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Introduction

> [O]ne is never to offer at propositions or advice that we are certain will not be entertained. Discourses so much out of the road could not avail anything, nor have any effect on men whose minds were prepossessed with different sentiments. This philosophical way of speculation is not unpleasant among friends in a free conversation, but there is no room for it in the Courts of Princes where great affairs are carried on by authority." – "That is what I was saying," replied [Hythloday], "that there is no room for philosophy in the Courts of Princes." – "Yes, there is," said I, "but not for this speculative philosophy that makes everything to be alike fitting at all times: but there is another philosophy that is more pliable, that knows its proper scene, accommodates itself to it, and teaches a man with propriety and decency to act that part which has fallen to his share.
>
> – The character of Thomas More in More's *Utopia*.[1]

For much of the past half-century, Anglo-American political philosophy has been dominated by juridical concerns: questions of right, law, duties, and justice. The towering figure during this period is John Rawls, for whom deontological questions, or questions of right, are normatively prior to, and constrain, concerns about the good. As he puts it, justice is "the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."[2] Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* spawned a cottage industry of critiques and extensions in its wake, works that focused on matters of right and justice. This set the terms and agenda for much of the political philosophy that followed, which focused on such issues as: the nature and scope of political authority; rights and self-ownership; justice in war; global justice; and the status and function of international law. Juridical discourse has held hegemonic sway over the field.

A second feature of contemporary political philosophy, which is non-accidentally related to the first, is idealism. Philosophers have appealed to idealized conditions in order to arrive at accounts of authority, right, and justice.[3] Rational Choice Theory, for instance, with its narrow utility-maximizing conception of

[1] More 1997, p. 22.
[2] Rawls 1971, p. 3n9.
[3] See Habermas 1996; Cohen 1989.

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human rationality – insulated from the quirks and heuristics of actual human reasoning – has served as a model of human motivation and action.[4] The assumption is that by conceiving of how we would reason if we were not subject to biases, affective disturbances, imperfect epistemic conditions, asymmetric power relations, and so forth, we can arrive at models of perfect justice or full democratic authority. The idealist method yields an ideal theory, an archetype that can guide us as a lodestar. As Rawls puts it, "once we have a sound theory for this [ideal] case, the remaining problems of justice will prove more tractable in the light of it."[5]

However, a number of political philosophers have expressed dissatisfaction with ideal theory and its attendant methodology. Critics have noted that it is a mistake to assume nonideal theory should be modeled on ideal theory, or that in suboptimal conditions the best thing to do is to mirror or approximate what would be best under ideal conditions. In an ideal society, the best way to promote true ideas might be through rational deliberation; but if one lives in a society in which reason-giving is less effective than emotional demagoguery, it is not obvious that the best thing for one to do is to approximate the ideal. This is an example of the problem of "second-bests."[6] To acknowledge the problem of second-bests is to concede that there might not be a clear derivation of the nonideal from the ideal. The best real-world condition might not be a mere modification of the ideal; indeed, it might not resemble the ideal in any significant way.

In her formidable book, *The Imperative of Integration*, Elizabeth Anderson makes a strong case for nonideal theory. In addition to the problem of second-bests, which she acknowledges ("knowledge of the better does not require knowledge of the best"),[7] Anderson cites three further reasons for pursuing nonideal theory. First, "we need to tailor our principles to the motivational and cognitive capacities of human beings."[8] In order to provide useful guidance, norms must satisfy what Owen Flanagan calls the Principle of Minimal Psychological Realism: "Make sure when constructing a moral theory or projecting a moral ideal that the character, decision processing, and behavior are possible, or are perceived to be possible, for creatures like us."[9] A second reason for embracing nonideal theory is that starting with ideal theory leads one to seek to "clos[e] the gaps" between the ideal and the real before adequately diagnosing the problems, "like a doctor who prescribes sleeping pills and aspirin to the patient who complains of fatigue, insomnia, and headaches."[10] And,

[4] See e.g. Rawls 1971; Gauthier 1986.
[5] Rawls 1971, p. 8.
[6] For a helpful analysis, see Brennan and Pettit 2005.
[7] Anderson 2010, p. 3.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Flanagan 1993, p. 32.
[10] Anderson 2010, p. 4.

