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## **Spinoza's theory of religion : the importance of religion in Spinoza's thought and its implications for state and society**

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### Part III. The Relation Between Politics and Philosophy

## A Brief Introduction to Part III

After having examined the relationship between the philosophical and the theological, and after having discussed the relationship between the theological and the political, it is now time to research the final relationship of the three: the one between the political and the philosophical. This means that it will be researched what exactly Spinoza's political philosophy is. It will be argued in this part that this political philosophy cannot be well understood as one of liberalism, but as a specific kind of republicanism. Spinozist republicanism and modern liberalism differ substantially in their definition of what 'freedom' actually is.

Actually, that Spinoza cannot be adequately understood as a liberal was already clear from the previous part. Spinoza seeks 'the empowerment of religion (...) for the sake of advanced citizenship'.<sup>1</sup> He therefore is not in favor of liberalism, because that is 'the rejection of the idea of empowering religion even for the sake of enhancing good citizenship'.<sup>2</sup> Spinoza turns against the separation of church and state, because Spinoza was – just like almost everybody in the seventeenth century - a proponent of a state-sponsored shared religion for the nation.

In this chapter other reasons for not calling Spinoza a liberal will be described, reasons which are not so much of a 'theological-political', but of a 'political-philosophical' nature, since they have to do with Spinoza's conception of 'freedom'.

The entire theological-political order of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was shaken on its grounds, because of the Reformation which was accompanied by the introduction of new philosophical and theological ideas. Given the fact that ideas could have such an impact (also because of the relatively new invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in about 1439, which, not unlike the invention of the internet, made it easier to spread ideas on a larger scale to a wider audience), gave rise to the question how much liberty should be given to the citizens to freely think about philosophical and religious issues?

The Dutch Republic was proud to be 'a free state'. Spinoza wrote the TTP under the regime of 'the true freedom' of Johann de Witt. But everybody also agreed that this freedom should not be allowed to undermine the piety and the peace in the state. Some felt that there was a threat coming from some of the new ideas, and demanded censorship. Spinoza wanted to argue against this point of view. The TTP's defense of the 'freedom to philosophize' is meant to convince people that reason as well as the Bible prescribes us to allow people to entertain different

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<sup>1</sup> Beiner (2010), p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

thoughts about the nature of God. Isn't this enough proof that Spinoza promoted a modern, liberal kind of freedom? Or does he in the end seek another kind of freedom, namely the freedom to rule over yourself, and not to be a slave to the passions?

The question 'what is freedom?' in Spinoza is of a political as well as a philosophical nature. What is to be investigated is whether we have to understand political freedom to be different from philosophical freedom or whether the two amount to the same thing.