

# Spinoza and Ethically Justified use of State Secrecy

Thesis Political Science: Political Legitimacy and Justice

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## List of used Abbreviations:

### Spinoza's Works:

E: *Ethica; Ethics* in *Spinoza: Complete works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, Tr. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

Ep: *Epistolae; The Letters*, in *Spinoza: Complete works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, Tr. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

TIE: *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione; Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in *Spinoza: Complete works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, Tr. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

TP: *Tractatus Politicus; Political Treatise, The Collected Works of Spinoza, Vol. II*, ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

TTP: *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus; Theological-Political Treatise*, in *The Collected Works of Spinoza, Vol. II*, ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

### In Ethics:

A: Appendix

D: Definition of the Emotions

e: Explication

P: Proposition

p: Proof

S: Scholium

## Introduction

One of Spinoza's earliest critics, Lambert van Velthuysen, argues in a letter to his contemporary Jacob Ostens that Spinoza's doctrine in the TTP 'subverts all worship and religion' and 'prompts atheism by stealth' through the use of 'furtive and disguised arguments' (Ep. 42). Although Spinoza talks of God and confirms its existence, van Velthuysen criticises Spinoza for treating god only 'for the sake of appearances' and teaching 'sheer atheism' as Spinoza's God is 'subjected to fate' (Ibid). Spinoza replied to the critique of van Velthuysen by writing to Ostens that the former had 'strayed far from the truth' and does 'much injury to himself' when proclaiming that Spinoza teaches atheism with 'clandestine and disguised arguments' (EP. 43). However, this has not done away with the suspicion that Spinoza in reality was an atheist and that the TTP should be read with this in mind. In his book *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Leo Strauss argues that Spinoza hides his atheism because he has to accommodate the book to the general public<sup>1</sup> (p.178). He argues that Spinoza's work is 'by no means free from accommodations to the accepted views' and as Spinoza was aware that his work would be accessible 'to all who can read the language' he had to hide the real message of the TTP from the general public (Strauss, p. 187). Although this has become an important interpretation of Spinoza it remains a controversial one as Spinoza explicitly says himself to not be an atheist in multiple sources outside the TTP and also to disapprove of atheism<sup>2</sup>. If Strauss and Van Velthuysen are right, Spinoza purposively employed deceit and silence in his works to accommodate the true message of TTP to the general public.

On the other hand, Spinoza says that the free man<sup>3</sup> 'never acts deceitfully' (EIVP72). He agitates against 'prejudices' because 'they leave nor room for sound reason' (TP 5/4) and seems to be a proponent of freedom of thought who claims that 'the most unfortunate results' follow from restricting this (TTP 20/9). These statements in opposition to the interpretation of Spinoza by Van Velthuysen and Strauss, form an interpretative puzzle on many subjects treated by Spinoza. In this essay I will focus on Spinoza's political philosophy. From a political perspective it seems that Spinoza, if he himself used and approved of the method of accommodating information to the public, would be in favor of the same method being used by the supreme power. This raises the following question: "Is the supreme power allowed to act in the same way and if so, is this desirable?"

In this essay, I analyze Spinoza's *Ethics* and his main political writings<sup>4</sup> to argue that the use of secrecy by the state<sup>5</sup> can be ethically justified. With this I mean that not only the use of secrecy has to be done by right, but it has to be 'good'<sup>6</sup> from an ethical point of view. With secrecy I will mean, 'any set of information that is withheld, by means of silence<sup>7</sup> or deceit<sup>8</sup>, from the subjects of the state<sup>9</sup>'. Before we delve into secrecy, however, we shall treat Spinoza's political consequentialism in the first section. Here, it will be shown that Spinoza separates

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<sup>1</sup> Strauss uses the term 'ad captum vulgi', which means something as 'accommodated to the capacity of the addressees' to describe Spinoza's style in the TTP (Strauss, p.178). Spinoza himself uses this term to describe the manner in which God, Jesus and Paul spoke to men 'who held vulgar opinions' to 'profess these opinions' and never to 'question' them (TTP 7).

<sup>2</sup> Explicit about not being an atheist: See Ep 30, 43, Disapproving of atheism: EP67

<sup>3</sup> Spinoza's ethical ideal person.

<sup>4</sup> The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Tractatus Politicus*.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I will assume that the supreme power is always the state and use these concepts interchangeably.

<sup>6</sup> Spinoza defines good as that which we know to be 'certainly useful' to us. We will see in section III that 'reason' is 'certainly useful', according to Spinoza (EIVP27).

