

**freedom as overcoming the  
fear of death: epicureanism  
in the subtitle of spinoza's  
*theological political treatise***  
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## 1. THE PROBLEM: FREEDOM TO PHILOSOPHIZE

The first part of the subtitle of the *Theological Political Treatise* may have been easily acceptable to Spinoza's contemporaries: the book shows that "Freedom of Philosophizing can be allowed in Preserving Piety and the Peace of the Republic."<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of the Reformation, this sentiment would not have been unfamiliar. The secular ideal of the separation of Ecclesiastical from temporal authority requires that there is a division between the inner self that is subject to faith and receives the message of Scripture, and the external self, who is subject to the authority of the sovereign and to the laws of the state.<sup>2</sup> Mirroring this logic, philosophers and deists of various hues claim a private right to the freedom to philosophize—a right that is distinct from their obligations to the state and which the first part of the subtitle ably presents.

The second part of the subtitle would have come, however, as a surprise to the general educated reader in the seventeenth century. The book, indicates Spinoza, also wants to argue that "it is not possible for such Freedom to be upheld except when accompanied by the Peace of the Republic and Piety Themselves." Here, the freedom to philosophize acquires a public dimension. It is as if Spinoza is suggesting that the freedom to philosophize is a necessary precondition for a well-functioning state and for a pious Church.<sup>3</sup> The absence of such a freedom, then,

would threaten the existence of a state and would make the Church impious. It is as if—to put it bluntly—the freedom to philosophize not only bridges the divide between private and public, but it also becomes the condition of the possibility of public liberty. Such a collapse of the distinction between the inside and the outside challenges authority, *both* the ecclesiastical authority that relies on internal faith, and the temporal authority that relies on the obedience of the law.<sup>4</sup>

I want to show that Spinoza’s conception of freedom that does not rely on a division of an inside and an outside is intricately linked with the dialectic of authority and utility that characterizes his Epicureanism. Let me sketch what I mean by this dialectic, as I presented it elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Authority or *auctoritas* has a specific range of signification in Latin that is much narrower than in modern English. It asserts the entity that is beyond dispute, or that is impervious to argumentation.<sup>6</sup> As Spinoza puts it, “the authority of the prophets does not permit of argumentation [*prophetae auctoritas ratiocinari non patitur*]” (139/152). The calculation of utility refers to the human propensity to make practical judgments in the course of acting. On the one hand, there is a conflict between authority that calls for obedience, and the calculation of utility that one fulfils by judging for oneself. To do what you are told and to calculate what is the most advantageous action are two contradictory ways of acting. On the other hand, this does not establish an exclusion between authority and utility because it may be advantageous to obey. Differently put, one may calculate that one’s utility is better served by suspending their calculation and following someone else’s lead.

Explaining the crosscurrents between Spinoza’s thought and Epicureanism around freedom and the dialectic of authority and utility will help us make sense of the enigmatic use of the “freedom to philosophize” in the subtitle of the *Theological Political Treatise*. I am only concerned to present these crosscurrents here, not to outline the entire theory of freedom in Spinoza. To achieve my aim, I will first look at the connection between fear and practical judgment in Epicurus; I will then turn to Lucretius’s contribution in both developing the concepts of authority and history; and finally I will show how freedom and the dialectic of authority and utility inform the most famous passage from the Preface of the *Treatise* discussing voluntary servitude.

I underscore that the discussion here is not meant to be an exhaustive analysis of freedom in the *Theological Political Treatise* or in Spinoza as a whole. The scope of the present article is more modest: it highlights how elements of ancient epicureanism inform the presentation of freedom in the Preface of the *Treatise*.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. “A FREE MAN THINKS OF NOTHING LESS THAN OF DEATH...”: FEAR AND FREEDOM IN EPICURUS

The difficulty in adumbrating the connection between freedom and the dialectic of authority and utility is that it is hard to identify a definition of freedom in Spinoza’s works. Nowhere in the *Theological Political Treatise* can we find an explicit definition of freedom. If we turn to his other major work, the *Ethics*, the difficulties compound. Part V of the *Ethics* may be about human freedom, but freedom as such is not defined there.

The closest that Spinoza comes to a definition of freedom is Proposition 67 of Part IV: “A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death.” This is an unusual definition of freedom, one that does not provide us with a *prima facie* description of what we would have expected freedom to be. More damagingly, as soon as we start interpreting Proposition 67, we are quickly led to contradictions and paradoxes: If we interpret it in terms of one’s personal overcoming of the fear of death, freedom’s *political* aspect recedes in the background reinstating the division between the inside and the outside—which is precisely what we thought that the freedom to philosophize overcomes. And as soon as the protection from death is delegated to a sovereign, Spinoza would require a strong sense of authority aligning his position with that of Thomas Hobbes.<sup>8</sup> How is it possible to understand Spinoza’s conception of freedom without presupposing either individualism or authoritarianism?

It is notable that the opening of the *Theological Political Treatise* is concerned with fear, specifically with how people become “prey to superstition [*superstitione*]” through fear (1/5). Spinoza observes that humans are under the sway of “fortune’s fickle favours,” which makes them “wretched victims of alternating hopes and fears [*spem metumque*]” (1/5). It is for this reason that fear “engenders, preserves and fosters superstition” (2). Everybody is subject to fear and hence to superstition. If that is true for the common people—Spinoza quotes Curtius saying that “the multitude has no ruler more potent than superstition”—it is also true for exceptional and powerful individuals such as Alexander the Great, who, in hard times, turns to oracles—“that mockery of human wisdom,” according to Curtius, whom Spinoza quotes again (2). This is a significant example—the first one in the *Treatise*. It suggests the futility of a task to “enlighten” ourselves as foolproof protection against superstition. If such a great individual as Alexander is prey to fear and superstition, we may be better served recognizing that we will always be subject to passions and that reason on its own will not liberate us. Is there maybe,

then, a link between the enslaving function of fear and the conception of freedom as overcoming the fear of death?

The above question allows us to turn to Epicureanism. Let me start by sketching the position. The importance of the overcoming of the fear of death is something of a commonplace in Epicureanism. The famous “*tetrapharmakon*” or the “fourfold remedy” that summarizes the first four of Epicurus’s principal doctrines devotes the first two to the overcoming of fear: “Fear not the gods/ Fear not death.”<sup>9</sup> This entire discourse about overcoming fear culminates in the fear of dying, since death provokes the strongest emotional reaction. Fear overwhelms us with emotions and thereby curtails our capacity to make practical judgments that lead to freedom. It works in the opposite direction too: as Epicurus puts it, when we are “altogether free from the fear of death,” our actions can be free and not dependent on any authority (ἀδέσποτον, X.133).<sup>10</sup>

The key to helps us make sense of the definition of freedom in Proposition 67 of Part IV of the *Ethics* in conjunction with the discourse on fear in the *Theological Political Treatise* is the calculation of utility—the third epicurean theme. According to Epicurus, phronesis is the precondition of any virtue and any good (X.132). We will see here that freedom is understood as the operation of phronesis, where this operation also mobilizes the other two themes of Spinoza’s epicureanism. Epicurus contributes on how to conceive the co-articulation of monism and phronesis, whereas Lucretius contribution—as we will see in the next section—is to delineate the first epicurean theme—the construction of authority through fear—in relation to instrumental rationality.

