent; at the other end of the spectrum are ephemeral things like raindrops and mayflies, whose power to produce effects, including the effect of persevering in their being, is overcome by external causes almost as soon as they come to be. And while there is a great disparity between the level of acting of a philosopher—who is able to cultivate an intellectual love of God, act from reason, etc.—and that of a raindrop—which has only a very limited power to persevere in its being—there is a common measure for the liberty of all things; to wit, a thing's power of acting. Thus, insofar as the state is able to aid the power of acting of its subjects *in any way*, it may be said to be directly liberating.

The final observation that I want to make about Spinoza's general account of freedom is that changes in a thing's power of acting are registered affectively. Indeed, an affect (*affectus*) is defined as "an idea by which the mind affirms of its body a greater or lesser force of existing than before."³¹ Specifically, joy is the affect "by which the mind passes to a greater perfection"³² or greater level of power; and sadness is the affective indicator of the mind's (and body's) transition to a lesser degree of perfection or power.³³ Spinoza's ethical project can thus be fruitfully viewed as a brand of perfectionism, with a graduated conception of human flourishing, wherein one's level of power is mirrored by one's level of joy or happiness.³⁴ The affective zenith is blessedness (*beatitudo*), or one's greatest happiness. Short of full blessedness, we want at least to be able to steel ourselves against external forces that diminish our power so that we may be as content as possible. From this we can see that anything that *reliably* promotes a thing's *overall* joy or protects

³⁰It follows that for humans, as well, the ability to persevere in our being is an expression of power. This is why, after having defined 'goodness' as joy or joy-production (*E* III P39S) and having defined 'joy' as an increase in one's power of acting (*E* III P11S), Spinoza writes that "those things are good which bring about the preservation of the proportion of motion and rest the human body's parts have to one another" (*E* IVP39); such sources of preservation are good because they are empowering. It would seem, then, that anything that contributes to the systematic functioning of our bodies—e.g., food, water, ventilators, antibiotics, and so forth—ought to be regarded as empowering or liberating for the individuals whose ratios of motion and rest depend on them. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza leaves aside the question of "in what way the Body must be cared for" (*EV* preface), in part because it constitutes a lower degree of empowerment than what is promised by his cognitive therapy. However, by mentioning "medicine" alongside "logic" in the preface to *Ethics* V, he implies that physical health constitutes a part of liberation or general welfare that falls outside of the ambit of the *Ethics*. And in the *TdIE*, he explicitly cites care for the body as part of the path to true happiness or liberty: "Because Health is no small means to achieving this end ... the whole of Medicine must be worked out" (§15). This is all to say that a thing's (system's) physical welfare or ability to persevere in its being constitutes a form of power or freedom.

³¹*E* IVP14dem.; cf. the general definition of the affects.

³²*E* III P11S.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴When he writes in the final proposition of the *Ethics* that "blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself" (*EV* P42), he is expressing this very point: blessedness is not a consequence of virtue or power, but is power itself, considered affectively.

a thing from suffering ought to be regarded as liberating or empowering (with respect to that thing).³⁵

Liberation, then, is construed so broadly as to comprise the whole of ethics for Spinoza.³⁶ This being the case, we should not be surprised that he would claim that the purpose of the state—which is grounded in the appetites/purposes of the individuals who constitute the state—is liberty. Still, in this section I have not sought to adduce evidence in favor of the interpretation that I advocate. Rather, I have dispatched one of the salient reasons for accepting some version of the Deflationary Interpretation of passage P, and for denying the possibility of direct civil liberation. In the next section, I will make a positive case for this reading.

3. THE SCOPE OF CIVIL LIBERATION

3.1 *Stability*

For Spinoza, as for Hobbes, the genesis of a commonwealth³⁷ is explained in terms of its capacity to protect its subjects from harm. The exigency for creating a commonwealth comes from the fact that in the state of nature man's natural right (*ius naturale*)—which is notoriously identified with power (*potentia*)—"is of no account, and is notional rather than factual."³⁸ In such a condition one is easily overcome by countervailing external forces: "it is vain for one man alone to try to guard himself against all others."³⁹ Because of our weakness on our own, Spinoza maintains that "in order to achieve a secure and good life, men had necessarily to unite in one body."⁴⁰ By providing security, the state thereby promotes the power of acting of its members, and so liberates them.

³⁵A couple of significant caveats are in order here. First of all, joy and sadness are fundamentally metaphysical, not phenomenal, states—while they are "felt" in some sense, they are not defined in terms of their subjective character. This is just to say that introspective reports of (levels of) joy or sadness are not infallible or incorrigible. Secondly, not all instances of joy are empowering for the individual *tout court*. Whereas cheerfulness [*hilaritas*]—which is always good (*E IVP42*) or empowering—affects the whole person (mind/body), pleasure [*titillatio*] is "ascribed to a man when one part of him is affected more than the rest" (*E IIIPI1S*). Pleasure can be excessive and can thereby undermine the power of the individual (mind/body) as a whole. But despite the fact that, when excessive, pleasure undermines an individual's overall power, it is nevertheless good in itself (a sign of a transfer of at least part of our body/mind to greater power of acting), and is rightly pursued in moderation by the wise man (*E IVP45S*). All joy is directly good (*E IVP41*); and so long as an instance of joy does not make an individual more susceptible to sadness or serve as an obstacle to greater joy, it too will be good or liberating on the whole. With these caveats in place, we may indeed affirm that anything that brings about an increase in one's overall joy, or a decrease in one's overall sadness, will have produced a liberating effect. And the more reliably a thing/mechanism conduces to one's joy, or power, the more reliably liberating it is.

³⁶In light of his naturalistic assault on conventional morality (*E IV* preface), the only foundation for morality—according to Spinoza—is one's natural striving for power (*E IVP18S*).

³⁷By commonwealth I mean here a legitimate form of state (not a tyranny). In Spinoza's account of the origin of the state, there is a shift from the Hobbesian contractarian account of the *TTP* (transference of powers, etc., illustrated by way of the Hebrew state), to the "deductive" account of the *TP* ("one should not look for the causes and natural foundations of the state in the teachings of reason, but deduce them from the nature and condition of men in general" [I/7]).

³⁸*TP* 2/15.

³⁹*Ibid.* Cf. *TTP* 5/64: "The formation of a society is advantageous, even absolutely essential, not merely for security against enemies but for the efficient organization of an economy. If men did not afford one another mutual aid, they would lack both the skill and the time to support and preserve themselves to the greatest possible extent."