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finally, ideal theory is epistemically disabling, as it prevents us from recognizing sources of injustice. Ideal theory takes a too narrow, legalistic view of inequality, failing to apprehend the actual structures and conditions that initially give rise to oppression and discrimination.

Charles Mills critiques ideal theory in a similar fashion. He, too, points to the problem of second-bests, disapproving of the way that "ideal theory either tacitly represents the actual as a simple deviation from the ideal, not worth theorizing in its own right, or claims that starting from the ideal is at least the best way of realizing it."[11] Against this view, Mills claims, rather provocatively, that "the best way to bring about the ideal is by recognizing the nonideal … by assuming the ideal or the near ideal, one is only guaranteeing the perpetuation of the nonideal."[12] If we are to overcome unjust conditions, we must confront injustice as it actually exists.

Raymond Geuss, another prominent critic of political idealism, makes the case in his *Philosophy and Real Politics* for taking socio-historical particulars very seriously. He advances four principles that ought to structure a political theory:

1. It should be realist, concerning itself "not with how people ought ideally (or ought 'rationally') to act … but, rather, with the way the social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate in some society at some given time, and what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances."[13]
2. It should recognize that politics is fundamentally about action, not merely belief.
3. It should be historically situated.
4. It should acknowledge that politics is "more like the exercise of a craft or art, than like traditional conceptions of what happens when a theory is applied."[14]

In advocating a psychologically attuned, historically situated approach to politics, Geuss seeks to bridge the yawning gap that separates political theory from political action.

Of course, the divide between theory and practice, philosopher and statesperson, was not always so vast. The psychological-grounded political theory advocated by Anderson, Mills, Geuss, and others harks back to a mode of theorizing that was prominent among Renaissance humanists.[15] Indeed, the very dialectic

[11] Mills 2005, p. 168.
[12] Ibid., p. 182.
[13] Geuss 2008, p. 9.
[14] Geuss 2008, p. 15.
[15] Brennan and Pettit are particularly attuned to this, acknowledging that "incentive-compatibility" was a feature of "neo-Roman" thought (Brennan and Pettit 2005, p. 264).

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that I've briefly sketched between juridical-idealists and psychological-realists roughly parallels a shift from the late medieval into the early Renaissance period. Perhaps political philosophy is on the verge of another renaissance.

From Medieval Ideal Theory to Renaissance Realism

Much medieval political thought was juridical, delineating the bounds of authority and determining the meaning, scope, and justification of law. Perhaps the central concept – and certainly one of the most ambiguous – was that of "right" (*ius*), which divided into at least two broad families of conceptions. On the one hand, there was the conception of right as the object of justice, designating that which is right or just (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae 57). This sense of right – dubbed the "objective" sense – was closely bound up with natural law (*ius naturalis*): right reason determines *ius*, which, when prescribed, takes the form of *lex*.[16] On the other hand, there is the subjective sense of right, so called because it is imputed to subjects rather than to states of affairs, consisting in a kind of moral power (*potestas*) or title. These two senses of *ius* grounded accounts of authority (*imperium*), property, and justice in war, giving rise to a scheme of duties.[17] These rights and duties were, by and large, determined independently of questions of utility and the probability of compliance, resulting in ideal theories of authority and justice.

This is the backdrop against which Renaissance political thought developed. Renaissance civic humanists typically sought a practicable approach to political theory. This period was typified by the rise of the scholar-statesman, the celebration of the *vita activa*, an increased emphasis on virtue and utility rather than right, the flourishing of rhetoric and the language arts, and the corresponding conceptualization of politics as a craft. Let's briefly consider these in turn.

Many prominent civic humanists were also political agents of some sort. To cite just a few familiar examples, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) had been second chancellor of the Republic and secretary to the Ten of War during the brief flourishing of the Florentine republic at the end of the fifteenth century. He was just one in a line of Florentine scholar-statesmen, including the Chancellor Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) and his successor to the post, Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444). In the north, Erasmus (1466–1536) sought to proffer advice to King Charles of Spain in his *Education of a Christian Prince*. Thomas More (1478–1535) became Lord Chancellor of England, before his fatal conflict with Henry VIII. Like the character of More in *Utopia*, the

[16] Aquinas frequently uses *ius nature* and *lex naturalis* interchangeably. R.W. Dyson notes that for Aquinas "lex is not the same as right, properly speaking, but an expression of the idea of right" (Aquinas 2008, p. 158n2.)