Phronesis in Epicurus is best grasped by noting first how he radicalizes Aristotle’s position. In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between scientific knowledge or episteme and practical knowledge or phronesis.<sup>11</sup> The main characteristic of scientific knowledge is that its causes are necessary because it refers to unchanging things (1139a-b). To put this point differently, scientific knowledge is universal. By contrast, practical knowledge is concerned with contingent things. As such, it relies on rational calculation (τὸ λογιστικόν, 1139a). Phronesis in particular is concerned with calculating or judging how one can achieve a good life (τὸ εὖ ζῆν, 1139b). This is why Aristotle describes phronesis as concerned with calculating means and ends relations and as the kind of knowledge that pertains to the political.<sup>12</sup>

Aristotle summarizes his distinction between scientific knowledge and instrumental rationality as follows: “Phronesis is concerned with the affairs of men, and with things that can be the object of deliberation. ... But no one deliberates about things that cannot vary, nor yet about things that are not a means to some end” (1141b). The lack of deliberation and instrumentality characterizes the one who practices scientific knowledge, the one who will be described later in the history of thought as a removed, objective observer. The one who has phronesis or the one who exercises practical knowledge is never conceived as removed. The reason is simple: “Thought by itself moves nothing” (1139a). Thought does not lead to action—it is not practical—unless it accompanied by emotion or desire. Significantly, for Aristotle this relation between thought and action in the operation of phronesis is not a hierarchical one. It can be either a thought coupled with desire or desire accompanied by thought (1139b). The starting point can be either, but for phronesis to be possible there must be a balance between the two—neither emotion can overwhelm thought, nor vice versa. This is an important point never questioned by Epicurus who otherwise significantly departs from Aristotle.

When Epicurus writes that phronesis is the precondition of the ends of human life and it is “the beginning and rule of everything [πάντων ἀρχή] and the greatest good [τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν]” as well as “the cause of all virtues [ἐξ ἧς αἱ λοιπαὶ πᾶσαι πεφύκασιν ἀρεταί]” and hence “more significant [τιμιώτερον] even than philosophy” (X.132), he effectively rejects the separation of theory and praxis and thereby turns Aristotle’s hierarchy of knowledge on its head. Suddenly phronesis emerges as the primary form of knowledge. Let us turn to Epicurus’s letter to Herodotus, his most detailed account of a theory of knowledge, to see why Epicurus places so much emphasis on phronesis.

Epicurus begins by stressing what knowledge of nature is *for*, specifically, for peaceful and calm life (X.37). He explains at this point that there are two sources of knowledge, either directly through perceptions, or indirectly through words that communicate experiences. But for this empirical conception of knowledge to be possible, Epicurus asserts that it is required to assume regularity in nature. He summarizes this position by saying that “nothing is created out of nothing” (X.38). The rejection of the possibility of creation *ex nihilo* was prevalent amongst the “physiologists” who tried to explain nature in material terms.<sup>13</sup> For instance, the same view was held by Democritus, the atomist who greatly influenced Epicurus.<sup>14</sup> Significantly, Epicurus recognizes that the rejection of creation *ex nihilo* can be expressed in terms of totality: “There is nothing outside the totality [τὸ πᾶν]—nothing that can enter the totality in order to change it” (X.39).<sup>15</sup> The recognition

that the rejection of creation *ex nihilo* entails a totality outside of which nothing exists essentially asserts that knowledge is possible on condition that there are no divine interventions that change the laws of nature.<sup>16</sup> Or, knowledge presupposes a complete or unchanging totality.

The affinities with Spinoza's monism are clear. The opening of the *Ethics* consists in a repetition and defense of this Epicurean insight about totality. Substance, Spinoza's word for this totality, "cannot be produced by anything else" is how Proposition 6 of Part I of the *Ethics* puts it. The totality of substance or God is also a key position of the *Theological Political Treatise*—for instance, the rejection of miracles in Chapter 6 is indebted to this Epicurean idea: if nothing comes out of nothing, no event can be precipitated by a deity intervening into the natural course of things. Or, more broadly, ontologically speaking, there is no transcendence. We can readily see how this monist principle—that the totality can admit of nothing outside it—is incompatible with the Judeo-Christian metaphysics that requires both creation and transcendence.<sup>17</sup>

The presupposition of a totality for knowledge to be possible leads to the primacy of practical judgment.<sup>18</sup> As soon as we impute a totality of being, a complete theoretical knowledge of that totality appears impossible. Thus, knowledge always begins with a practical purpose. Epicurus designates this end as tranquility. The word that he uses at the beginning of the letter to Herodotus is γαληνισμός, which is more commonly expressed in his writings as ἀταραξία (*ataraxia*) and its cognates signifying the serenity and blessedness characteristic of the wise person who has phronesis (see e.g. X.83, 85, and 124-125). The letter to Menoeceus says that such a disposition makes the wise person live "like a god amongst humans" (X.135). *Ataraxia* means literally the absence or negation of "anxiety" (τάραχος)—and fear of death is singled out as the most detrimental anxiety in our pursuit of blessedness (X.81-82).

The mutual support between phronesis and *ataraxia* is clear. If phronesis signifies the balanced relation between thought and emotion in the process of making judgments about how to act, then *ataraxia* is the state of mind and body that results from the balanced exercise of thought and emotion characteristic of phronesis (X.132 and X.140). Differently put, *ataraxia* is the state in which we are *free from* the dominance of emotions such as fear of death that curtail our calculative capacity, *as well as* free from the illusion that the mind or the spirit can predominate over the body.

The Epicurean refusal of the separation of mind and body combines the materialism of monism—no transcendence and no creation—with the inseparability of thought and emotion characteristic of phronesis. The interconnection of thought and emotion entails that no body is created out of nothing and that no mind contains a transcendent quality. When the body dies, the mind dies with it—there is no immortal soul or spirit that outlives the body. This means that—as Epicurus puts in a phrase that was perhaps his best known in antiquity—“death ... is nothing to us” (X.126). The reason is that, while we are alive, we should concern ourselves with living—as Spinoza puts it in Proposition 67, we are free when our activity “is a meditation on life”—and when we are dead, we feel nothing and hence death can no longer bother us. The fear of death, then, is a state in which our knowledge starts from false premises and as such derails our judgment by overwhelming our emotions. In other words, it derails the balance in phronesis of thought and emotion that *ataraxia* requires.

This balance between thought and emotion provides a basic conception of free action. Phronesis cannot accommodate the hierarchical division between spirit and body—the division that is the metaphysical foundation of the conception of the free will. Another way of expressing this idea is to say that instrumental rationality conceives of *freedom as being free from the free will*.<sup>19</sup> This is a fundamental idea in Spinoza that Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens express by saying that in Spinoza “freedom fundamentally is the emergence from the illusion of freedom—that is, from the illusion of free will.”<sup>20</sup> It is also noteworthy at this point that the Latin translation of *ataraxia* is “beatitudo,” usually rendered in English as “blessedness,” a word that plays a significant role in Part V of the *Ethics*, which is concerned, as its title discloses, with “human freedom.”

Following Epicurus, we could say that beatitudo as understood by Spinoza is the state that arises when one acts without being overwhelmed with the fear of death, but rather by exercising judgments that pertain to his living—that is, when one acts freely, according to Proposition 67 of Part IV of the *Ethics*. That Spinoza adopts the Epicurean position of linking phronesis and *ataraxia* in terms of overcoming the fear of death is also supported by the fact that Proposition 67 is preceded by two propositions that essentially summarize the calculation of utility: Proposition 65 holds that “from the guidance of reason, we shall follow the greater of two goods or the lesser of two evils.” And Proposition 66 explains that this calculating applies not only to the present but also to the future.<sup>21</sup>

A difficulty arises at this point. If monism designates a totality outside of which nothing exists does not this entail determinism?