⁴⁰*TTP* 16/181; Cf. *TP* 2/15.

If this were the only way in which the state could liberate its citizens, all this would demonstrate is that Spinoza's conception of liberty is broad enough to encompass such things as security. And this is perfectly consistent with the interpretation of Spinoza's state as minimal; indeed, it is consistent with the view that the state is morally neutral according to virtually any conception of morality other than Spinoza's. In other words, if I were merely claiming that the purpose of the state is security or stability, and that security is a form of liberty, this would amount to little more than a terminological quibble. I want to make a stronger claim than this. I propose that Spinoza's normative political claims are grounded in the view that the state ought to attempt to promote general welfare (meaning the satisfaction of *real* interests) and cultivate virtue in its citizens as far as the limits of human nature and state power allow. There are indeed limits to what the state *can* do as a moralizing agent, but it can certainly do more than merely furnish security. In what follows, I will trace the more robust liberating function of the state.

3.2 *The Citizen and As-If Rational Behavior*

One of the fundamental ways in which a well-organized state liberates its citizens is by ensuring that they cannot help but act in ways that redound to their own power. The mechanisms of the state serve as surrogates of reason; the next best thing to acting from the dictates of reason is to act in accordance with the laws of a good state. To see how there can be a "next best" course of action to acting from reason, we must first consider the inadequacy of the "free man/slave" dichotomy with which Spinoza operates (at least some of the time). In the *Ethics*, Spinoza tells us that the free man is one who "complies with no one's wishes but his own, and does only those things he knows to be the most important in life."⁴¹ That is, he⁴² is someone who knowingly acts in accordance with his own (real) interests. A free, rational man is one who serves his own advantage, or successfully strives (*EIVP20*), thereby obeying himself.⁴³ By contrast, the slave "does those things he is most ignorant of"⁴⁴—he "lives under pleasure's sway and can *neither see nor do* what is for his own good."⁴⁵ The slave neither knows what is in his best interest nor acts reliably in accordance with his own real interests. We may represent the distinction between the free man and the slave in the following way:

Figure 1.

	Is able to discern what reason dictates (i.e., is rational).	Is able reliably to act in accordance with his own real interests.
FREE MAN	YES	YES
SLAVE	NO	NO

⁴¹*EIVP66S*.

⁴²In order to maintain consistency with Spinoza's language, I adopt the masculine personal pronoun throughout.

⁴³This is Spinoza's way of speaking: *TP 2/20, 2/22*. Despite the Kantian ring to it, 'autonomy' for Spinoza means nothing more than acting in accordance with one's essential interests, or according to "the laws of human nature" alone (*TP 2/7*).

⁴⁴*EIVP66S*.

⁴⁵*TTP 16/184*; my emphasis. A slave follows the vicissitudes of the common order of nature (see *EIII P59S*), which is as likely as not to lead him to "neglect his own advantage" (*EIVP20*).

The free man and the slave are paradigms, models of human perfection and imperfection, respectively. In reality, all humans fall somewhere in between these extremes. And whereas Spinoza operates with the sharp free man/slave dichotomy in the *Ethics*, in the political writings we are presented with another model of action that falls somewhere between the free man and the slave, namely, the *citizen-subject*.⁴⁶

In the *TTP* Spinoza maintains that the difference between the citizen-subject and the slave hinges on the *cui bono* question, i.e., the question of whose interests are served:

If the purpose of the action is not to the advantage of the doer but of him who commands, then the doer is a slave, and does not serve his own interest. But in a sovereign state where *the welfare of the whole people, not the ruler, is the supreme law* [*salus totius populi, non imperantis, summa lex est*] he who obeys the sovereign power in all things should be called a subject [*subditus*], not a slave *who does not serve his own interest*. (*TP* 16/184; my emphasis)

What Spinoza calls a ‘subject’ here in the *TTP* is replaced by the designation ‘citizen’ in the *TP*, which Spinoza defines as one who “enjoy[s] all the advantages of the commonwealth by civil right”⁴⁷—hence the expression “citizen-subject.” Again, the citizen-subject of a well-organized state will reliably act in accordance with his own real interests, whether he is rational or not (and most humans are not, for the most part). The position of the citizen-subject as the “next best” is well illustrated in the following passage from the *TP*:

Now if human nature were so constituted that men desired most of all what was most of their advantage, no special skill would be needed to secure harmony [*concordiam*] and trust [*fidem*]. But since, admittedly, human nature is far otherwise constituted, the state must necessarily be so established that all men, both rulers and ruled, whether they will or no, will do what is in the interests of their common welfare; that is, either voluntarily or constrained by force or necessity, *they will live as reason prescribes*. (*TP* 6/3)

The citizen-subject in a well-organized commonwealth will resemble the free man in that he will “live as reason prescribes” (will be as-if rational), meaning that he will do what is in the interest of the welfare of the people as a whole, which is in turn to do what is in his own interest.⁴⁸ Laws—at least laws of a good state—are framed to maximize the power (liberty) or welfare of all citizens. Yet the very existence of civil laws (of the *civitas* itself) depends upon the defectiveness of most human

⁴⁶I will use this term to refer to the non-rational citizen, since rational individuals can obviously be citizens as well. Despite being “beneath” a free man, a citizen constitutes something of an ideal (one who lives according to the laws of a maximally rational or well-organized state). As we shall see, the degree to which one is a citizen, rather than a slave, will depend on whether the laws of a state serve one’s real interests, and just how far one is committed to the laws of this state.

⁴⁷*TP* 3/1.