<sup>7</sup> See TP 7/29

<sup>8</sup> See TTP Preface/10

<sup>9</sup> I would like to point out that secrecy is defined very broadly and also includes myths. We will see in section II that Spinoza includes religious myths when talking about secrecy. Also See TTP Preface/10.

private virtue from state virtue (TP 1/6). The virtue of the state is 'security', and Spinoza's consequentialism entails that a state is more virtuous the more secure it is, without consideration for the means by which security is begotten. This means that secrecy may always be used if this is conducive to security. However, we will also see that the end of the state for Spinoza, does not only consist of 'security', but also of 'harmony' (TP 5/2). Harmony means something as social cohesion between subjects of the state and is grounded not solely in security but also in reason. In the following section, we will investigate the stance Spinoza has *vis a vis* the use of secrecy, by analyzing the relevant passages in which this subject is mentioned. We will see that Spinoza writes only of one specific way in which secrecy can be used, in one specific ordering of the state, namely monarchies. This specific use of secrecy is one by which the sovereign 'gains absolute power (potestas) over his subjects', leading his subjects towards 'a dangerous slavery'. (TP, 7/29, TTP preface/10). After treating Spinoza's view on secrecy, I will argue that the use of secrecy does not necessarily have to lead to slavery. This is the case if the use of secrecy is advantageous for the subjects. In section III, it will be shown that Spinoza assesses whether something is to the advantage of the subjects in terms of reason. This means that the use of secrecy has to be conducive to reason to not lead to slavery and thus for the possibility to be ethically justifiable. Furthermore, we will see that this entails that the use of secrecy has to be conducive to harmony as this is conceptually tied to reason. Reason urges us to live harmoniously as people are of most use to each other if they differ as less as possible (EIVP37). As harmony is grounded in reason I have to further show that the use of secrecy is not incompatible with reason. This I will do by arguing in section IV, that the use of secrecy, although sometimes an obstacle in obtaining reason, can be used as a pedagogical tool to help people who are not reasonable to act in accordance with reason. This is crucial for the possibility of an ethically justified use of secrecy, as according to Spinoza nothing can be ethically justifiable that is incompatible with reason<sup>10</sup>. This argument paves the way for the construction of an account for the ethically justifiable use of secrecy in the final section. I will argue that an ethical justification for secrecy is possible if it meets the following necessary condition:

(1) The use of secrecy has to be conducive to reason.

This condition means that the use of secrecy necessarily has to be advantageous to those it is withheld from, and by this, the use of secrecy falls outside Spinoza's critique in chapter 7 of the TP as it does not lead to slavery. Furthermore, I argue that this condition entails that:

(a) The use of secrecy may not be detrimental to security.

(b) The use of secrecy must be conducive to harmony.

(c) The use of secrecy may not be accompanied by any species of pain.

Reason dictates to obey the law of the state and to be obedient to the supreme power, or in other words, to no act against the security of the state<sup>11</sup>. This means that (1) entails that (a) at minimum the use of secrecy may not lead to greater disobedience in the form of transgressions of the law by subjects. Furthermore, (1) entails that (b); the use of secrecy must always lead to greater unity in the state, because it is not advantageous to the subjects of the state if the use of secrecy leads to discord<sup>12</sup>. Finally, (1) entails (c) as it is necessary to exclude those uses of secrecy that bring about greater harmony by means that are incompatible with reason<sup>13</sup>. In addition, I will argue that one

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<sup>10</sup> By EIVP27

<sup>11</sup> By TTP 16/27, TTP 20/17, TTP 20/18.

<sup>12</sup> By EIVP40.

<sup>13</sup> By EIVP41.

condition remains that is necessary to bring it about that secrecy is used in an ethically justified way by the state, namely that:

(\*): The user of secrecy has to have love for its subjects.

Without (\*), we will see that there is no reason for the supreme power to use secrecy in an *ethically* justified manner. Herewith the enquiry in to the ethically justified use of secrecy by the state shall come to an end. I conclude by answering that the use of secrecy by the supreme power is always allowed but only desirable if condition (1) is met. However, I will also show that Spinoza's political philosophy forces us to ultimately disapprove of using state secrecy. As its ethical use is dependent on the private virtue of the supreme power and we can never be sure that the supreme power is virtuous, it follows that we may not anticipate that secrecy is ever ethically used.

### I. Spinoza's Consequentialism

Before we delve into the passages in which Spinoza speaks of secrecy, it is helpful to look briefly into Spinoza's political consequentialism. His political consequentialism comes clearly to the fore in the first chapter of the TP after arguing for the impossibility of a state solely inhabited by reasonable people (TP 1/5). Here he says:

*'Therefore, a state whose well-being depends on someone's loyalty, and whose affairs cannot be looked after properly unless those who handle them are willing to act in good faith, will not be stable at all. For it to be able to last, its affairs must be ordered in such a way that, whether the people who administer them are led by reason or by an affect, they cannot be induced to be disloyal or to act badly. It does not make any difference to the security of the state in what spirit men are led to administer matters properly, provided that they do administer them properly. For freedom of mind, or strength of character, is a private virtue. But the virtue of the state is security'.* (TP 1/6)