Even if Epicurus does not tackle this problem explicitly, his letter to Pythocles may be used to respond to the charge of determinism. This letter discusses celestial or “meteorological” phenomena (X.83), for instance, thunder, lightning, and eclipses. These are natural phenomena that may generate fear in us, which is why people have attributed them to the interference of gods. Epicurus approaches the discussion of these phenomena by saying that they may admit of a multiplicity of causes, none of which contradicts the senses (X.86). From a modern scientific perspective, it is inadmissible to impute multiple causes for the same natural occurrence. And if for Epicurus the senses were indeed the only way in which existence is experienced, as Hegel accuses him in his lectures on the history of philosophy, then such an admission of multiple causes would have constituted an empiricism on a weak foundation.<sup>22</sup>

Hegel’s accusation presupposes a separation of theory and practice, which is precisely what Epicurus seeks to deny through the primacy of practical knowledge. In fact, the reason why Epicurus admits of multiple causes is to defend the idea of a substance outside of which nothing exists and to reject creation *ex nihilo* as a way of arguing for the primacy of phronesis. There may or may not be multiple causes for thunderbolts, writes Epicurus almost nonchalantly, but—and that’s the point—“the only thing that really matters is not to lapse into myth” while providing an explanation (X.104). In other words, if we cannot find the single cause of a phenomenon, we can experiment with different causes based on sense-experience, but we must avoid at all cost concocting divine interventions in the totality of nature, which only ever precipitates fear. The multiplicity of causes is not a theoretical point about epistemology but a point about how to avoid emotional surges that overwhelm us and lead to fanciful ideas about gods. In other words, the discourse on multiple causes points to the primacy of practical knowledge.

This is not to reject theoretical knowledge or to devalue it in any way. It is, rather, to recognize that theory is founded in practice and inseparable from it. Epicurus is describing a hermeneutical situation as overcoming the separation of theory and praxis similar to what Heidegger calls the primacy of interpretation over understanding—and I call the primacy of practical knowledge.



We can put the same point starting with monism: The totality that includes everything is, by virtue of the fact that it includes everything, impossible to know completely. On certain occasions we may even be allowed to impute multiple causes to a natural phenomenon so as to avoid being trapped in the fear of this phenomenon. Instrumental rationality in this construal is the form of knowledge that does not simply have an epistemic function but that is the necessary outcome of the substance and that organizes all the various ways of being in the world. Ontology necessarily entails that actions take place within contingency, requiring the human to make practical judgments—to exercise phronesis—so as to act in the world. Differently put, the operation of phronesis breaks the hold of determinism.<sup>23</sup>

The priority of phronesis indicates that the Epicurean question is not “what is truth?” Rather, the question is about how we arrive at falsities. How is it that we err? This is an epistemological question—it asks how we can avoid errors. It is simultaneously an ethical question—it asks about the effects of our capacity to know, especially as they pertain to our wellbeing. And, finally, it is a political question that addresses the motivation for action—either because we are influenced by certain desires that drive us to error, or because falsities motivate us to act so as to rectify them. Note how congenial this line of thought is to Spinoza’s understanding of the imagination in the *Theological Political Treatise*. The imagination does *not* lead to truth—which is why it is about action and therefore, as we learn in Chapter 2 of the *Treatise*, the imagination “is beyond the limits of intellect [*multa extra intellectus limites percipere*]” (20/28). And that’s why it is also related to freedom: A universal truth does not demand any action, whereas the possibility of error requires action, it calls for it as a way of presenting or amending the error. Thus error contains within it the possibility of political freedom.

The discussion of the multiple causes of celestial phenomena indicates also that Epicureanism is not naturalism if by naturalism we understand that any natural explanation is referred to science. Phronesis precedes scientific explanation. But this is not humanism either, because phronesis is an effect of materiality. There is an heliocentrism operating here—as opposed to anthropocentrism. The imputation of multiple causes is, in fact, not uncommon in the materialist tradition. For instance, Machiavelli often draws attention to how the same actions do not necessarily lead to the same outcome.<sup>24</sup>

Overcoming the fear of death, then, suggests a theory of freedom that is irreducible to the free will, because it understands the mind and the body, emotions and thought, as inseparable. The calculation of utility or phronesis is the kind of practical comportment to the world that makes such a materialist sense of freedom possible because phronesis relies on the parallel operation of desire and rationality. Thus, the overcoming of the fear of death emerges as a way of expressing *freedom as the exercise of phronesis*.

### 3. ANTE-SECULARISM: THE CONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORITY AND HUMAN NATURE IN LUCRETIUS

Freedom as overcoming the fear of death in Epicurus shows how monism and the calculation of utility work together, for the good life of the human. For this to be possible, practical knowledge or phronesis needs to take priority. Knowledge is never disinterested or, as we might express it today, “knowledge is power.”

It is here that the shortcoming of Epicurus arises. Despite certain incidental intimations, Epicurus never develops a theory of power, stopping instead at the designation of *ataraxia* as the end of action. This is a significant deficiency for two reasons. First, authority—the first epicurean themes—is an underdeveloped concept in Epicurus; and, second, the historical dimension of the dialectic of authority and utility is lacking. Lucretius may claim that his *On the Nature of Things* adds nothing new to his philosophical master and it is merely an attempt to popularize his view in Rome (5.336–37).<sup>25</sup> But in fact it is more than that, as it addresses the two shortcomings we identify in Epicurus. Let me take these two innovations by Lucretius in turn.

At the beginning of his poem, immediately after the opening hymn to Aphrodite, Lucretius turns to “religio.” This is a condition that we find in Epicurus, namely, when we assume gods or mysterious entities to be the efficient causes of natural phenomena that cause us fear or anxiety. Consequently, we are “oppressed beneath the weight of religion [*oppressa gravi sub religione*]” (1.63). But this oppression is no longer *solely* an effect of the phenomena themselves. Rather, it is produced by those who interpret the phenomena in such a way as to gather power for themselves by making others obey them. Let me put this differently: According to Epicurus, ontologically there is nothing transcendent, since there is nothing outside the totality. Fear of nature creates transcendent ideas—what Epicurus calls “myths.” With Lucretius, transcendence is not produced solely, or even primarily, by natural phenomena as such. Rather, it is produced through the

interpretation of natural phenomena by the proponents of religion. Essentially this means that the practitioners of *religio* actively counter the operation of phronesis through fear. *Religio* appropriates instrumental rationality for itself and for its own ends, that is, to perpetuate its own power. Or, more succinctly, *religio* stifles freedom. This is a significant shift because it allows for a thinking of authority.

That Lucretius has *auctoritas* in mind when he writes *religio*—or that, at least, we can substitute one term for the other—is also shown by the fact that Lucretius indicates both a theological and a political source to *religion*, just as authority's origins are theologico-political. The example that Lucretius puts forward for the “evil” of *religio* (1.101) is the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (1.80 ff.). Her father, Agamemnon, does not sacrifice her only because he is ill-advised about the reasons why the winds won't carry his Greek army to Troy. In addition, he draws his justification for the sacrifice from the matrix of beliefs and practices instituted as religion. Thus, in *religio*, as the example of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia demonstrates, collude those who derive their authority through theological and through political means.<sup>26</sup>

Note that authority signifies a kind of power that is constructed and that is not shared—a power that is confined to priests and kings. Such an artificial power that is not common to all is what Spinoza calls “potestas” or constituted power. As Negri has demonstrated, Spinoza stages a conflict between potestas and the kind of power that is shared by everyone and which is creative—as opposed to created.<sup>27</sup> This is the kind of power that Spinoza calls “potentia.” Let us see how Lucretius stages the conflict between potestas and potentia as a way of presenting the dialectic of authority and utility.