⁴⁸Spinoza claims that “he who has resolved to obey all the commands of the commonwealth, whether through fear of its power or love of tranquillity, is surely providing for his own security and his own advantage in his own way” (*TP* 3/3). To see how Spinoza might deal with cases where self-interest seems to come apart from collective interest, see Michael Rosenthal, “Two Collective Action Problems in Spinoza’s Social Contract Theory,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 15 (1998): 389–409, and Diane Steinberg, “Spinoza’s Ethical Doctrine and the Unity of Human Nature,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 22 (1984): 303–24.

minds—these laws are correctives that check or harness the passionate, myopic, grasping nature of most people and replace would-be destructive behavior with power-promoting behavior. Humans, in general, must be compelled to act in accordance with their own (real) interests. As Spinoza puts it, “men are not born to be citizens, but are made so.”⁴⁹

Now despite the fact that Spinoza claims in *TP*6/3 (quoted above) that citizens of a well-organized state will “live as reason prescribes,” I agree with Den Uyl that one ought to distinguish here between acting *from* the dictates of reason and acting *in accordance with* the dictates of reason. To act *from* the dictates of reason is to be rational in the full sense. It is to have adequate ideas concerning our essences (as modes of God’s power striving for greater power) and to apprehend how certain action-types necessarily promote our fundamental interest; it is to know not just *that* performing certain actions is good, it is to fully understand *why* doing so is good. In contrast, acting *in accordance with reason* simply requires performing those actions that reason tells us we ought to perform. In terms of acting in accordance with reason, the motivation does not matter.⁵⁰ It is important that we make this distinction, since it is precisely because humans are not generally rational that they must be forced to act as though they were (they must be made as-if rational). The citizen-subject, or one who merely acts in accordance with reason, occupies a middle position between the free man and the slave:

Figure 2.

	Is able to discern what reason dictates (i.e., is rational).	Is able reliably to act in accordance with his own real interests.
FREE MAN	YES	YES
CITIZEN-SUBJECT	NO*	YES*
SLAVE	NO	NO

* Indicates “for the most part”—this will be a matter of degree.

Unlike the free man, the citizen-subject is not himself wise, and his tendency to promote his own power depends upon the effectiveness of the laws. But, unlike the slave, he acts in reliably empowering ways.

This view ought to be understood against the background of Spinoza’s thoroughgoing determinism. Since our behavior will be determined by something, if we are incapable of acting from reason, it is better to act from causes that are consonant with reason than to act from destructive passions. For this reason, Spinoza maintains that “taking heed [of wise laws] . . . is the exercising of human freedom.”⁵¹ A well-organized state will directly liberate, to moderate degrees, those who cannot achieve the liberation described in *Ethics* IV and V.⁵²

⁴⁹*TP* 5/2. Cf. Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. and trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), vol. 1, 211.

⁵⁰This distinction enables Den Uyl to maintain, quite rightly, that “one need not himself be rational to do what is rational. The forming of political society was a rational action, but that does not imply that it was done by rational men” (*Power*, 64).

⁵¹*TP* 4/5.

⁵²The Rousseauian suggestion that men can be forced to be free seems to indicate a distinctly illiberal strand of Spinoza’s political thought. However, this aspect of his thought is tempered by a deep distrust of moral regulation through laws.

On the basis of the preceding analysis we see that civil laws actually can liberate citizens to a considerable degree, proportionate to the reasonableness of the laws and governmental procedures. However, our discussion of civil liberation (i.e., liberation by the state) is by no means complete. In the next subsection, I will maintain that the state can actually effectuate a change not only in the behavior of its citizen-subjects, but in their cognitive/affective dispositions; specifically, a good state will bring it about that its citizens become more joyful, sociable, and truly rational than they otherwise would be.

3.3 *Promoting Hope and Peace*

The most far-reaching way in which the state can bring about the liberation of its citizens is by helping to reorient their emotions or affective dispositions. This is what distinguishes good states from merely enduring states. A good state will not only limit destructive behavior, it will also promote (positive) civic harmony and individual tranquility of mind, thereby playing a very significant role in the moral development or liberation of its citizen-subjects.⁵³ To see this, we must consider Spinoza's conception of peace. We will recall that, whereas in the *TTP* Spinoza claims that "the purpose of the state is in reality freedom" (passage P), in the *TP* he maintains instead that the purpose of the state is "peace and security of life."⁵⁴ Den Uyl attempts to reconcile these parallel passages by *deflating* the concept of liberty in the political works. I identified this as one of the reasons for adopting the liberal interpretation. On my view, Spinoza in fact operates with an *inflated* notion of peace. Peace signifies a flourishing civil condition, wherein the members of a state are committed, to some degree, to the common good, guided by socially harmonious affects. So, whereas Den Uyl's Deflationary Interpretation of liberty accords a rather limited moralizing role to the state, my inflationary interpretation of peace accords a far more expansive moralizing role to the state.

If we consider what Spinoza says about "peace," it is clear that it is a positive condition. For instance, Spinoza straightforwardly rejects Hobbes's suggestion that peace signifies the absence of war,⁵⁵ claiming instead:

A commonwealth whose subjects are deterred from taking up arms only through fear should be said to be not at war rather than to be enjoying peace. For peace is not just the absence of war, but a virtue which comes from strength of mind [*animi fortitudine*]; for obedience (Section 19, Chapter 2) is the steadfast will to carry out orders enjoined by the general decree of the commonwealth. (*TP* 5/4)

This distinction between peace and the mere absence of war here is quite significant. Whereas Spinoza sometimes suggests that the primary problem with despotic governments is that they fail to provide long-term stability—citing approvingly Seneca's dictum that violent (tyrannical) governments never last long (*violenta imperia nemo continuit diu*)—here it is clear that *mere* stability does not make for a healthy polity.⁵⁶ This is an important point that commentators have frequently

⁵³We should recall from section two that one's power of acting is registered affectively.

⁵⁴*TP* 5/2.

⁵⁵*On the Citizen*, vol. 1, xii.

⁵⁶Here I concur with Hans Blom, who writes: "It is clear that Spinoza measures states not according to their mere stability, but according to their rationality, i.e., *potentia*" (*Causality and Morality in Politics: The Rise of Naturalism in Dutch Seventeenth-Century Political Thought* [*Causality*] [Utrecht: University of Utrecht, 1995], 203).

overlooked. Over and above stability, the state ought to promote a positive harmony, or the agreement of the minds/bodies, as far as it can.⁵⁷ This point is illustrated by Spinoza's comment on the putative peace of the Turks:

[N]o state has stood so long without any notable change as that of the Turks. . . . But if slavery, barbarism, and desolation are to be called peace, there can be nothing more wretched for mankind than peace. . . . It is slavery, then, not peace that is promoted by transferring all power to one man; for peace, as we have already said, consists not in the absence of war but in the union or harmony of minds.⁵⁸

The maintenance of order through adherence to the law is not sufficient for peace.⁵⁹ A peaceful state is distinguished from a merely strife-less state (exemplified by "the Turks") in virtue of the motives or affective dispositions of the individuals within these states. The mere absence of war is characterized by conformity to the law through fear. In this condition, men do not really agree with one another;⁶⁰ rather, they are made not to disagree with one another.⁶¹ By contrast, peace is said to arise "from strength of mind" (*animi fortitudine*)⁶² and indicates a genuine agreement or union of minds.