Herewith, Spinoza says that a state has to be structured in a way that prevents the outcome of the administration of being influenced by the disposition of its rulers, to be stable. He argues for this position by separating private virtue from the virtue of the state. Why private virtue, as freedom of mind or strength of character, which seems to be useful in administering the state, is separated from the virtue of the state, becomes clear from Spinoza's treatment of private virtue in the *Ethics*:

*'The more every man endeavors and is able to seek his own advantage, that is, to preserve his own being, the more he is endowed with virtue. On the other hand, insofar as he neglects to preserve what is to his advantage, that is, his own being, to that extent he is weak'*<sup>14</sup> (EIVP20)

By man's private virtue, he only endeavors to seek his *own* advantage and to preserve his *own* being<sup>15</sup>. This virtue is solely defined by what Spinoza calls the 'conatus'<sup>16</sup>, which is the 'actual essence of the thing itself' by which 'each thing endeavors to persist in its own being' (EIIIP7). Although according to Spinoza, man is most useful to man, meaning that our striving to preserve ourselves is supported by others who share our nature<sup>17</sup>, he also holds that a man, if he 'be among individuals who are by no means in harmony with his nature', will hardly be able to conform to them without

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<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that Spinoza places private virtue in opposition to weakness in this passage (EIVP20) while equating private virtue with 'strength of character' in the passage before (TP 1/6).

<sup>15</sup> See EIVP24.

<sup>16</sup> In the words of Curley: "It expresses Spinoza's view that each thing exemplifies an inherent tendency toward self-preservation and activity". (Completed Works, p.283).

<sup>17</sup> By EIVP37, EIVA9.

changing himself' (EIVA7). Furthermore, Spinoza says that 'as an absolute rule, it is permissible by the highest natural right for everyone to do what he judges to be to his own advantage' (EIVA8). From this it follows that, the administrators of the state may destroy or harm that which is 'capable of hindering' them from 'being able to exist and to enjoy rational life', i.e. being virtuous (Ibid.). In other words, if the administrators think their subjects 'capable of hindering' their striving, it is their own striving that has primacy over that of their subjects, which entails that the administrators may remove or harm them<sup>18</sup>. The security of the subjects of a state is thus not guaranteed by relying on the private virtue of those who administer the state, as they can act in ways to destroy or harm their subjects if they deem this necessary for preserving their own being. It is in this sense that 'in what spirit men are led to administer matters properly' should not matter. The essential striving of men to preserve their being should not have an effect on the way the state is administered. By saying that the virtue of the state is 'security', Spinoza tries to eliminate the inherently egoistical element of the conatus, which even in somewhat virtuous man<sup>19</sup> can form a threat to the stability of the state. Therewith he places emphasis on the consequence of the administration, security, rather than the private virtue of 'freedom of mind' by which the state is administered.

Spinoza's political consequentialism has important implications on the search for an ethical justification for the use of secrecy by the state. First off, the means by which the state begets security are subordinate to the end of security. That among these means, the state is justified in using secrecy, follows from Spinoza's account of rights. According to Spinoza, natural right is the right to do everything that is in one's power (potentia) to do. If someone has no power (potentia) to do something, this means there exists no correlative right to do that thing (TTP 16/9). Someone's right thus extends as far as one's power (potentia) to act. In the case of the supreme power, this means that he has 'supreme right over everyone':

*'It follows also that if a person has the supreme power, which enables him to compel everyone by force, and restrain them by fear of the supreme punishment (which everyone, without exception, fears), then that person has the supreme right over everyone. He will retain this right just so long as he preserves this power of doing whatever he wishes. Otherwise he will command by entreaty; no one stronger will be bound to obey him unless he wishes to'. (TTP 16/24)*

From having the 'supreme right over everyone', it follows that the supreme power can by right do everything that it is capable of and additionally that it is justified in doing this. The subject of the state has to obey the supreme power in everything, as the subject's power (potentia) *vis a vis* the sovereign's power (potestas) is marginal. Spinoza says that reason dictates to 'uphold the state with all our powers' and that 'we're bound to carry out absolutely all the commands of the supreme power, even if it commands the greatest absurdities', otherwise we are 'enemies of the state, and act contrary to reason' (TTP 16/27). Furthermore, he says that 'it is impious to do something according to your own decision, contrary to the decree of the supreme power of the state of which you are a subject. For if this were permitted to everyone, it would necessarily lead to the downfall of

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<sup>18</sup> This does not happen in a state consisting only of people who are solely guided by reason as Spinoza holds that 'Insofar as men live under the guidance of reason, to that extent only do they always necessarily agree in nature' (EIVP35).