[17] See McGrade 1982, pp. 740–1.

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historical More espied a "more pliable" model of political philosophy in which the philosopher is also a kind of actor who must learn to play his (or her) part (see Epigraph). Even Montaigne, who famously withdrew from public life, left his tranquil tower to serve two terms as mayor of Bordeaux and to advise king Henry of Navarre (Henry IV).[18]

The rise of the scholar-statesman was mirrored by a celebration of the life of *negotium*, or the *vita activa*, over the life of *otium*, the *vita contemplativa*. Civic humanists rejected the Aristotelian view that while the political life is good, the life of contemplation was divine. Some, like Petrarch and More, drew inspiration from the Platonic alternative, which conceded that the active life is intrinsically undesirable to men of wisdom, but insisted that the wise and the virtuous take on this burden in order to heal the city.[19] Others were more enthusiastic about civic life. Machiavelli advanced perhaps the most vigorous defense of the active life as a condition for liberty in his *Discourses*, despite having failed to obtain a public post after the Medici returned to Florence in 1513. Machiavelli's encomium to the *vita activa* captured the prevailing ethos of a certain civic strand of humanism: a useful life was to be preferred to a life of idle learning. This was true irrespective of whether one lived in a republic or served a prince.

As political theorists increasingly joined the ranks of political actors, enacting and glorifying the *vita activa*, rhetoric took on a greater philosophical significance.[20] The medieval *ars dictaminis*, the skill of composing persuasive speeches and diplomatic letters, helped to elevate the status of rhetoric, long regarded as inferior to logic in the *trivium*.[21] But it was in the Renaissance period, with the rediscovery of Cicero's letters and speeches and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, that rhetoric became a prized part of the humanist program, uniting theory and practice, inquiry and argumentation.[22] Rhetoric was especially important to moral philosophy, since a skilled writer or orator, especially one endowed with a good character, could stimulate the cultivation of virtue, adding affective force to what might otherwise be a cold, intellectual appreciation of that which is honorable (*honestas*). It also served as a model for political life in which, in Geuss's terms, the aim is action and not mere belief.

These three related aspects of Renaissance civic humanism – the emergence of the scholar-statesman, the celebration of the *vita activa*, and the elevated position of rhetoric – contributed to the shift from the language of rights to that of utility and virtue, the promotion of which made psychology an essential component of political theory. If philosophers are to lead lives of public influence and

[18] For an analysis of how his political engagement informs his *Essays*, see Fontana 2008.
[19] See, for instance, Petrarch's letter to Carrara. For analysis, see Nelson 2007; More 1997, pp. 17–22.
[20] See Seigel 1966; Pocock 1975.
[21] See Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, p. 25ff.
[22] See Skinner 1978, pp. 88–9; Seigel 1966.

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persuasion, they must be savvy judges of their audiences. One cannot simply appeal to reason to discern *ius* and *lex*; one must find *useful* laws and institutions that foster loyalty and conduce to the stability and, indeed, glory of the state. In order to advance effective laws and institutions, one must accurately assay the prevailing cognitive–affective make-up of one's subjects and one's readers.

Finally, in this period, governance is conceived of as a craft, akin to medicine.[23] Both practices drew on the rhetorical method, using maxims as guides, while accommodating these rules to suit the particular constitutions or "humors" of their subjects.[24] Knowledge of the humors was regarded as just as important for politicians as it was for doctors. Machiavelli stresses the need to balance the opposing humors of competing factions of society.[25] Justus Lipsius, in his *Politica*, maintains that "the humor and inclination of the subjects ought to be as well knowne to the Prince, who commandeth over them, as if he were one amo[n]gst them."[26] And Francis Bacon, too, cites the need to espy "the predominancy, what humour reigneth most, and what end is principally sought."[27] Just as in the "medicining of the body" one must first "know the divers complexions and constitutions, secondly the diseases, and lastly the cures," so too "in medicining of the mind, after knowledge of the divers characters of men's nature, it followeth in order to know the diseases and infirmities of the mind, which are no other than the perturbations and distempers of the affections."[28] As humors and tempers vary, good governance must be adaptive, prescribing treatments that match the diagnoses. And, like medicine, governance is stochastic: even when practiced unimpeachably, it may fail to achieve its goal. Circumstances shift; fortune intrudes.