However, Spinoza's use of the term '*fortitudo*' to signify the affective state that supports peace generates a puzzle. In the *Ethics*, *fortitudo* is described as a class of rational (active) affect, which is "related to the mind insofar as it understands."⁶³ Spinoza's claim then is that peace is possible only if citizens are led by *fortitudo* rather than by fear; but *fortitudo* is a rational affect, and Spinoza claims at the outset of the *TP* that most people cannot be expected to act primarily from reason.⁶⁴ In other words, Spinoza seems to be committed to the following three theses:

- (i) Peace is a civil condition wherein members act primarily from *fortitudo* (*TP* 5/4).
- (ii) To act from *fortitudo* is to act from reason (definition of *fortitudo*; *E* IIIIP 59S).
- (iii) Men cannot be expected to act primarily from reason (*TP* 1/5; *TP* 6/1).

⁵⁷Spinoza makes it clear that mere stability is an inadequate norm by way of an analogy with the individual: "when we say that the best state is one where men pass their lives in harmony, I am speaking of human life, which is characterized not just by the circulation of the blood and other features common to all animals, but especially by reason, the true virtue and life of the mind" (*TP* 5/5).

⁵⁸*TP* 6/4. This beautifully illustrates the contrast with Hobbes, who claims that there is every bit as much liberty in Constantinople as there is in the Republic of Lucca.

⁵⁹This is interesting in that elsewhere Spinoza writes that the *fact* of obedience does not depend on any particular motive (*TTP* 17/192), which indicates that here Spinoza is concerned with more than just civil order through obedience—he is concerned with human flourishing. Once again I am in agreement with Hans Blom, who writes: "although it is not the *motive* for obedience, but the *fact* of obedience, that constitutes a subject of the state, the means that contribute to men's willingness to obey are crucial to the state's continuity and strength" (*Causality*, 205).

⁶⁰For Spinoza's account of agreement, see *E* IVP29–P35 and the physical digression after *E* IIP13.

⁶¹Citizens of a fear-ridden commonwealth are compared to sheep and said to exhibit a "sluggish spirit" (*TP* 5/4). And Spinoza has made it clear that it is not the purpose of the state "to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets" (*TTP* 20/232).

⁶²*TP* 5/4.

⁶³*E* IIIIP59S.

⁶⁴*TP* 1/5. If men were always rational, they would always agree with one another, and consequently would constitute a single mind/body. As it is, existing states are at best approximations of such a genuine union.

These theses conjointly entail that peace is an unrealizable ideal. How could Spinoza, who opens the *TP* by castigating utopian political schemes, himself embrace an unfeasible political ideal? The short answer is that he does not. Perfect peace or perfect harmony is unattainable. However, close approximations of perfect peace are possible, and it is the aim of a state to bring about as much peace or cohesion as it can. Peace, or a close approximation thereof, is possible only if citizens are motivated primarily by stable, sociable affects, that is, only if they are generally joyful or powerful. In short, a state will be peaceful or free to the extent that its members are themselves relatively peaceable or free. This requires that Spinoza provide an account of non-rational affects, or passions, in the political writings that enables him to draw subtle evaluative distinctions between them. This is precisely what he does, focusing on the distinction between hope and fear.

3.3.1 *Social and Antisocial Affects*

Whereas in the *Ethics* Spinoza treats hope and fear as kindred affects, as mere passions in contrast to rational (active) affects,⁶⁵ in the political works he drives a wedge between social and antisocial passions in general, and between these two passions in particular.⁶⁶ Recognizing that the multitude “are led more by passion than by reason,”⁶⁷ he considers what the best *realizable* civil condition would be, concluding that it would be one in which citizens are led more by hope than by fear. Indeed, the primary basis for distinguishing between a powerful, thriving state and a feeble, torpid state lies in the affective condition of the citizens in these respective states: a healthy polity will be marked by a hopeful citizenry; an unhealthy polity will be marked by a fearful citizenry. And while it is true that states will generally need to foster *both* hope and fear, those states that are able to cultivate more hopeful submission to the laws will be more powerful than those that depend primarily on the fear of punishment. In turn, hopeful citizens will be individually more powerful than their fearful counterparts. But on what basis can Spinoza claim that a hope-driven state and its hopeful citizens will be more powerful (freer) than a fear-driven state and its fearful citizens?

Part of the explanation is purely pragmatic: for the sake of stability, the proverbial carrot is more effective than the proverbial stick. As Spinoza puts it in the *TTP*, “in every state, laws should be so devised that men may be influenced not so much by fear as by hope of some good that they urgently desire; for in this way

⁶⁵E.g., *E* III app. XIII exp.: “there is neither hope without fear, nor fear without hope”; cf. *E* IVP47.

⁶⁶Following Curley (“Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece [II]: Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise* as a Prolegomenon to the *Ethics*,” in *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. A. Cover and M. Kulstad [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1990], 141), I will refer to those passions through which men can be said to agree with one another as “social.” By contrast, I will refer to divisive passions as “antisocial.” In general, joy-based passions such as love and trust are social, while sadness-based passions such as hatred and suspicion are antisocial. Spinoza himself limns a distinction between unifying and divisive passions in *E* IVP34 and *E* IVP34S. However, in the political writings this distinction takes on a much greater significance. Since, “insofar as men are assailed by anger, envy, or any *emotion deriving from hatred*, they are drawn apart and are contrary to one another” (*TP* 2/14), the harmony of the state depends upon the replacement of antisocial passions with social ones; that is, the state must try to effectuate a kind of affective reorientation (see *TTP* 20/232).

⁶⁷*TP* 6/1.

each will be eager to do his duty.”⁶⁸ In the *TP*, too, Spinoza makes it clear that, for the sake of maximizing stability and civic commitment, one ought to rule “more by kindness than by fear” (*beneficiis magis quam metu*).⁶⁹ Those who regard the state as a benign force will be more vigilant in protecting and upholding its laws and institutions than those who regard it as a hostile force.⁷⁰

And even if stability is established through fear,⁷¹ stability, again, ought not to be confused with the real end of the state: peace or freedom. A state that promotes obedience through fear and anxiety is hardly civil at all, for “a civil order is established in a natural way *in order to remove general fear and alleviate general distress*.”⁷² A fear-driven state is marked by many of the same detestable features of pre-civil life that the *civitas* was supposed to overcome. Stability secured through oppression results in a languid, lifeless body politic. As Spinoza puts it, “a commonwealth whose peace depends on the sluggish spirit of its subjects who are led like sheep to learn simply to be slaves can more properly be called a desert than a commonwealth.”⁷³ Citizen-subjects of a fear-driven state will themselves, in turn, be rather weak and unfree. They live in a condition of distrust and suspicion, lacking the many comforts and aids that come with living in a genuinely harmonious state. In sum, a fearful state is not only worse than a hopeful state on pragmatic grounds, it is also an intrinsically inferior civil condition, since fear as an affect is intrinsically inferior to hope.