Lucretius writes that Epicurus took a stand against (*obsistere contra*, 1.67) religion and the misery it brought to the world.<sup>28</sup> This consists in questioning the myths (*fama*, 1.68) about Gods as well as searching for the causes of the natural phenomena that provoke fear.

Therefore the lively power of his mind [*vivida vis animi*] prevailed, and forth he marched far beyond the flaming walls of the world, as he traversed the immeasurable universe in thought and imagination; whence victorious he returns bearing his prize, the knowledge what can come into being, what cannot, in a word, how each thing has its powers limited [*fnita potestas*] and its deep-set boundary mark. (1.72-77)

This is a complex passage. The main metaphor presents Epicurus as a powerful adversary that conquers *religio*. In parallel, there are two further metaphors presenting monism. First are the fiery walls that signify the end of the world, and the second is about the boundary mark that indicates the laws of nature that we as human cannot overcome—for instance, the fact that we will all die.

It is important to note the two parallel metaphors—about the overcoming of *religio* and about monism—are possible on condition that a conception of power other than constituted power is presupposed. Specifically, the power (*vis*) that Epicurus has to take a stand against the oppressions of *religio* is not premised on any instituted form of power. Rather, the source of his power is that he has “marched” to the end of the world, or, to put the same point in the vocabulary of the letter to Herodotus, he has grasped the totality (τὸ πᾶν). This power that Epicurus employs is finite ( *finita potestas*). It is a power that comes from his thought that as finite it pertains to the particular circumstances that allow for the emergence of that power. We can understand this power as *phronesis*, that is, as the power exercised through practical judgment and which is opposed to the power of authority that operates by employing fear. Thus, here the *potestas* of authority is pitted against the *potentia* of Epicurus’s *phronesis*.

From this vantage point, we may be able to explain why the expression “freedom to philosophize” from the subtitle is absent from the Preface—and in fact it is not used again until Chapter 14 of the *Treatise*. It is substituted by the idea of the freedom to judge, repeated three times in the Preface. The first use suggests that preventing people from making judgements freely erodes their political freedom: “To invest with prejudice or in any way coerce each person’s free judgment [*liberum uniuscuiusque iudicium*] is altogether incompatible with public freedom [*communi libertati*]” (3/7). The freedom to judge is opposed to constituted power that derives its authority from “prejudices.” The second takes the same point further, accusing priests who “distort the true function of the Church” from “inhibiting everyone from judging freely [*unusquisque libero suo iudicio*]” (4/8). This point could have come from Lucretius. The final use asserts that “everyone should be allowed freedom of judgment [*unicuique sui iudicii libertatem*]” (6/11)—because this freedom to judge is distinctive of human nature and of *potentia*, the kind of power that everyone has access to. We see here how Lucretius’s first innovation helps organize the dialectic of authority and utility in terms of power in the Preface.

The second innovation that we find in Lucretius consists in highlighting the historical import of phronesis. If phronesis is constitutive of human nature, its operation cannot be confined to the here and now. It also operated in the past. Not only does this allow for the employment of history in the pursuit of “free philosophizing.” In addition, it solves a problem about the connection between instrumentality and teleology. Let us, now, turn to Book 5 of *On the Nature of Things* where Lucretius introduces this second innovation.

Lucretius’s theory of the stages of social formation requires an initial step, namely, the denial of any anthropomorphic conception of the divine as well as the denial of creationism: “the world was certainly not made for us by divine power” (5.198-99). This leads to a conclusion that is familiar to readers of the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*. As Spinoza puts it there, “Nature has no end set before it, and ... all final causes are nothing but human fictions.” Consequently, the “sanctuary of ignorance” is the belief that God has a will. The Epicureans express this also by saying that the gods do not care about us—their tranquility and blessedness is unconcerned with human affairs.

Following upon the denial of the divine creation of the world “for us,” in Book 5 Lucretius spends close to two hundred lines on the interconnection between creation and destruction. Nothing created is exempt from destruction, “even stones [of the gods’ temples] are conquered by time” (5.306). This mutual dependence of birth and death ought to be placed within the argument about the mutual dependence of forces of power that Lucretius developed in Book 3: “one thing never ceases to arise from another, and no man possesses life in freehold—all as tenants” (3.970-71). One exists by virtue of the fact that one is inserted in a network of power relations. No one is absolutely free. Everybody depends upon the relations of power—both of potestas and of potentia—that unfold within the specific context one finds oneself in. Differently put, the totality consists of power relations that are responsible for the continuous, incessant unfolding of genesis and destruction, birth and death—and there is no end or meaning to this process. The rejection of creation *ex nihilo* or monism and the rejection of teleology go hand in hand.

The discussion of the formation of society is premised on the realization that, even though there is no ultimate end in this matrix of power relations, still we can identify particular ends that regulate behavior. Instrumental rationality or phronesis has no need for final causes at a metaphysical level, which is what allows for the operation of particular ends in history. Or, in another formulation

employing vocabulary from Book 1 of *On the Nature of Things*, we strive for particular ends as opposed to an ultimate end because our power is finite. We can find the same move in Spinoza, who rejects ultimate ends in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* but admits of instrumental reasoning—the kind of reasoning that relies on means and ends as a way of calculating utility—in Part IV of the *Ethics*.<sup>29</sup>

Lucretius employs the principle that human action is premised on the finite ends pursued by phronesis to delineate three stages of social and political formation. Every epoch in the three stages of society is adumbrated by stipulating how humans use their instrumental rationality to respond to specific material conditions.<sup>30</sup> An historical analysis has recourse to phronesis to describe power relations that articulate the finite or particular ends—as opposed to final ends—of action. Thus Lucretius uses phronesis to distinguish between the three stages of society.

In the first stage of social formation life is nomadic, based on hunting, but humans lack a conception of the common good and do not have laws (5.925-69). Being close to nature, they do not fear natural phenomena and hence have no use of religion, but they fear the wild beasts. In the second stage, humans start living in settlements. At this point, Lucretius provides his account of the creation of language in terms of the utility (*utilitas*, 5.1029 and 1047) of communication. Here Lucretius also stipulates that property and wealth start developing, but with that also comes ambition (5.1132), leading to the slaying of kings and general warfare—resembling what Hobbes calls a war of all against all. The feature that inaugurates the third stage is the creation of laws (5.1143-44), whose purpose is to arrest the violence characterizing the previous stage. The humans in this stage overcome the fear of violence but now they fear punishment from the law instead (5.1151).

Two features of this schema are notable. First, Lucretius extrapolates how instrumental rationality is based on material conditions (see, e.g., the account of the development of metallurgy, 5.1241 ff.). Any articulation of phronesis thus is historical—which is to say, finite. Second, the drive toward the preservation of life or *conatus* accounts for the transition from one stage to the next—and fear is the dominant emotion. Thus in the first stage humans fear for their life from wild animals, in the second they fear for their life through the ambitions leading to generalized violence, and in the third stage they fear punishment from the law. Consequently, the main features of each stage are thoroughly determined by the exercise of instrumental rationality that responds to material circumstances with the aim to preserve life. What characterizes the humans by virtue of being humans, all the way from a state of barbarism to the development of complex

political structures, is the fear for their lives and the drive for self-preservation.<sup>31</sup> This constant feature affords Lucretius a method to think about the evolution of society. To put this differently, history shows us that human nature consists in how we exercise our phronesis to overcome fear. Or, that human nature consists in the unfolding of the dialectic of authority and utility—where authority is understood as the power produced through fear.