<sup>19</sup> I say, somewhat virtuous, as the completely virtuous person would live according to the guidance of reason alone. He or she, as ruler, would not destroy his or her subjects. However, Spinoza obviously is of the opinion that the 'well-being of the state', should not be dependent on this being the case and anticipates rulers of a less virtuous kind (TP 1/6).

the state<sup>20</sup> (TTP 20/17). The downfall of the state is the end of security, as everyone would return to the state of nature in which:

*‘Whatever anyone who is considered to be only under the rule of nature judges to be useful for himself – whether under the guidance of sound reason or by the prompting of the affects – he is permitted, by supreme natural right, to want and to take – by force, by deception, by entreaties, or by whatever way is, in the end, easiest. Consequently, he is permitted to regard as an enemy anyone who wants to prevent him from doing what he intends to do’. (TTP 16/8)*

Reason dictates obedience to the state, no matter by what means the supreme power rules, as disobedience to the supreme power results in ‘the downfall of the state’. Even if the supreme power acts deceitfully, obedience is not unreasonable for Spinoza, he says: ‘a subject can do nothing contrary to the decree and dictate of his own reason so long as he acts according to the decrees of the supreme power. For it was at the urging of reason itself that he decided without reservation to transfer to the supreme power his right of living according to his own judgment’ (TTP 20/18). From this, it follows that the state is justified in using secrecy if it has the capability to do so. However, this justified use of secrecy does not entail that its use of secrecy is *ethically* justified. Spinoza, after his treatment of rights in chapter 4 of the TP, says:

*‘..., it is one thing to command, and to have the care of Public Affairs, by right, and another thing to command and to govern Public Affairs most commendably’. (TP 5/1)*

The ‘most commendable’ way of governing public affairs shows itself by looking at the ‘end of the civil condition’, which is the reason why people have created the state. According to Spinoza this is: ‘that state where men pass their lives *harmoniously* and where the *laws are kept without violation*’ (TP 5/2; emphasis mine). We have already seen that for Spinoza, keeping the laws without violation is essential for the virtue of the state, i.e. security, as the state would otherwise dissolve. However Spinoza adds ‘where men pass their lives harmoniously’ to security. We will see that ‘harmony’ will be key to construing an account for the ethical justified use of secrecy<sup>21</sup> as this concept also figures in the *Ethics*, and depends not solely on the virtue of the state, but also on the private virtue of ‘freedom of mind’. However, before we delve into the concept of harmony, let us first look at what Spinoza has to say about the use of secrecy.

## II. Secrecy, Monarchy and Slavery

Spinoza only touches twice on the subject of secrecy in state matters. Once he treats the effect the use of state secrecy has on the capability of subjects to form proper judgements about state matters<sup>22</sup> (TP 7/27), and once he criticizes the use of secrecy in monarchies<sup>23</sup> (7/29). In this section, I

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<sup>20</sup> The dictates of reason are universal according to Spinoza (EIVP36S, EIVP62S) meaning that if reason dictates that one can act according to their own decision, reason dictates this to all, which would entail the downfall of the state.

<sup>21</sup> The concept of ‘harmony’ will first be treated in section III. In section V, we will see the connection between harmony and the private virtue of freedom of mind.

<sup>22</sup> Although Spinoza speaks of secrecy in TP 7/29, he only argues here that secretive rule prevents subjects from making proper judgement about matters of state. An important, although obvious point that I will implicitly deal with in section IV.

<sup>23</sup> In this critique on monarchy, Spinoza is speaking of an ‘absolute monarchy’ in which the monarch is not bound to a constitution.

will focus on Spinoza's critique on the use of secrecy in absolute<sup>24</sup> monarchies. In chapter 6 of the TP, Spinoza proposes a model for a constitutional monarchy with a council consisting of citizens. For our enquiry, we have to know that, in this model, all letters directed to the king, all emissaries of other countries who want to visit the king and all the citizens who want an audience with the king, have to be sent through the council first (TP 6/19). Furthermore, the monarch is obliged to listen to the opinion of the council, before he can decide on matters of state (TP 6/17). Since all information has to pass through the council, Spinoza anticipated little room for secrecy in his model of constitutional monarchy:

*'I confess that the plans of this state can hardly be concealed. But everyone will also confess with me that it is much better for the state's proper plans to be open to its enemies than for tyrants' wicked secrets to be kept from their citizens. Those who can conduct the business of the state secretly have it absolutely in their power. As they plot against the enemy in war, so they plot against the citizens in peace. That silence is often useful to the state no one can deny. But no one will ever prove that the same state cannot subsist without it. On the contrary it's quite impossible to entrust the Commonwealth absolutely to someone and at the same time keep a firm hold of freedom. And it's just folly to choose to avoid a small harm by incurring the greatest evil. But this has always been the only refrain of those who aspire to absolute rule for themselves, that it is completely to the advantage of the state that its affairs be conducted in secret, and other things of this kind. The more these doctrines are cloaked in the mantle of utility, the more dangerous the slavery they lead to'. (TP 7/29)*