By contrast, the citizen-subjects of a relatively peaceful, hope-driven state will be able to affirm, and identify with, their actions, and so will be freer. In the *TP*, Spinoza explicitly connects hopeful obedience with freedom, claiming that “a free people is led more by hope than by fear, while a subjugated people is led more by fear than by hope; the former seeks to engage in living, the latter simply to avoid death. *The former, I say, seeks to live for itself, the latter is forced to belong to a conqueror; hence we say that the latter is a slave, the former is free.*”⁷⁴ What Spinoza seems

⁶⁸*TTP* 5/65. Cf. *TP* 10/9, where Spinoza makes it clear that stability requires some sort of civil commitment or loyalty (“the common sentiment of the people”).

⁶⁹*TP* 9/14; cf. *TP* 7/12. By emphasizing the superiority of a hopeful citizenry over a fearful citizenry, Spinoza decisively allies himself with Cicero and opposes Machiavelli. In *On Duties* (*De Officiis*) Cicero defends the view that “there is nothing at all more suited to protecting and retaining influence than to be loved, and nothing less suited than to be feared” (*On Duties*, trans. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], bk. 2, ch. 23, pp. 70–71). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli directly opposes the Ciceronian view, arguing that “it is desirable to be both loved and feared; but it is difficult to achieve both and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved” (*The Prince*, trans. Russell Price, ed. Quentin Skinner [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 59).

⁷⁰This is an insight that is supported by a number of recent studies. As Philip Pettit writes, “it is a common observation among those who study compliance that the reasons most people obey the law in law-abiding communities derive, not from fear of legal sanctions, but from a sense that the law is fair” (*Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997], 246).

⁷¹And Spinoza admits that this is quite possible (e.g., with the Turks; *TP* 6/4).

⁷²*TP* 3/6.

⁷³*TP* 5/4.

⁷⁴*TP* 5/6; my emphasis. There is a clear comparison to be made here between this passage and the claim in the *Ethics* that “the sick man, from timidity regarding death, eats what he is repelled by, whereas the healthy man enjoys his food, and in this way enjoys life better than if he feared death, and directly desired to avoid it” (*E* IVP63S2). A fearful citizenry will be like the sick man, obeying the laws reluctantly (see also his claim that the superstitious “flee the evil rather than love virtues” [*E* IVP63S1]); and a hopeful citizenry will be like the healthy man, affirming the laws as power-enhancing or desirable, rather than like the superstitious or ignorant. In this way a hopeful citizenry will lead a more active life, affirming their actions, rather than recoiling from that which they fear.

to envisage here is a condition in which citizens view the interests of the state, or the aim of the laws, as consonant with their own private interests. Only under such conditions will the state accomplish its “main object,” which is “to ensure that the subjects do their duty willingly rather than by legal constraint.”⁷⁵ Trusting and affirming the civic order, rather than fearing and resenting it, is a necessary condition of truly living well: “for a state that looks only to govern men by fear will be one free from vice rather than endowed with virtue. Men should be governed in such a way that they do not think of themselves as being governed but as living as they please.”⁷⁶ Again, on Spinoza’s account, it is not only safer to be loved than feared: true peace and civil liberation also depend on the citizenry’s commitment to the civic order.

3.3.2 *Hope and Liberty*

At this point one might still be a bit confused about the relationship between hope and liberty. It cannot be the case that hopeful citizens are freer than fearful citizens simply because they *feel* freer, since Spinoza insists in the *Ethics* on the distinction between feeling free and being free. Rather, hopeful citizens are freer than fearful citizens because they are in an affectively superior position, which reflects a corresponding superiority in their level of power. Recalling that one’s degree of liberty corresponds to one’s degree of power and that joy and sadness indicate transitions in one’s power of acting (joy denotes an increase, sadness a decrease), it is clear that states that are reliably able to promote more joy than sadness will be reliably empowering or liberating. For this reason, once we take into account Spinoza’s definitions of hope and fear, it becomes clear that a hopeful citizenry will be freer than a fearful citizenry. Hope is, after all, defined as a species of joy (“inconstant joy which has arisen from the image of a future or past thing whose outcome we doubt” [E IIP18S]), whereas fear is defined as a species of sadness (“an inconstant sadness, which has also arisen from the image of a doubtful thing” [E IIP18S]).⁷⁷

Moreover, when Spinoza speaks of the hopefulness of citizens in a good or free state, he is envisioning a rather firm form of hope—something closer to an expectation—characterized by a relatively constant form of joy.⁷⁸ After all, the content of the hope in this case is that *one’s interests will be served by the state*. And since a well-organized state will in fact consistently serve the interests of its mem-

⁷⁵TP 10/7.

⁷⁶TP 10/8.

⁷⁷This is why Spinoza claims that “the more cause for fear a man has, the less power ... he possesses” (TP 2/15).

⁷⁸We must bear in mind that hope can take many different forms, marked by greater or less joy (or “constancy of joy”). A dim hope will be marked by only a trace of joy, since the desired outcome is unlikely, while a firm hope (expectation) will be marked by a fuller and more secure sense of joy, since the outcome is more likely. We may illustrate this in the following way. Imagine Harvey and Alex both have tickets to outdoor music festivals this weekend in different cities. These festivals will take place only if the weather is good. The weather forecast for Harvey’s festival in Phoenix could not be better, while Alex’s festival in Jacksonville is likely to be canceled due to an impending hurricane. Harvey and Alex may both hope that the festival takes place (i.e., that it does not storm, etc.), but while Alex’s hope is exceedingly dim—his joy being undercut by his fear that it will be canceled, etc.—Harvey’s hope is far more robust. Harvey’s greater certitude about the satisfaction of his desire to attend the festival makes his joy in imagining the event more constant than Alex’s.