When Spinoza links conatus to the calculation of utility (for instance in *E IV*, P2oS), he makes available to himself the historical methodology that we find in Book 5 of *On the Nature of Things*. Thus, he can employ the example of the founding of the Hebrew state through the contribution of Moses's authority not simply as an historical analogy, as is common in the newly founded Dutch Republic.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as soon as history is founded on phronesis as a distinctive feature of human nature, the lessons about the dialectic of authority and utility derived from the analysis of the Hebrew state become relevant to the present. Spinoza can reconstruct an instrumental logic that leads to the foundation of the Hebrew state by identifying the means and ends relations that were at play in conjunction with the various forms of power—but, crucially, *without* recourse to ultimate ends, or to transcendent entities that miraculously intervene to support a supposedly “elect” people (as Spinoza argues in Chapter 3 of the *Theological Political Treatise*).

A significant implication arises from Lucretius's analysis of authority in conjunction with its historical articulation, one pertaining to the inseparability of the two sources of authority, the theological and the political. In a move that today would seem counter-intuitive, Lucretius locates the emergence of *religio* in the third stage of human progress (5.1161 ff.). As soon as society is politically organized by providing laws to protect the state and to lead to order, peace and stability, humans realize that they are still subject to sudden death: “when cities are shaken and fall or threaten to fall, what wonder if the sons of men feel contempt for themselves, and acknowledge the great potency and wondrous might of gods in the world, to govern all things?” (5.1237-40). The fear of punishment distinctive of the third stage is transfigured into a fear of gods as the punishers *par excellence*.<sup>33</sup> This creates the theological support for the structure of command and obedience that political authority relies on. Differently put, it is not religious practice as such that is produced in the third stage; rather, what is produced in the *theologico-political* authority.

This entails that the political and the religious are inextricable in any organized polity. But this is not the kind of postsecularism that has become prevalent the past few years, for instance through the work of Charles Taylor or Jürgen Habermas. The main characteristic of the recent “return to religion” presupposes that a separation was forged between Church and state and that contemporary sensibilities transverse this secular moment.<sup>34</sup> Their aim is for postsecularism to point toward a pluralism sustained through reason. As opposed to this, Lucretius locates the genesis of *religio* in the creation of the political community through obedience to laws. The demand to *obey the laws* is psychologically distorted to create the illusion that we also need to *obey the divine*. This recognition of the theologico-political roots of authority cannot be used to defend pluralism as it is simply a fact of historical development. Differently put, it indicates a historical or finite dimension of phronesis that explains the creation of law and that lacks any normative traction dictating what the law ought to legislate. Since it describes how a distinction between religious and state law is possible, we can talk of Lucretius’s *ante*-secularism.

Instead of a normative dimension, *ante*-secularism fuels the dialectic of authority and utility. On the one hand, the production of authority as the theologico-political conjunction is positive. This is the reason why Lucretius locates *religio* at the advanced stage of society. In the move characteristic of Epicureanism, the calculation of utility leads to commonality and the political structures that result from this can contribute to the utility of the community. The calculation of utility is thus necessary for the political.<sup>35</sup> Further, the fact that the citizens obey the law is necessary for the law to function and reach the third stage of development in Lucretius’s schema. The structure of command and obedience is here positive.

On the other hand, the theologico-political authority can lead to negative consequences for the community when the calculation of utility is co-opted by those in authority to further their own purposes. Such a theologico-political authority can be concentrated in one person—Spinoza’s example in the Preface is Alexander. Or it can be split between Church and state. But this “secular” separation of powers is immaterial compared to the fact that the production of authority reunites within itself politics and religion. Obedience in a community relies on both political and religious motivations that may promote the ends of those who hold authority against the utility of the community. The negative articulation of authority contains within it a strong anti-authoritarian impulse.



This double movement of authority—both required under certain conditions to protect the utility of the people and under other detrimental to them—is characteristic of the dialectic of authority and utility. And such a dialectic operates *irrespective* of a constitutional separation of Church and state, which is why Spinoza is ante-secular. Such an ante-secularism arises in Lucretius through the mobilization of the first epicurean theme—the production of authority through fear—in conjunction with the third epicurean theme—the operation of phronesis. This ante-secularism, then, complements Epicurus’s analysis of the interactions and interconnections between the second and the third epicurean themes.

This point is also important so as to avoid confusing Spinoza’s Epicurean position with the typical republican position of freedom as freedom from domination. Both conceptions of freedom are indeed anti-authoritarian. But there are at least two important differences. First, freedom from domination implies a sense of negative freedom that is still reliant on the free will, that is, on a separation of mind and body. Second, in the republican tradition the emphasis is on the construction of forms of legality within the framework of the legitimacy of political authority. Conversely, in Spinoza anti-authoritarianism unfolds at the level of phronesis, whereby the conflict cannot be confined at the level of legitimation; rather, the conflict arises from the junctures and disjunctures of authority and utility. Thus, even though republicanism and Epicureanism share an anti-authoritarian drive, it is constructed differently because of the Epicurean dialectic of authority and utility.

#### 4. “FIGHTING FOR THEIR SERVITUDE AS IF FOR SALVATION”: MONARCHY VERSUS DEMOCRACY

The most forceful and paradoxical co-articulation of freedom and the dialectic of authority and utility in the Preface occurs soon after the discussion about fear and superstition:

Granted, then, that the supreme mystery [*arcanum*] of monarchism [*monarchici*], its prop and stay, is to keep men in a state of deception, and with the specious title of religion to cloak the fear by which they must be held in check, so that they will fight for their servitude as if for salvation [*pro servitio, tanquam pro salute pungent*], and count it no shame, but the highest honour, to spend their blood and their lives for the glorification of one man. Yet no more disastrous policy can be devised or attempted in a free state [*in libera republica*]. To invest with prejudice or in any way coerce

each person's free judgment [*liberum uniuscuiusque iudicium*] is altogether incompatible with public freedom [*communi libertati*]. (3/7)

The most “mysterious” feature of the dialectic of authority and utility is that in certain political settings, the dialectic seems to suspend itself. The people stop calculating their utility and thereby lose their freedom. The regime of power that results is monarchy. Monarchy should be taken literally—as the authority that incorporates both political and religious obedience. Monarchy is despotism—not just authority but authoritarianism.<sup>36</sup> At the same time Spinoza entertains the possibility of an opposed regime of power, namely, the free republic or democracy. Spinoza notes only one characteristic of a democratic regime—as if a regime is democratic if and only if it has that characteristic: namely, the capacity to judge freely. In other words, the exercise of phronesis that we have already seen as synonymous with freedom in the Epicurean tradition here becomes the necessary condition for democracy. With this move, the dialectic of authority and utility is transformed into the conflict between two regimes of power, monarchy and democracy. Let us explore some of the context of this move, before examining Spinoza's answer to the threat of freedom posed by voluntary servitude—what the *Treatise* designates as “people fighting for their servitude as if for salvation.”

Spinoza's insight is that even in the most abject and total state of obedience, the possibility persists of a re-inscription of utility. He shares this insight with Étienne de La Boétie, who, a century and a half before the *Theological Political Treatise*, frames the issue of voluntary servitude as follows: “how it happens that so many men, so many towns, so many cities, so many nations at times tolerate a single tyrant who has no other power than what they grant him, who has no other ability to harm them than inasmuch as they are willing to tolerate it, who could do ill to them only insofar as they would rather suffer it than oppose him. It is certainly quite something.” In other words, “it is the people who enslave themselves.”<sup>37</sup> Voluntary servitude presupposes democracy in the sense that the people have more power than any other entity within the polity. This power consists in the capacity to calculate their interest—that is, it consists in the exercise of instrumental rationality. The suspension of this power produces tyrannical authority but its re-energizing—always a possibility—describes a robust anti-authoritarian impulse that shook a lot of La Boétie's contemporaries, including his good friend Montaigne, who thought it prudent to leave the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* unpublished.