The main reason why Spinoza prefers the publicity of his constitutional model of monarchy to the secretive rule in an absolute monarchy, is that he thinks the latter to be inherently unstable. Spinoza thinks stability is most important as it is necessary for peace which 'reason teaches us to seek without reservation' (TP 3/6). Secrecy can be helpful in times of war but it is easily abused and turned against citizens. Indeed, this abuse is likely to take place because an absolute ruler is in greater danger from his citizens than from his outside enemies<sup>25</sup>. In an absolute monarchy, the ruler, unable to please everyone, 'must be in a daily fear of plots' (TP 5/7), looking mostly after his own interest to survive *qua* ruler and 'rather plot against the multitude than consult its good' (TP 6/6). Spinoza's preference of constitutional monarchy to absolute monarchy is grounded in his conviction that the former has less to fear from its own citizens. The constitutional model, by virtue of its council, binds the pursuit of self-interest of citizens to the state through the possibility of political participation and political careers. Therefore, citizens are more likely to comply with public law (TP 7/4). The absolute monarchy has less institutionalized political outlets for the self-interested pursuits of citizens, making this ordering of public affairs more prone to inner conflict than the constitutional model (TP 7/6). By erecting a council consisting of citizens to check the power (*potestas*) of the monarch, Spinoza, with his model of constitutional monarchy, sacrifices secrecy to gain greater stability. Although the greater stability that is acquired by involving citizens in state matters, and the accompanied reduction of the monarch's power, is the main reason for proposing the council, Spinoza argues that the stability is further enhanced by the publicity that is entailed by the workings of the council. Spinoza thus argues for implementing a council in TP chapter 7, by identifying one of the sources of the instability of absolute monarchies in its use of secrecy, which becomes impossible in his constitutional monarchy. However, this argument does not exclude an ethically justified use of secrecy *per se*, but only one specific use of secrecy as being ethically justifiable.

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<sup>24</sup> Absolute in the sense that the monarch's powers are not limited by a constitution. Not the Spinozean concept of 'absolute' as inclusive rule. For the Spinozean concept of absolute see: Curley, E. (2016) *Introduction to the Tractatus Politicus* in Completed Works of Spinoza, and Steinberg, J. (2018) *Spinoza and Political Absolutism*. Chapter 11 in Spinoza's Political Treatise A Critical Guide.

<sup>25</sup> See: TTP 17/1, 17/4 and TP 6/6.

As we have seen, Spinoza warns for the ruler who argues for the use of secrecy by cloaking it in the 'mantle of utility' (TP 7/29). The nuance here is important. Not the use of secrecy itself is condemned but the specific use of secrecy by which the supreme powers gain 'absolute rule for themselves' (TP 7/29). It is the consequence of this specific use of secrecy, namely with the end of obtaining 'absolute power' that Spinoza calls 'the greatest evil' (TP 7/29). According to Spinoza, when the monarch, to gain absolute power (potestas) over the state, uses secrecy, this leads to a situation in which citizens do not further their own advantage but only that of the sovereign. The sovereign 'cloaks' his use of secrecy, which is a purely selfish means to gain absolute power (potestas), in the 'mantle of utility' by arguing that it is in reality to the advantage of the state (TP 7/29). The citizen, who believes the sovereign who argues for the utility of secrecy, is ignorant of the actual reason the sovereign uses this. This citizen thus supports secrecy by thinking it is for the common good, unable to look under the mantle to see that he is merely advancing the power (potestas) of the sovereign. Ultimately, this conviction can lead to a 'dangerous slavery' and according to Spinoza, the sovereign who argues for the use of secrecy will strive exactly to this end, he says:

*'The greatest secret of monarchic rule, and its main interest, is to keep men deceived, and to cloak in the specious name of Religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for their survival, and will think it not shameful, but a most honorable achievement, to give their life and blood that one man may have a ground for boasting'. (TTP Preface/10)*

If a monarch can convince his subjects that his rule is god given, the people will, by acting piously, also act to further his advantage. As this passage shows, the 'main interest' for the monarch is to 'deceive' people by letting them think that they act towards their own ends while in reality they are serving him. This, according to Spinoza, is the 'greatest form of authority' as obedience 'concerns not so much the external action, as the internal action of the soul' (TTP 17/8) and by cloaking fear 'in the specious name of religion', the monarch convinces people that obedience to him is to their own advantage, albeit ultimately advantageous to the monarch alone. Spinoza thus condemns a specific use of secrecy in chapter 7 of the TP, namely that use of secrecy that has no utility for the citizens whatsoever. In other words, secrets that are used to deceive a people into making their outer actions and inner motivations ultimately serve the interest of the supreme power alone. This effectively turns subjects into slaves, as for Spinoza, a slave is someone who acts 'not to the advantage of himself, but of the person who issues the command' while the people who are deceived by the 'secret of monarchic rule', think their survival is dependent on their pious obedience to the sovereign (TTP 16/32). For an ethically justified use of secrecy by the state, the use of secrets has to fall outside the scope of Spinoza's critique, meaning that it may not lead to a 'dangerous slavery' for those it is withheld from. We shall see that this is possible by delving deeper in Spinoza's use of the concepts of 'slave' and 'subject' in relation to the use of secrecy:

*'An action done on a command – obedience – does, in some measure, take away freedom. But that isn't what makes the slave. It's the reason for the action. If the end of the action is not the advantage of the agent himself, but of the person who issues the command, then the agent is a slave, useless to himself. But in a Republic, and a state where the supreme law is the well-being of the whole people, not that of the ruler, someone who obeys the supreme power in everything should not be called a slave, useless to himself, but a subject'. (TTP 16/33-34)*

According to Spinoza, the conceptual difference between the slave and the subject lies in the 'reason of the action' and not in their obedience to the supreme power. While both act on the command of the supreme power, this makes the slave completely 'useless to himself', while for the subject this is



not the case. Spinoza defines the subject as 'someone who does what is advantageous for the collective body – and hence, also for himself – in accordance with the command of the supreme power' (TTP 16/35). In assessing whether someone is a subject or a slave, Spinoza is only concerned with the consequence of the action, as the conditional of being a slave is 'if the *end* of the action is not the advantage of the agent himself' (emphasis mine). By this, not the content of the action itself, but only the end of the action, is of importance in assessing whether the agent is slave or subject. The content of the 'action done on command' falls outside the conceptual space used by Spinoza to define one as being either a slave or a subject. As we have seen, the men in the passage before this one<sup>26</sup>, are unaware of their slavery, as their obedience to the monarch is grounded in religious beliefs through which they are mistakenly convinced that they are acting to their own advantage. The 'reason for the action' for these men is advancing themselves, while the 'end of the action' is advantageous to the monarch alone. As the monarch uses deceit to hide the real end of the action from these men, these men, unlike the monarch, do not know that the end of the action is not advantageous to their selves. From this, it follows that in assessing whether an agent acts towards his own advantage, we are not speaking of whether the agent himself thinks to be acting to his own advantage, but what is in reality to his advantage. Every 'action done on a command', which is advantageous to the acting agent does, in some degree, make this agent a subject rather than a slave. I say to some degree, as the advantage for the agent can be greater or smaller according to the specific 'action done on command'. This is why Spinoza says that someone cannot be a slave who obeys the supreme power in a state where the 'supreme law is the well-being of the people', as this excludes those ends of the action from the set of 'actions done on command', which are not to the advantage of the acting agent<sup>27</sup>. From this, it follows that if the supreme power let his subjects act to their own advantage in accordance with his commands, there is no slavery in the state as the end of every command and thus the corresponding acts of his people, are advantageous to his people.

We have seen that Spinoza criticizes the specific use of secrecy by which the supreme powers gain 'absolute rule for themselves' (TP 7/29). In other words, that use of secrecy that leads to the slavery of his people. Further, we have established that the end of the action, not the content of the action decides whether one is a slave or a subject. In other words, the content of the command by which an agent acts, whether given deceitfully or honestly by the supreme power, does not play a role in assessing the subject or slave position of the agent. By this, the use of secrecy does not *per se* lead to slavery. This means that if secrecy can be used by the supreme power, in a way that is ultimately advantageous to his people, this use of secrecy would fall outside the scope of Spinoza's critique in chapter 7 of the TP, as this use of secrets would neither lead to absolute power (*potestas*) for the ruler nor to the slavery of his people. An ethical justification for the use of secrets might thus be possible under the necessary condition that the secret is not 'cloaked' in the 'mantle of utility' but is advantageous to those it is withheld from. As of now, we have only broadly spoken of 'the advantage of the agent' while this is

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<sup>26</sup> On the 'greatest secret of monarchic rule' (TTP Preface/10)

<sup>27</sup> This becomes clearer by looking at Spinoza's concept of a 'son' whom he describes as 'someone who does what is advantageous for himself in accordance with a parent's command (TTP 16/35). It is obvious that the reason of the action of the son, him being a child, differs from what is to his real advantage (i.e. the projected end of the command given to the son by the parent). However, because the son acts towards this projected end by following the parent's commands, the son is conceptually different from the slave, who follows a command that is not ultimately advantageous to himself. Now, if the parent would command the son to act contrary to his own advantage and rather let him only serve his parent, the son would conceptually turn into a slave, just as the subject who gains nothing by his continued obedience to the supreme power. If one fills in 'agent' instead of 'son' and 'supreme power' instead of 'parent' in the last two sentences, we see that the concept of 'subject' is tied to the 'supreme power', as the concept of 'son' is tied to 'parent'.

key in deciding whether the use of secrecy leads to slavery or not. In the next section, we will see that it is necessary for achieving harmony that the use of secrecy is advantageous to the people.