bers, its members will be rather unwavering in their belief that their desires will be fulfilled. As a result, citizens of such a state will experience a particularly stable form of joy that comes not from some faint hope that they will benefit from the mechanism of the state, but from the *expectation* that they will benefit, grounded in past experience.⁷⁹

This condition is best described as *securitas*, which Spinoza defines in the *Ethics* as “a joy born of the idea of a future or past thing *concerning which the cause of doubting has been removed*.”⁸⁰ *Securitas* (or confidence, peace of mind, etc.) will involve a more constant joy than mere hope, since it will not include much fear that the hoped-for end will not come to pass. Spinoza’s use of the term ‘*securitas*’ to describe a firm hope is quite revealing, since this is precisely what he identifies as the aim or end of the state in *TP* 1/6 and *TP* 5/2 (*pax* and *securitas*). A state that is able to procure the *securitas* of its members will in turn have empowered or liberated them, since it will consequently promote their joy or psychic well-being in a reliable way. In this condition of *securitas*, citizens will largely agree with one another, since they will love the same thing (i.e., civic order),⁸¹ and they will function cooperatively to produce a desired effect, namely, the preservation of the state.⁸² And the steadiness or constancy of this joy, reinforced by the rational mechanisms of the state, sets it apart from those fickle passions that Spinoza disparages in the *Ethics*. So even if the *securitas* that characterizes a good state is not on par with full-fledged *fortitudo*, it is a respectable substitute.

Seen in this light, the difference between a flourishing, peaceful state and a merely persisting state appears to be great. A relatively peaceful state will be one in which its members are led, if not by *fortitudo*, then by the next best thing, namely, *securitas*. In this way, citizens will be more likely to uphold the law and encourage conformity to the law, thereby augmenting the power of the state on which their own power depends. Furthermore, the more they are led by *securitas* rather than fear, the more powerful or liberated they will become, since *securitas* is a relatively stable form of joy, and joy marks a transition from lesser to greater power. By contrast, in a merely enduring (non-disharmonious) state, citizens will regard the state as a hostile, alien force, will uphold the law only reluctantly, and will be fearful and weak.

Furthermore, it would seem that hopeful citizen-subjects are in a cognitively superior condition to their fearful counterparts; they will be in an epistemically next-best position to being fully rational. A fully rational person recognizes that one is essentially a mode of God’s power striving for more power or right. He apprehends the conceptual link between his power and the power of the state in which he lives, such that he steadfastly obeys the laws *knowing* that this will enhance the power of the state and, in turn, his own power. Spinoza, reasonably enough, concludes that few people will be able to grasp these facts from reason. Nevertheless, citizens of a well-organized state will be able to recognize, to some extent,

⁷⁹After all, if men are to be “governed in such a way that they do not regard themselves as being governed, but as following their own bent and their own free choice” (*TP* 10/8)—which is the aim of the state—they must have a fair amount of confidence in the state.

⁸⁰*E* III app. Exp. XIV; cf. IIP18S.

⁸¹*E* IVP34S.

⁸²To the extent that a number of individuals function together to produce a common effect, they may be considered a singular thing (*E* IID7).

that the laws are for the general good; this will be the source of their hopefulness or *securitas*. To use a Spinozistic turn of phrase, those who are guided by *securitas* (*vis-à-vis* the state) seem to grasp the goodness of the *civitas* “as if through a cloud,” which is certainly better than not grasping it at all. Hope and trust are encouraged by experience and so will be less stable than rational *fortitudo*. Nevertheless, in the case that Spinoza is describing—i.e., confidence that the laws redound to one’s own welfare—hope is consonant with reason. Hopeful citizens will have true beliefs about the relationship between the state’s interests and their own interests (and will be in a position to form fully adequate ideas—see *EIVP* 54S). By contrast, the fearful will have wholly false beliefs.⁸³

3.3.3 *Some Conclusions about the Position and Scope of Civil Liberation*

In light of the preceding analysis, we may add another wrinkle to our still over-simplified chart:

Figure 3.

	Is able to discern what reason dictates (i.e., is rational).	Is able reliably to act in accordance with his own real interests.
FREE MAN	YES	YES
HOPEFUL CITIZEN-SUBJECT	YES & NO: Has true beliefs that are consonant with reason (but is not fully rational)	TO A HIGH DEGREE
FEARFUL CITIZEN-SUBJECT	NO	TO A MODEST DEGREE
SLAVE	NO	NO

The “middle position” of citizen-subject (from figure 2) has been subdivided into two further categories: (1) the hopeful, peaceable citizen and (2) the fearful, non-combative citizen. Short of being fully rational, the next best condition is to be a hopeful citizen-subject whose actions are guided by a relatively stable form of joy and true beliefs about the state. And a state that is able to promote *securitas* or hope will approximate “peace” to a considerable degree.

Based on the account that I have given above, it should be clear that Spinoza’s claim that the purpose of the state is peace is perfectly consistent with his claim that the purpose of the state is liberty, and that, *pace* Den Uyl, ‘peace’ and ‘liberty’ denote relatively robust normative concepts. The state can play a significant role in the liberation or moral development of its citizens. Indeed, at one point in the *TP* Spinoza suggests that the state bears the brunt of the responsibility for the

⁸³“For as long as men act only from fear, they are doing what they are most opposed to doing, taking no account of the usefulness and the necessity of the action to be done, concerned only not to incur capital or other punishment” (*TTP* 5/64; my emphasis).

moral rectitude of its subjects. He writes: “just as the vices of the subjects and their excessive license and willfulness are to be laid at the door of the commonwealth, so on the other hand their virtue and steadfast obedience to the laws must be attributed chiefly to the virtue and absolute right of the commonwealth.”⁸⁴ This claim is consistent with his suggestion that a well-organized state not only will be able to provide stability, it will also be able to establish a certain degree of social cohesion by promoting joyful, social affects. A good state not only will ensure that citizens don’t act in outwardly destructive ways, it will also act as a bulwark against resentment, fear, and other stultifying passions. It will liberate both insofar as it fosters prudential behavior and insofar as it promotes certain affective dispositions, thereby curbing the passions of its citizens. It should be clear, then, that the moralizing or liberating scope of the state extends well beyond the bounds assumed by the liberal reading.