Spinoza and Renaissance Realism

I propose that we understand Spinoza's political philosophy within the lineage of Renaissance civic humanism. At first blush, this may be surprising. Spinoza is positively hostile toward "humanism" in the sense of conceiving of human beings as fashioned in God's image and possessing unique dignity.[29] He also seems to privilege the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa* both in theory[30] and in practice – declining, for instance, to abandon his "private and solitary life" for a professorship at the University of Heidelberg (*Epistle 48 to Fabritius*, March 30, 1673). Moreover, Spinoza was writing in a time when many philosophers like him, who were impressed by the power of reason and the promise

[23] See Fontana 2008, p. 13.
[24] See Pender 2005.
[25] Machiavelli, *Prince*, Ch. XIX, pp. 71–2; cf. *Discourses* 1.4 in *CWO* 1.
[26] Lipsius 1970.
[27] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Book II in *MW*, p. 275.
[28] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, in *MW*, pp. 258–9.
[29] Mirandola, *De Hominis Dignitate*. Melamed 2010; Sharp 2011.
[30] Hannah Arendt criticized Spinoza on precisely this point. See Kahn 2014, p. 140n70.

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of scientific advancement, took a suspicious view of rhetoric, associating the art of arguing *pro et con* with obscurantism and skepticism. We see this in Thomas Sprat's enthusiastic heralding of a new scientific language, marked by a "primitive purity" and "Mathematical plainness," shorn of "all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style" (*The History of the Royal Society*, 1667) as well as in Descartes's suggestion that clear, rational argumentation has persuasive force without the need for adornment (*Discourse on Method*, AT VI, 7; 114). The geometrical method of *Ethics* certainly looks like a model of a purely rational language, stripped of rhetorical ornamentation.

Nevertheless, Spinoza shares a basic orientation with Renaissance political thinkers – and, indeed, with contemporary nonideal theorists – in seeking to construct a theory of governance suited to humans "as they are" not as one "want[s] them to be" (TP 1/1).[31] Since Spinoza grounds his analysis of governance in his account of human psychology, I begin my study of his political philosophy by looking at his theory of motivation (Chapter 1). In this chapter, I maintain that the activity of finite things is fixed entirely by their affects, leaving no independent motivating role for reason. Furthermore, I show that while, in some sense, "everyone shares a common nature" (TP 7/27), this nature may be constituted in radically different ways, reflecting the influence of socio-political structures. The state, in particular, plays an outsized role in regulating the behavior of its subjects.

The subsequent three chapters examine the aims of the state. In Chapter 2, I argue that Spinoza adopts a juridical vocabulary only to strip it of its normative import. He disavows any non-prudential sense of obligation, embracing instead the position associated with the academic skeptic Carneades that *utilitas* alone is the measure of right. This sets the stage for a psychologically attuned analysis of political organization in the mode of Renaissance political theorists. In Chapter 3 I seek to show that in the absence of juridical side-constraints, the state has a single directive: to liberate or empower its citizens as far as possible. Chapter 4 examines the affective side of liberation or empowerment, defending the internal coherence of Spinoza's insistence that hopeful citizens are freer, less constrained, and more willing than their fearful counterparts. Civil liberation requires the promotion of hope, trust, and peace.

Chapter 5 looks at the method by which this end is advanced. Spinoza conceives of governance as the craft of accommodating institutions and laws to the affective make-up, or *ingenia*, of subjects. While I argue for the continuity of ethical and political *aims* in Chapter 3, this chapter makes the case for the continuity of ethical and political *methods*. This throws into sharp relief Spinoza's

[31] Throughout this manuscript I have generally tried to avoid using gendered pronouns when referring to generic subjects. In those instances where I have adopted gendered pronouns, I have typically preferred the feminine "she/her/hers." However, in instances in which the subject that Spinoza has in mind seems paradigmatically male – as with the "citizen-subject," since Spinoza's exclusion of women from his model democracy suggests that full civil rights were reserved only for males – I have adopted the masculine "he/him/his."