### III. Secrecy, Reason and Harmony

As we have seen, the use of secrecy, to not fall prey to Spinoza's critique in chapter 7 of the TP, may not lead to absolute power (*potestas*) for the monarch and thus to the slavery of his people. In other words, the use of secrecy has to be advantageous to the people. Spinoza is very explicit about what he thinks to be advantageous to the people:

*'...no one can doubt how much more advantageous it is to man to live according to the laws and certain dictates of our reason. As we've said, these laws and dictates aim only at the true advantage of men.'* (TTP 16/12)

It is truly to the advantage of the people to be guided by reason. Spinoza says that 'we know nothing to be certainly good or evil' except those things that are 'really conducive to understanding' or those that 'can hinder understanding' (EIVP27). Spinoza thus grounds the answer to the question whether something is good or evil, in its ability to have a negative or positive effect on acquiring reason. Reason consists of having 'common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things' (EIIIP40S2). 'Since' according to Spinoza, 'all things are in God and are conceived through God' (EIIIP47S), 'the mind's highest good is "true knowledge of God"<sup>28</sup> and "the highest virtue"<sup>29</sup> is to know God' (EIVP28). In other words, the highest good is complete understanding. All can 'equally enjoy' the highest good of knowledge of God, according to Spinoza, as it is 'common to all' (EIVP36). The dictates of reason are universal and one having knowledge of God does not exclude another from having that same knowledge. This being the case, people can equally share in the highest good, and according to Spinoza, they should. Because 'insofar as a thing is in agreement with our nature' it is 'to that extent necessarily good' (EIVP31), so that he who pursues knowledge of God for himself 'will also desire it for the rest of mankind' (EIVP37). On the other hand, insofar as a thing does not agree with our nature', it can be 'evil for us', (EIVP30). Therefore, the highest display in 'skill' and 'genius' lies in 'so educating men that they come to live under the guidance of reason' because, 'nothing can be more in *harmony* with the nature of anything than other individuals of the same species' (EIVA9; emphasis mine) and 'insofar as men live under the guidance of reason, to that extent they necessarily agree in nature' (EIVP35). If men live under the guidance of reason, this is certainly 'good' as Spinoza defines 'good' as those things 'we know to be certainly useful to us' (EIVD1). If reason is certainly useful, and because 'insofar as men live by the guidance of reason, they are most useful to man' (EIVP37p), harmony is also certainly useful<sup>30</sup>. Harmony is good, this means that the use of secrecy by the state, to be ethically justifiable, has to be conducive to harmony. It has to fit the following proposition from the *Ethics*:

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<sup>28</sup> True knowledge of God is not knowledge of God as an anthropomorphic lawgiver or any conceptions of this kind. Spinoza thinks of God as 'a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence' (EIP11). In addition, Spinoza says that 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God (EIP15). God who consists of 'infinite attributes' encompasses everything that 'is' and because God encompasses everything we can not conceive what 'is', without God. By this, true knowledge of god is complete understanding of nature as a whole.

<sup>29</sup> Remember that private virtue is named 'freedom of mind' or 'strength of character' in TP (1/6). We established in section I that this private virtue originates in the *conatus*, 'with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being' (EIIIP7). Since nothing is as advantageous to man as reason, the highest virtue is to know god, since all things are in God and conceived through God' (EIIIP47S).

<sup>30</sup> See also EIVP31, EIVP35.

*'Whatever is conducive to man's social organization, or causes men to live in harmony, is advantageous, while those things that introduce discord into the state are bad'* (EIVP40)

Spinoza says that 'whatever things cause men to live in harmony cause them also to live by the guidance of reason' (EIVP40p). If the use of secrecy can be conducive to harmony, this means that the use of secrecy is possibly conducive to reason and thus that its use can be ethically justified. However, a close reading of Spinoza shows this is not entirely the case, as according to Spinoza, 'Harmony is also commonly produced by fear', and because 'fear arises from weakness of spirit' the use of fear to produce harmony 'does not belong to the use of reason' (EIVA16). Fear is thus excluded from the means by which harmony may be ethically justifiably established and so is 'pity' according to Spinoza (Ibid). Furthermore, he excludes 'shame' on the grounds that it is 'a species of pain' and therefore 'does not concern the use of reason' (EIVA23). The argument for excluding shame gives us a neat definition to exclude those things that bring harmony but are not compatible with reason. Since, fear is also a species of pain, as it is 'inconstant pain, likewise arising from the image of a thing in doubt' (EIIIP18S2) and shame as well as it is 'pain accompanied by the idea of some action of ours that we think that others censure' (EIIIDe31). We can say that all things that bring about harmony, excluding those that are accompanied by a species of pain, are possibly compatible with reason and therefore their use may be ethically justifiable<sup>31</sup>.