4. HOW DOES A STATE PROMOTE SOCIALITY AND JOY?

At this point one might well wonder what licenses Spinoza to suppose that the state *could* play such an important role in the moral development of citizens? Why is it that responsibility for both the virtuousness and viciousness of citizens is primarily “to be laid at the door of the commonwealth”?⁸⁵ Part of the answer lies in what I will call the “homogeneity thesis,” which is the view that “all men share in one and the same nature; it is power and culture that mislead us.”⁸⁶ Because men are naturally cognitively and psychologically alike, Spinoza thinks that *systematic differences between men of different states will reflect differences in the organization of those states*.⁸⁷ The homogeneity thesis enables Spinoza to suppose that political institutions and procedures will directly influence the affective character of its members and the social ethos at large; it can make people moral without “moralizing” in the pejorative sense. But what sort of institutional or organizational features will give rise to widespread trust or *securitas*, rather than fear? How can a state promote *positive* harmony?⁸⁸

The most obvious way in which a state can secure a certain degree of harmony is simply by advancing the welfare of its citizens. For, unless systematically duped, citizens will not willingly promote laws that run counter to their own long-term interests. Only in a commonwealth, where the aim is the good of all, rather than the glory of a despot, and where institutional measures are taken to ensure success in securing the common good, will citizens be guided more by hope than by fear.

⁸⁴TP 5/3; cf. 5/2. We should bear in mind that in the *Ethics* Spinoza claims that “by virtue and power I understand the same thing” (EIVD8). To make one virtuous, then, is to make one powerful, and *vice versa*. Unsurprisingly, these passages are overlooked by the commentators who emphasize Spinoza’s liberalism.

⁸⁵TP 5/3.

⁸⁶TP 7/27.

⁸⁷This is indicated in Spinoza’s claim that “men’s natural passions are everywhere the same; so if wickedness is more prevalent and wrongdoing more frequent in one commonwealth than in another, one can be sure that this is because the former has not done enough to promote harmony and has not framed its laws with sufficient forethought, and thus it has not attained the full right of a commonwealth” (TP 5/2). Cf. Machiavelli’s *Discourses*, bk. 3, ch. 29.

⁸⁸A full answer to this question would warrant a complete explication and analysis of Spinoza’s political prescriptions. This would take us too far afield. Instead I will limn some of the general features.

The bulk of the last six chapters of the *TP* is devoted to showing what governmental mechanisms are necessary (in various regimes) in order for the common good to be promoted. The better organized a state is, the more likely it will promote the welfare of all its citizens; and the more the welfare of citizens is promoted, the more content they will be with the governance of the state in which they live.

In addition to this obvious point about the relationship between prosperity/welfare and contentment, there are specific ways in which a state can foster hope and harmony. It must be constituted in such a way as to account for, and respond to, the common passions of men, since effective governance begins with a realistic understanding of human psychology. One of the more prevalent and politically significant features of human nature is that “each of us strives, so far as he can, that everyone should love what he loves, and hate what he hates,”⁸⁹ a proclivity that Spinoza calls ‘ambition’ (*ambitio*).⁹⁰ We are also saddened by the good fortune of those like us; i.e., we are “envious.”⁹¹ And because of natural ambition and envy, “men are impatient above all at being subject to their equals and under their rule.”⁹² So, widespread inequalities will undermine general contentment and tranquility. Spinoza says this explicitly when discussing lifetime appointments of counselors to a monarch, which he claims “would result in great inequality among the citizens, leading to envy and incessant murmurings and finally to outbreaks of sedition.”⁹³ Humans are constantly judging the welfare of others against their own, and so states that allow for significant inequalities likely will be rather disharmonious. By contrast, states that are guided by relatively democratic procedures (e.g., rotation of offices, checks and balances on power, etc.), that encourage broad participation, and that generally preserve equal rights and opportunities will be more likely to establish not only stability, but also civic loyalty.

Furthermore, because people are resistant to domination by others, especially when it means suppressing their own interests and desires, the state ought to minimize the extent to which it tries to regulate conduct. Rather, it should try to find ways to make men’s natural passions serviceable. Anticipating Pierre Nicole and Bernard Mandeville, Spinoza recognizes that self-love can mimic *honestas*, maintaining that a well-founded state will be able to build in positive incentives for private gain and honor that will in turn benefit the state as a whole.⁹⁴ He writes:

The common peace-time vices . . . should be prevented indirectly and never directly; that is by basing the state on such laws as will cause the majority, not indeed to seek to live wisely—for that is impossible—but at any rate to be governed by those passions which are most useful to the commonwealth. Thus every attempt must be made to ensure that the rich, if they cannot be thrifty, are at any rate greedy for gain. For if this passion for gain, which is universal and constant, is reinforced by the desire for glory, most men will certainly make every effort to increase their wealth by honorable means so as to obtain office and avoid great disgrace. (*TP* 10/6)

⁸⁹*E* IIP3 1C.

⁹⁰This is assuming that the tendency does not arise from reason. Cf. *EVP*4.

⁹¹*E* IIP24S.

⁹²*TTP* 5/65; cf. *TP* 7/5.

⁹³*TP* 7/13.

⁹⁴For more on this connection with Mandeville, see Wim Klever, “Bernard Mandeville and his *Spinozistic* Appraisal of Vices,” *Folio Spinoziano* 20 (2000) (Online at <http://www.fogliospinoziano.it/artic20.htm>).

By encouraging industry and commerce, a state will be indirectly promoting honest practices, since, on Spinoza's view, merchants will only thrive if they maintain good reputations.⁹⁵ And by finding ways to channel the natural passions of man—such as ambition, pride, and envy—for the good of the whole, rather than by trying to regulate perceived vice, a state will govern men in such a way that they will be “restrained only by love of freedom, desire to increase their possessions, and the hope of obtaining offices of the state.”⁹⁶ In such a state men will feel as though they are “following their own bent and their own free choice in their manner of life,”⁹⁷ and will be relatively content and loyal.