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affinity with Renaissance civic humanists, as he conceives of governance as a rhetorical, adaptive craft. Spinoza's account of the aim and method of governance yields a form of what I call "dynamic realism": civic institutions and laws are suited to existing *ingenia* (realism), with the goal of reconstituting or reshaping these very *ingenia* (dynamism).

The subsequent two chapters explore Spinoza's proposals for institutional design. These chapters loosely trace the protective and the constructive aspects of *ingenia* reform, respectively. Chapter 6 sketches Spinoza's multipronged attempt to diminish superstition and intolerance, which are rooted in one particular civic institution: a politicized and powerful clergy. Consequently, Spinoza seeks to dismantle clerical power, first by restricting the domain over which clerics could preside, and then by depriving them of authority altogether. Chapter 7 examines Spinoza's endorsement of deliberative, democratic, and relatively egalitarian civil institutions. Behind the apparently tidy veneer of Spinoza's democratic egalitarianism lies a complex, psychologically rich understanding of the relationship between political participation, affective buy-in, and individual and collective rationality.

I conclude the book (Chapter 8) by considering the extent to which the state can contribute to salvation and beatitude. Here I advance an interpretation of intellectual perfection as the strengthening or potentiation of adequate ideas, showing how the imagination can serve the intellect and, consequently, how the state can promote intellectual perfection. I also attempt to make sense of why Spinoza, who privileges the eternal order of things over the temporal order, devotes much of the last decade of his life to working on political treatises that are precisely concerned with ephemeral things in the diminished temporal order. I argue that one's determinate, temporal existence is the only condition about which it makes sense to care. This reinforces Spinoza's connection to a secular strain of Renaissance civic humanism.

Even though Spinoza did not lead the active life of the scholar-statesman – a role that was certainly not available to an apostate Jew with a scandalous reputation – he recognized the transience of human flourishing, its shifting and historical character, and the roles of adaptive governance and civic engagement in its production. In short, he viewed governance as a kind of praxis aimed at promoting virtue, and he adopted a mode of theorizing that was, in accordance with Geuss's requirements, realist, action-oriented,[32] historically situated, and craft-like.

Methodology

My interpretation proceeds by way of close readings of Spinoza's texts, attending to their dialectical aims and the intellectual and political contexts

[32] I shall argue that he denies that there is a sharp distinction between belief and action (Section 6.5).

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from which they emerge. My approach to some degree straddles the lines – to the extent that such lines truly exist – between intellectual history, history of philosophy, and philosophy, leaving me susceptible to what John Dunn aptly described as the "persistent tension between the threats of falsity in its history and incompetence in its philosophy."[33] But while methodological purists may regard my approach as insufficiently committed, I cannot easily separate out my philosophical engagement with Spinoza from my historical interest in his texts. While my own interests are primarily philosophical, and certainly not antiquarian, I believe that situating historical texts in their proper contexts – seeing them as dependent on, and arising out of, somewhat alien sets of concerns and belief-systems – expands our repository of philosophical resources and affords reflective distance from where we can better appreciate our own shibboleths and biases.[34] Sensitivity to history and historicity is indispensable to philosophy.

In developing a reading of Spinoza's political philosophy, I seek to preserve the strangeness of his perspective, which challenges certain contemporary sensibilities. And while I don't linger too much on how contemporary political philosophers can benefit from Spinoza – this is, after all, primarily an interpretative work – I hope that readers will find in my interpretation provocations to think Spinozistically about contemporary civic affairs.

When it comes to conceiving of the relationship between Spinoza's mature philosophical works – the *Ethics*, the *TTP*, and the *TP* – I am a lumper, not a splitter. Despite differences of style and emphasis, I see these works as fundamentally of a piece, each filling out a crucial part of Spinoza's normative program. Lumping is somewhat out of fashion. Intellectual history promotes splitting, not only because it provides the historian with endless opportunities for reconceptualization, but also because the capacity to descry differences between texts and figures is seen as a mark of subtlety and erudition.