Let me express this another way: La Boétie realizes that authority does not rely on command but on obedience. Command on its own is useless—as anyone who has encountered the “no” of a young child easily realizes. Command is effective only so long as it is obeyed. Thus, the power of the sovereign relies on the continuous submission to obedience. But—and that’s La Boétie’s significant insight—the people actually have the capacity to calculate their utility, which may lead them to the conclusion that they need not obey. To put it differently, disobedience is the precondition of obedience.<sup>38</sup> This means that they have more power than the one who relies on their obedience. The critical insight is about the calculation of utility: power can only be mobilized against authority through the actualization of instrumental rationality, that is, through phronesis.

The articulation of voluntary servitude in the *Theological Political Treatise* relies on instrumental rationality to grasp the function of obedience. This often remains unrecognized. At a strategic moment in *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to Spinoza’s phrase that people “fight for their servitude as if it is their salvation” to support the pivotal claim of their work, namely, that the forms of production and reproduction leading to a capitalist society rely on desire. They invoke Spinoza to show the paradoxical nature of desire, which consists in willingly striving for something that is against one’s interests.<sup>39</sup> And yet, *pace* Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza’s insight is not just that every rational calculation is determined by desire. It also moves in the opposite direction: every desire is also equally determined by rational calculation. There is a reciprocal movement between desire and practical judgment. I won’t indulge here in all the medieval debates as to what comes first, emotions or intellect. Aristotle was fully aware that this was the wrong question, when he asserts that either is possible because phronesis “may be called either thought related to desire or desire related to thought; and man as an originator of action is a union of desire and intellect.”<sup>40</sup> This co-operation of thought and emotion characterizes phronesis specifically, according to Aristotle. We have already seen how epicureanism radicalizes the Aristotelian notion of phronesis and how Spinoza appropriates this radicalization. In their extrapolation of Spinoza’s conception of voluntary servitude, Deleuze and Guattari pay scant attention to the operation of phronesis in how obedience is constructed in the *Treatise*, and thereby miss the dialectic of authority and utility.

Deleuze and Guattari’s blindness to the dialectic of authority and utility is in fact the norm in the secondary literature. Even Frédéric Lordon, who in *Willing Slaves of Capital* makes Spinoza’s voluntary servitude resonate with the twenty-first century, only points to the dialectic to envisage its suspension.<sup>41</sup> In an analysis

full of insightful observations, Lordon shows how obedience can be mobilized in all sorts of seemingly irrational ways so as to precipitate submission to capitalist and neoliberal forms of production and reproduction. Toward the end of the book, Lordon asks how it is possible to evade voluntary servitude. He points to Spinoza's argument from the *Political Treatise*, according to which the indignation of the multitude is the motivating factor in resisting power when it acts against their interests. Indignation implies recognition of one's predicament and a drive to change. There is, then, here, an intimation of the dialectic of authority and utility. But what does this change amount to? To the multitude regaining control of government in what would amount to "a second coming of sovereignty," writes Lordon at the very end of the book. This solution erases the dialectic of authority and utility. Utility will triumph over superstition but then democracy will be completely absorbed within sovereignty. Besides the danger that the dialectic here may contain a telos, I primarily fear that the abandonment of the agonistic framework—the conflict of authority and utility—at this critical juncture of the argument contains the danger of resurrecting a revamped sense of voluntary servitude, one in which we are slaves by exercising our power (*potestas*). We are slaves by being rulers—not as a master and slave dialectic but as a coincidence of master and slave. At this point utopia becomes indistinguishable from dystopia. The exercise of pure utility supposedly freed from obedience is just as, if not more, disturbing than the surrendering of utility in the act of blind obedience—because voluntary servitude at least retains the prospect of resistance.

Both Deleuze and Guattari's and Lordon's positions stumble when the question arises about how to overcome voluntary servitude. The problem is that neither desire on its own, nor the elimination of obedience seem adequate. So what is Spinoza's position? His solution is unexpected. He grants that—quoting Curtius—"the multitude has no ruler more potent than superstition" (2). But avoids the usual move, whereby democracy is defined by arguing that the people or the multitude should rise from servitude by perfecting themselves through education, a better political system, and so on. Instead, he accentuates the conflict between the two regimes of power, monarchy and democracy.<sup>42</sup> This accentuation of the conflict in the dialectic of authority and utility is at the heart of what I take to be Spinoza's conception of agonistic democracy.<sup>43</sup>

Let us see how Spinoza signals such a move. I am citing here the passage that immediately follows the one in which Spinoza determined voluntary servitude while distinguishing between monarchy and the free state:

Alleged seditions [*Et quod ad seditiones attinet*] that are pursued under the cloak of religion, they surely have their only source in this, that law intrudes into the realm of speculative thought [*leges de rebus speculativis conduntur*], and that opinions are put on trial and condemned as crimes. The adherents and followers of these opinions are sacrificed, not to the public health/ salvation [*publicae saluti*], but to the hatred and savagery of their opponents. If under state law [*ex jure imperii*] “only deeds were arraigned, and words were not punished,” seditions of this kind would be divested of any appearance of legality [*nulla juris specie similes seditiones ornari possent*], and controversies would not turn into seditions [*controversiae in seditiones verterentur*]. (3/7)

This is a complex passage, not least because of Spinoza’s propensity to present something as self-evident, whereas in fact it may deviate from our preconceptions. So let us read the passage attentively.

This first point to note is that the word “seditio” is repeated three times. Seditio enters forcefully the vocabulary of political philosophy through Hobbes’s translation of Thucydides’s *Histories of the Peloponnesian War*. Hobbes translates as “seditio” the word “stasis.”<sup>44</sup> It is well-known that stasis as civil war, or internal arrest, or conflict within the city denotes a negative political experience. For instance, Plato contrasts the glory and virtue that arises through *polemos*, the war against external enemies, with the *stasis*, the internal war that he describes as the greatest ill of the polity.<sup>45</sup> From ancient times onward, stasis is described as the greatest disease of the polis.<sup>46</sup> This assessment is still pivotal in Carl Schmitt’s distinction between the enemy and the foe—who is the internal enemy. Schmitt defines the political as the identification of the enemy, whereas the foe is explicitly excluded from this definition.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, the identification of the internal enemy, *pace* Schmitt, is also a way of strengthening sovereign power, as the flourishing of sedition laws in the aftermath of 9/11 demonstrates.

Sedition or stasis is never accomplished by a single individual or a group of people. There may be an orchestrator of an internal unrest, but for that to be a threat to the state, the participation of the people is also required. For instance, Locke strongly advocates for the toleration of any opposing view, but with one exception, namely, when opinions that can be detrimental to the state start appealing to a large number of people.<sup>48</sup> The “fickle multitude” that is swayed this way and that by the enemies of the state, is indispensable for sedition to be actualized. Thus, “seditio” signifies the worst that a state or polity can encounter and which consists

in the people inciting conflict with established authority. So, the word “seditio” is loaded with over two millennia of unanimity as to its pernicious influence on the state, a unanimity that is accompanied by the fear of the multitude.<sup>49</sup>

Within the historical and conceptual context that I describe above, Spinoza’s discussion of “seditio” is extraordinary. He completely reverses the entire structure of the concept. Instead of the people precipitating sedition against authority, Spinoza presents authority as being seditious when it is using the law to suppress the free exercise of judgment. Spinoza starts by introducing not real but false seditions. These alleged seditions are perpetrated “under the cloak of religion” to the extent that religion is a vehicle of superstition advancing authority. Religion, as we will learn soon and as Spinoza will tirelessly repeat throughout the *Theological Political Treatise*, has a positive function that consists in instilling obedience as a precondition of legality (6). Authority—to repeat—is not bad per se. But obedience, when promulgated through superstition, is counterpoised to the freedom to judge (4). Alleged seditions are the intrusion of law (and hence obedience whose negative side is superstition) into our freedom to judge and to calculate our utility. The effect of this is that alleged seditions will lead to prosecution. Differently put, authority seeks to substitute instrumental rationality, which is against the *salus* of the people—against the multitude’s utility.