Finally, if a state is to promote civic concord, it must find ways to minimize factional conflict. In fact, Spinoza makes it quite clear that broad civic participation will have the effect of not only preserving equality, but also reducing factionalism: “the greater the number of men in whom the actual sovereignty is vested, the weaker the factions will be.”⁹⁸ The most pernicious source of factional difference is religion.⁹⁹ A state riven by religious disputes cannot be said to be at peace. But how is religious conflict to be mitigated? This is, in effect, the overarching concern of the *TTP*, one main conclusion of which is that the freedoms of religious beliefs and expression are essential to the peace and piety of a commonwealth.¹⁰⁰ And while the state can, and indeed must, regulate outward practices that are deemed seditious, it ought to exercise caution in this regard, lest it incite more dissent than it prevents. Moreover, in addition to this practice of mitigation through toleration, the state can foster greater cohesion by propagating a sanitized civic religion.¹⁰¹ Indeed, a universal, moral theology could potentially inspire many of the same socially unifying sentiments that reason begets, which is why Spinoza claims: “He who abounds in these fruits—charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control . . . whether he be taught by reason alone or by Scripture alone, is in truth taught by God, and is altogether blessed.”¹⁰² By helping to replace provincial superstition and fear with a universal moral religion and love, a well-organized state will thereby liberate its citizens and bring about greater social harmony.¹⁰³

⁹⁵Hans Blom rightly highlights the significance of *bona fides*: “Spinoza must have been aware that *bona fides* is essential to the commercial sector of society. The basic *utilitas* of a merchant is that contracts be performed, otherwise neither he nor his fellow-merchants would be able to continue their business” (“Politics, Virtue and Political Science: an Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy,” *Studia Spinozana* 1 [1985], 222; see also *Causality*, 204).

⁹⁶*TP* 10/8.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*

⁹⁸*TP* 8/1.

⁹⁹This is probably what Spinoza has in mind when he refers to the “culture” [*cultus*] that leads minds astray (*TP* 7/27).

¹⁰⁰Spinoza also recognizes that toleration is only tenable if the theoretical pretensions of religions are curbed, which is why Spinoza devotes most of his effort in the *TTP* to demonstrating that “the aim of faith” is “obedience and piety” rather than truth (*TTP* 14/169).

¹⁰¹*TTP* 167; *TP* 8/46.

¹⁰²*TTP* 5/71.

¹⁰³An anonymous reviewer has suggested quite rightly that one of the most significant ways in which the state can liberate is by diminishing the power of the clergy and thereby protecting the people from superstitious persuasion. The reviewer is absolutely correct that Spinoza thinks that reducing ecclesiastical power will have a politically salutary effect, which, when combined with the promotion of a civic religion, should result in the diminution of pernicious, false beliefs and the advancement of

A state that operates in these relatively equal, open, and inclusive ways¹⁰⁴—taking into account common features of human psychology such as ambition, envy, pride, and a tendency toward superstition—not only will generally be quite stable, it will be characterized by a content, cohesive citizenry, who will obey the sovereign with confidence and loyalty rather than from fear and mistrust. The correlation between such fundamental laws or institutions and civic happiness is reliable precisely because human psychology is reliable. Recalling the “homogeneity thesis”—i.e., the view that human beings share in one and the same nature—it should not come as a surprise that institutional measures should impact the ethos of a citizenry.¹⁰⁵ By organizing a system of governance in the ways that he suggests, Spinoza thinks that a state can contribute significantly to the overall—affective and cognitive—welfare, or freedom, of its citizens.

5 . S U M M A R Y

In this paper I have suggested that, when Spinoza says that the “purpose of the state is liberty,” he takes “liberty” to stand for precisely the same concept that it does in the *Ethics*. Moreover, I have tried to establish that, despite the doubts of a number of commentators, the state can liberate its citizens to a significant degree. Not only will an effective state supply conditions in which philosophy can flourish, thereby fostering the liberation or moral perfection described in the *Ethics*, it will also liberate in a number of more direct ways: by providing stability for all, by bringing it about that all citizens act in ways that are consonant with reason and their real interests (furthering the natural rights of citizens to exist and act), and, most importantly, by ensuring that citizens who are not themselves fully rational nevertheless live with tranquil minds, steeled against painful, antisocial, enfeebling emotions. I concluded by looking at few of the institutions that are particularly crucial to civil liberation. These institutions have the power to influence reliably the lives of citizens, sustaining patterns of behavior and affective dispositions, in part because of the relative uniformity of human psychology.¹⁰⁶

socially beneficial, true beliefs. A full account of the particular ways in which the state promotes cognitive and affective development would have to include a thorough discussion of this point. Since I am primarily concerned in this paper with establishing *that* Spinoza thought that the state could liberate through the reorientation of the affects and am only secondarily concerned with the question of *how* it does this, I cannot hope to offer an adequate discussion of this point here. However, I will add that since Spinoza thinks that fear and superstition are mutually reinforcing (*TTP* preface and ch. 20), he would thus hold that the reduction of either fear or superstition will likely result in the reduction of the other. So to the extent that the state can prevent superstition, it will also likely reduce fear, thereby empowering the citizenry.

¹⁰⁴Transparency of governance is also important. Closed governance not only keeps the public uninformed (ignorant), it leads to civic distrust and resentment, which is why Spinoza remarks that “it is far better for the honest policies of a state to be open to its enemies than for the guilty secrets of tyrants to be kept hidden from the citizens” (*TP* 7/29).

¹⁰⁵Contemporary political philosophers have recognized this connection between institutions and ethos, emphasizing the importance of a public conception of justice or a perception of legitimacy, the absence of which would entail the erosion of civic confidence and trust. Philip Pettit, for instance, has argued that civic commitment, and freedom from fear and oppression, depends on the perception of legitimacy; and perceived legitimacy will be at its highest level in a contestatory democracy (*Republicanism*, ch. 8).

¹⁰⁶A similar claim can be found in contemporary situationist literature in social psychology. See for instance Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

The upshot of all of this is that, on my reading, not only does one get a distorted view of Spinoza's political project if one understands it as "anti-perfectibilian," guided by fundamentally different concerns and norms than the *Ethics*, one also gets a fragmented view of Spinoza's liberative project, which neither begins nor ends with the *Ethics*. While the *Ethics* is concerned with the uppermost rungs of human freedom, the political works are concerned with the freedom that may be achieved through prudence, cooperation, and a conditioning or reorientation of the affects, even in the absence of fully adequate knowledge.

The claim that, to a great extent, the overall freedom of men depends on the health of the commonwealths in which they find themselves is not new to the political writings. For instance, in the *TdIE* Spinoza makes it clear that the path to freedom or perfection is aided in no small part by civil association. Here he writes:

This, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a [perfect] nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand, so that their intellect and desire agree entirely with my intellect and desire. To do this it is necessary, *first* to understand as much of Nature as suffices for acquiring such a nature; *next*, to form a society of the kind that is desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and surely as possible." (§14; my emphasis)

The political works can rightly be regarded as Spinoza's attempt to spell out, at the civic level, the conditions in which individuals can best perfect their natures and come to form a genuine union or harmony.