Unsurprisingly, we find many splitters when it comes to understanding how Spinoza's two political treatises hang together. Étienne Balibar insists that "what is most striking are the points not of continuity but of contrast" between the two works, claiming that they "seem to belong to two entirely different worlds … Both the logic of the theory that Spinoza advances [in the TP] and its political implications are significantly different from those of the earlier work."[35] Lewis Feuer reaches a similar assessment for almost diametrically opposed reasons – while Balibar thinks that Spinoza becomes more democratic in the later treatise, Feuer thinks he becomes less so (see Chapter 7). And, when justifying her approach to reading the earlier works in relative isolation from the later political treatise, Susan James raises some concerns about those

[33] Dunn 1968, p. 85.
[34] Skinner 1996, p. 15.
[35] Balibar 1998, p. 50.

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who indiscriminately mine Spinoza's corpus to build a comprehensive interpretation: "Spinoza's texts are far from forming a seamless whole. Written for various audiences and diverse purposes, they operate on a number of levels and use different methods to win the agreement of their readers."[36]

These commentators are right, in a sense. There are indisputable differences between these two works. The TTP was published anonymously, for a particular audience – chiefly, liberal theologians – and can be reasonably understood as an intervention in a particular theologico-political dispute (see Chapter 6). By contrast, the TP, which was unfinished at the time of Spinoza's death in 1677, is a thoroughly philosophical work written for a philosophical audience. Given Spinoza's own principle of linguistic accommodation (see Section 5.2), we should expect to find variations between these texts. And we do. Rhetorically, these works do occupy different worlds.

However, *pace* Balibar, what is remarkable to me is how consistent the two works are when it comes to normative political theory. The TP, which reflects Spinoza's most considered political views, reproduces and recasts many of the core arguments of the TTP in more compact and consistent forms. Where there are deviations, they are typically clarificatory or elaborative. As I will show, this is true of both of the alleged points of distinction between the works that Balibar alludes to: the abandonment of the social contract in the TP and the shift in the declared purpose of the state from freedom to peace.[37] Because of the broad consistency, I do not hesitate to juxtapose texts from these two works – despite James's caution against this practice[38] – as there are observations and elucidations in one treatise that are absent from the other. Indeed, I would insist that, by and large, reading texts from the TTP alongside texts for the TP yields a more comprehensive understanding of Spinoza's positions.

Of course, this leaves me to answer why Spinoza wrote a second political treatise, if he didn't radically change his mind on matters of substance. My answer is that these works are concerned with distinct aspects of *ingenia* reform. The TTP seeks to protect the citizenry from ideological corruption by curbing the power of the clergy and limiting the scope of sovereign interest, while the TP aims to identify institutions that promote civic integration and collective rationality.[39] While there is a lot of overlap in the overall theoretical

[36] James 2012, p. 5.
[37] Balibar 1998, pp. 50–1.
[38] "The context in which a point is made alters its valency, so that it can be dangerous to uproot an argument from one text and plant it in another" (James 2012, p. 5).
[39] Consider for instance the fact that Spinoza does not repeat much of the analysis of religion in the TP. This is not evidence that he has disavowed this material. On the contrary, he omits this material precisely because "In the *Theological-Political Treatise* we showed fully enough what we think about Religion" (TP 8/46). Nevertheless, he supplements the discussion of the TTP with some new material, for which the TTP "wasn't the place to discuss" (TP 8/46).

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framework, these two works focus on different aspects of the project of *ingenia* reform.

Ultimately, I hope to show not only that the two political treatises complement one another, but further that Spinoza's political writings and the *Ethics* are mutually supportive, collectively constituting a comprehensive vision of human empowerment and the methods by which this end is promoted. The *Ethics* in general, and the metaphysical psychology in particular, provides the theoretical foundations for many of the observations and arguments of the political treatises, and it illuminates the aims of these works. And the political works explicate some of the structural conditions for knowledge, power, and harmony that are essential to the liberative project, but which are only very incompletely sketched in the *Ethics*. From his earliest writings, Spinoza conceives of individual empowerment and perfection as bound up with collective uplift:

> 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 (TdIE Section 14).

Spinoza never abandoned this goal of harmony and collective perfection. The political writings constitute his crowning analysis of how this is to be achieved.

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