

Politics

Readings (see copies for full bibliographic details)

[1] Spinoza, from the *Theological–Political Treatise*, ch. 16 §§1–11.

[2] Spinoza, from the *Theological–Political Treatise*, ch. 20 §§6–7, 13–4, 16–7.

1. [1] Briefly describe how human live under the ‘government of nature’ (§§2–4).
- 2.★ [1] Explain the analogy we are ‘no more obliged to live by the laws of a sound mind than the cat is by the laws of a lion’s nature’ (§3).
3. [1] Why is it beneficial to live in a community (§5)?
- 4.★ [1] Explain why an agreement works only if is in our interest (§§6–7).
5. [1] Why is a ‘deomcratic republic’ the ‘most natural’ kind of political organisation (§§8–11)?
6. [2] What is the true purpose of the state (§6)?
- 7.★ [2] Based on the summary (§16), try to piece together Spinoza’s case for tolerance and freedom of expression.

Background Information. (a) Here is a crude sketch of Spinoza’s main points of the *Theological–Political Treatise*. The holy scriptures are human products: the Bible, say, is nothing more than a profound piece of literature, and can be read and interpreted as such. It contains a simple moral message, *viz.* that we ought to treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves, i.e. with dignity and respect. This is the true religion, and has nothing to do with superstitious and dogmatic pomp and ceremony of the sectarian churches. Furthermore, the state not only ought to be secular, but its powers ought to be separated too. In other words, the churches’ influence on society should be minimal. All this is necessary to allow human flourishing. (b) Spinoza knew Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, which was published twenty years prior to the *Treatise*. Here is a famous passage, which echoes in Spinoza’s thoughts about the state of nature: “Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against every man. [...] In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is the worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” (ch. 13, ¶¶8–9)