The tension between authority and utility comes to a climax around the word *salus*. The word *salus*, meaning both health and salvation, repeats the word used in the expression about the people fighting for their servitude as if for their salvation (*pro salute*). So there is certainly an echo of this phrase here. At the same time, the medical metaphors of the term stasis are unmistakable. As I mentioned above, since Plato stasis has been consistently designated as the greatest disease of the political. Spinoza is certainly aware of this tradition to which he responds to by totally subverting it. Here, the loss of health is attributed to those who seek to exercise authority despotically.

The reversal of the traditional understanding of stasis allows Spinoza to dramatize the dialectic of authority and utility leading to an understanding of democracy as agonistic practice. The idea of stasis, from Plato and Aristotle all the way to the seventeenth century, was uniformly attributed to the “fickle multitude,” whereas here it is attributed to those who hold political authority and evoke the law against those who want to exercise phronesis.<sup>50</sup> *Seditio* is, according to Spinoza, an effect of seeking to consolidate authority by eliminating instrumental rationality in the name of the law. The accusation is directed primarily against authority—

both religious and political—as is stated unambiguously a bit later: “Church and Court are breeding bitter factions [*dissidia*] which readily turn people to sedition [*seditiones*]” (5/9). This claim is repeated in Chapter 7 and further amplified in Chapter 14 of the *Treatise*. The seditious role of what Lucretius calls “religio” is presented in political terms that mirror the distinction between monarchy and democracy: sedition is the prosecuting—exercised in the service of monarchy—of the freedom to judge. In this sense, sedition here stages the conflict between monarchy and democracy.

The argument concludes that if we recognize this seditious activity of monarchical authority, then controversies will no longer be thought of as seditions. In other words, democracy here is not defined through the people achieving rule. Such a rule is always liable to voluntary servitude when the people miscalculate their utility. Instead, the starting point of Spinoza’s democratic thinking is the controversies and conflicts (another word in Greek for this could actually be stasis) allowed to unfold within the polity.<sup>51</sup> Thus, democracy is only possible if the dialectic of authority and utility is operative.<sup>52</sup>

The subversion of stasis performed by Spinoza is not unprecedented. The word “sedition” has another equally, if not more, important side. As I argue in my book *Democracy and Violence*, an alternative tradition about the function of stasis does exist.<sup>53</sup> For instance, Nicole Loraux discovers the foundation of the political in ancient Athens precisely in stasis.<sup>54</sup> And centuries later Machiavelli—one of the major if never named conversants in the *Theological Political Treatise*—rehabilitates stasis by arguing in the *Discourses* that the greatness of the Roman Republic was due to the instituted conflict between the senate and the people.<sup>55</sup> The position I defend in *Democracy and Violence* is that such an alternative tradition is crucial for an understanding of democracy. Within such a genealogy of stasis, the passage we are dealing with here is of singular significance.

Differently put, Spinoza engages in this paragraph with a long tradition that sees stasis or sedition as the bane of the political—as the greatest fear of any state. As opposed to this tradition, Spinoza inscribes free judgment or phronesis at the center of the regime of power that is democratic. This means that internal controversies are indispensable for democracy to be possible. And yet, that possibility is not envisaged as an ultimate outcome that would put an end to the conflict with authority—that is London’s deficient move. Instead, free judgment is counterpoised to sedition as the attempt by authority to repress judgment so as to institute voluntary servitude.

Nothing in Spinoza's passage indicates that this conflict characteristic of the dialectic of authority and utility can end. It does suggest, however—and this is fundamental in Spinoza's conception of democracy—that monarchy cannot exclude that conflict and therefore that the democratic is always presupposed, even when it is seditiously repressed. If freedom as the overcoming of death consists in nothing else than the exercise of phronesis, then the political regime embodying this freedom is democracy, even though—or, perhaps, because—the threat of authority and voluntary servitude can never be eliminated.

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## NOTES

1. All references to Spinoza's *Theological Political Treatise* are to the translation by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001) cited parenthetically by page number. I have often altered the translation. For the Latin, I have used the *Opera*. Ed. Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1924. The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is contained in Volume 3. All page references to this edition follow after the English edition.
2. For the concept of authority in relation to the Reformation paying particular attention to the division between the inside and the outside of the subject as well as to the contrast between faith and reason, see Herbert Marcuse, *A Study on Authority, in Studies in Critical Philosophy*. Trans. Joris de Bres. Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, 49-155. For the historical context in relation to Biblical hermeneutics, see Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2012; and, Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority*. Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2001.
3. Pierre-François Moreau notes this tension in the subtitle in *Spinoza et le Spinozisme*. Paris: PUF, 2014, but he does not link it to Epicureanism, nor to a discussion of freedom in Spinoza.
4. There is a significant body of work on Spinoza's "alternative" modernity that is characterized, amongst other things, by the overcoming of the mind-body dualism. See, indicatively, Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2001; and, Michael Mack, *Spinoza and the Specters of Modernity: The Hidden Enlightenment of Diversity from Spinoza to Freud*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
5. See Dimitris Vardoulakis, "Why is Spinoza an Epicurean?" *Epoche*, forthcoming in 2019. This is developed even further in my forthcoming book *Authority and Utility: On Spinoza's Epicureanism*.
6. As Arendt puts it, authority "is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance." Hannah Arendt, "Authority", *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*. New York: Viking, 1961, 93. Or, in Alexandre Kojève's formulation, authority resides with someone whose "action does not provoke a reaction." *Kojève, The Notion of Authority (A Brief Presentation)*. Ed. François Terré, trans. Hager Weslati. London: Verso, 2014, 13.
7. I further elaborate on the concept of freedom in Spinoza in *Authority and Utility*.
8. Some of the most penetrating observations about the importance of the individual's fear of death in Hobbes's adumbration of the social contract can be found in Carl Schmitt's *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*. Trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, [1938] 1996.
9. The so-called *tetrapharmakon* (meaning, literally, a fourfold pharmakon or medicine) is a summary of what Epicurus's students regarded as the four most important ideas of his teaching. The tetrapharmakon has been preserved in a Herculaneum papyrus by Philodemus.
10. Diogenes Laertius, "Epicurus", *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1931). All references to Book X of the Lives are made parenthetically in the text. I have regularly modified the translations of this edition.
11. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. H. Rackham. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 2003. All references to this edition are made parenthetically in the text. I have often amended the translations. Also, I note that the distinction is more complicated. Aristotle is also concerned with technical or artistic knowledge—the knowledge about how to create things. I am presenting here the Aristotelian theory only insofar as it has a bearing on the Epicurean discussion of phronesis.
12. I am using phronesis, calculation of utility and instrumental rationality interchangeably: see

Vardoulakis, “Why is Spinoza an Epicurean?” I note here the influence of Heidegger’s course on the Sophist in repressing the importance of instrumentality in Aristotle’s extrapolation of phronesis. The course on the Sophist was particularly significant for Heidegger’s development as it was delivered just before the writing of *Being and Time* and it was attended by a number of students—such as Gadamer and Arendt—who, in their own ways, followed Heidegger’s lead to have an aversion to instrumentality when it comes to practical knowledge. I examine Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and I take up its interpretation by Heidegger and others in *Neoepicureanism*, a book on materialism that I am writing. For a synoptic view of my position, see Dimitris Vardoulakis, “Neoepicureanism.” *Philosophy Today* (2019), forthcoming.

13. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1933, 986b.

14. Diogenes Laertius, “Democritus”, IX.44.

15. I could have translated τὸ πᾶν as substance using the Spinozan expression from Part I of the *Ethics*.

16. This is the reason, as Frederick Lange explains in his monumental history of materialism, that the idea of the rejection of the creation *ex nihilo* played such a decisive role in the development of modern empiricism. See Friedrich Albert Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*. Iserlohn: Baedeker, [1866], 2nd rev. ed. 1887. This is also why Epicureanism is important for the scientific revolution. See Elizabeth Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008.

17. Leo Strauss makes this point very clearly in *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*. New York: Schocken, 1965.

18. See Vardoulakis, “Why is Spinoza an Epicurean?”

19. See Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Freedom from the Free Will: On Kafka’s Laughter*. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2016.

20. Genevieve Lloyd and Moira Gatens, *Collective Imaginations: Spinoza, Past and Present*. London: Routledge, 1999, 51.

21. Propositions 65 and 66 are summarized at a pivotal moment of the argumentation about natural right in Chapter 16 (175) of the *Theological Political Treatise*.

22. G.W.F. Hegel, “The Philosophy of the Epicureans.” *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson. London: Kegan Paul, 1895, vol. 2, 276-311.

23. Thus, phronesis does in the political realm what the *clinamen* or *swerve* does in the physical realm. I cannot develop here the connection between the Epicurean physics and ethics, and I only want to note the operation of instrumental rationality as a way of making sense why Spinoza has no use of the *clinamen* in his metaphysics, as his correspondence with Boxel makes clear (see esp. Ep. 54).

24. For an excellent discussion of multiple causes in Machiavelli, see Vittorio Morfino, “The Five Theses of Machiavelli’s ‘Philosophy’.” *The Radical Machiavelli: Politics, Philosophy and Language*. Eds Filippo Del Lucchese, Fabio Frosini, Vittorio Morfino. Leiden: Brill, 2015, 145-73.

25. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, rev. Martin F. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924). Hereafter cited parenthetically by book and verse number. On occasion, I have modified the translation. On the discovery of Lucretius’s manuscript, see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton, 2011). For an overview of different approaches to Lucretius’s reception and impact in modernity, see the collection edited by Jacques Lezra and Liza Blake, *Lucretius and Modernity: Epicurean Encounters* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

26. For the theologico-political origin of authority see Paul Ricoeur, “The Paradox of Author-

ity.” *Reflections on the Just*. Trans. David Pellauer. Chicago: Chicago U. P., 2007, 91-105. Because of this double origin, as I argue in Spinoza’s Promise, the title of the Treatise can be understood to mean Treatise on Authority.

27. Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota P., 1991.

28. For the distinction between taking a stand and taking sides, see Dimitris Vardoulakis, “Stasis: Notes Toward Agonist Democracy.” *Theory & Event*, 20:3 (2017, 699-725).

29. As Julia Annas argues, ancient moral theories take for granted that their starting point is the investigation of the ends of action that lead to happiness and virtue. See *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1993, 9 and passim. Such a moral end is very different from the teleology relying on the presence of a divine law-giver, which Spinoza attacks in the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics* and elsewhere. It is prevalent amongst Spinoza’s commentators to infer from the rejection of an ultimate end (in the Appendix to Part I) that Spinoza rejects that action is directed toward ends. I have found no textual evidence that supports this inference, nor does it make sense within Spinoza’s framework.

30. Lucretius is here a long distance from Hesiod’s mixing of myth, of the stories about gods, in order to describe the various stages of humankind in *Works and Days*. See Hesiod, *Theogony; Works and Days; Testimonia*. Trans. Glenn W. Most. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 2006, lines 109–201.

31. The similarities with Hobbes’s state of nature are stark and the Englishman’s debt to Lucretius still remains to be fully explored.

32. See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: And interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage, 1987, Chapter 2.

33. It may be worth comparing Lucretius’s argument to that of the second essay of Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals*. For both, religion is intricately linked to how punishment is conceived.

34. For a critique of this conception of secularism as well as an adumbration of secularism from a radical democratic perspective, see Stathis Gourgouris, *Lessons in Secular Criticism*. New York: Fordham U. P., 2103.

35. The correlation of utility and commonality is a feature of phronesis at least since Aristotle, but it is most clearly presented in Spinoza. As I argue in *Neoepicureanism*, the rupture between utility and commonality mirrors the rupture between thought and emotion in the adumbration of instrumental rationality, for instance, in the way that Adam Smith describes self-interest in the *Wealth of Nations*. This rupture is fully effected in neoliberalism, such as in Kenneth Arrow’s *Social Choice and Individual Value*. As such, Spinoza can be seen to respond to neoliberalism.

36. This is an important distinction as Spinoza develops a positive conception of authority in chapters 7 of the *Theological Political Treatise*. Again, see my *Authority and Utility*.

37. Étienne de La Boétie, *The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude (Or, Against One)*. Trans. James B. Atkinson and David Sices. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012, 2 and 6.

38. See Dimitris Vardoulakis, “Authority and the Law: The Primacy of Justification over Legitimacy in Spinoza.” *Spinoza’s Authority Volume II: The Political Treatises*. Eds Kiarina Kordela and Dimitris Vardoulakis. London: Bloomsbury, 2018, 45-66.

39. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*. Trans. R. Hurley et al. London: Athlone Press, 2000, 29.

40. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139b.

41. Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*. Trans. Gabriel Ash. London: Verso, 2014.

42. I have described this move in my own work by saying that democracy does not need to be defined by starting with the definition of the demos and then inquiring how the demos can rule. Instead, we can start with the second noun of the compound democracy, namely, the word *kratos* that means both constituted power as well as conflict, disagreement, and overpowering. See Vardoulakis, “Stasis: Notes Toward Agonist Democracy.”
43. I provide here only the general framework of Spinoza’s agonistic democracy, a concept that I develop in detail in *Spinoza’s Promise*.
44. See Dimitris Vardoulakis, “Stasis: Beyond Political Theology?” *Cultural Critique* 73 (2009, 125-47).
45. Plato, *Republic*. Trans. Paul Shorey. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 2003, 470a-471c.
46. Cf. Kostas Kalimtzis, *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease: An Inquiry into Stasis*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2000.
47. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Trans. George D. Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 28-30 and passim.
48. John Locke, “An Essay on Toleration.” *Political Essays*. Ed. Mark Goldie. Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1997, 134-59.
49. See Warren Montag, “Who’s Afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104:4 (2005, 655-73).
50. La Boétie also makes this point in *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*, 7.
51. See on this point again Vardoulakis, “Stasis.”
52. And, can the dialectic of authority and utility ever be thoroughly suspended? If, following Spinoza, we assert that that’s not possible, then we can grasp why Spinoza calls democracy the absolute form of government in the final chapter of the *Political Treatise*. I return to this point at various points in *Spinoza’s Promise*.
53. The book *Democracy and Violence* is still in draft form. A lot of the ideas from that book have informed the present study. Also, *Democracy and Violence* contains an analysis of Spinoza’s *Political Treatise* that I could not undertake in the present book for reason of space.
54. See Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*. Trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort. New York: Zone, 2006.
55. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livius*. Trans. Allan Gilbert. In Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others, volume 1. Durham: Duke U. P., 1989, 200-01.