We have seen in this section that the advantage of the people is their living by the guidance of reason. Reason takes a central place in the ethical teachings of Spinoza as he defines something as 'good' or 'evil' on the basis of its consequence on acquiring reason. Furthermore, we have established that, for the use of secrecy to be ethically justifiable, it has to be conducive to harmony while also being compatible with reason. This excludes those uses of secrecy that are not conducive to harmony or are conducive to harmony without being compatible with reason (i.e. those uses that are accompanied with pain in any form). However, I have not yet shown that the use of secrecy by the state is compatible with reason itself, but only that if it is to be compatible with reason, the use of secrecy has to be restricted in certain ways<sup>32</sup>.

#### IV. Secrecy and Reason

In this section, I will argue that the use of secrecy by the state is compatible with reason if it is conducive to harmony without being accompanied by any species of pain. To argue accordingly, I will first show that the use of secrecy is incompatible with achieving 'the highest good' of complete understanding. Secondly, I will show that this does not mean that secrets are necessarily evil and, by this, that the possibility remains that the use of secrecy can be conducive to reason. To do this I will argue that Spinoza's consequentialism entails that the use of secrecy is not bad in itself, but that, if the consequences of the use of secrecy are conducive to reason, the use of secrecy is good.

Since we have seen that the 'highest good', according to Spinoza, is 'true knowledge of God'

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<sup>31</sup> One might think that all emotions that are 'passive' and thus indicate weakness of spirit are not compatible with reason and might therefore not be used. However Spinoza holds that 'those desires that are defined by man's power (potentia), that is, by reason, are always good; the other desires can be either good or evil' (EIVA3). From this, it follows that emotions stemming from weakness of spirit do not necessarily have to be evil. Pain, according to Spinoza, is 'in itself bad' (EIVP41) and thus we can say that pain rather than all passive emotions must be excluded from that use of secrecy that can be ethically justified. This means that the use of secrecy that is accompanied by passive emotions is *possibly* ethically justifiable according to the positive or negative effect this use of secrecy has on acquiring reason.

<sup>32</sup> The use of secrecy to be compatible with reason has to be conducive to harmony while not being accompanied by any species of pain.

(EIVP28), which we named ‘complete understanding’, an objection that may arise against an ethical justification for the use of secrecy, is that the use of secrecy by the state is incompatible with achieving the highest good. Since the highest good is complete understanding and the use of secrecy entails that some information is withheld, the use of secrecy forms an obstacle for those it is withheld from in the obtainment of the highest good. By this, the use of secrecy is ‘evil’ (EIVD2, EIVP27) and moreover, because it is an inherent property of secrecy that by its use information is withheld, the use of secrecy is evil *per se*. However, we will see that this conclusion is only warranted if secrecy always forms an obstacle to the obtainment of reason.

Secrecy does form *in itself* an obstacle to achieving the highest good, but this does not exclude the possibility that the *consequence* of the use of secrecy can be conducive to reason. Let me explain this by ways of a parable<sup>33</sup>. Just as armbands form an obstacle for someone who is an adept swimmer to swim perfectly, armbands can be conducive, as a pedagogical tool, to teach a novice swimmer how to swim. Let us imagine an ethical system in which the highest good is not complete understanding but perfect swimming. Let us further imagine that under this system live two types of swimmers, adept swimmers and novice swimmers. Adept swimmers can swim fairly well and do not need armbands while novice swimmers are beginners who cannot yet swim on their own. Would the people living under this ethical system call armbands ‘evil’ as they form an obstacle to perfect swimming? Maybe so, but not all. Only those adept swimmers, for whom the armbands would be an obstacle to perfect swimming, would be justified in calling armbands ‘evil’, but only for themselves and other swimmers of their skill. All novice swimmers, who by using armbands strive towards the highest good of perfect swimming, would be justified in calling armbands ‘good’. The ‘adept swimmer’, wanting of course that his fellow swimmers share in the virtue of perfect swimming<sup>34</sup> would also be justified in calling armbands ‘good’ for those who need them to learn how to swim and would let novice swimmers use armbands if this would help them to learn how to swim better<sup>35</sup>.

I want to argue that the use of secrecy holds the same ethical position in Spinoza’s philosophy as armbands in the ethical system of the above parable. To argue for this claim we have to remember Spinoza’s consequentialism as explained in the preceding sections<sup>36</sup>. As we have seen, Spinoza’s consequentialism entails that only those things that always have evil consequences are evil, and those things that always have good consequences are good. It is in this way that we have to understand Spinoza’s definition of ‘good’, which are those things ‘we know to be *certainly* useful to us’ (EIVD1; emphasis mine). The word ‘certainly’, in this definition, figures to establish that what is good, necessarily always has to be good. If this is the case, then we are allowed to say that something is ‘good in itself’, or to the contrary ‘evil in itself’. In other

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. TIE 11, where Spinoza explains that wealth, honor and sensual pleasure are only a hindrance to ‘the true good’ if they are desired ‘on their own account, and not as a means to other things’.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. EIVP37, EIVA9

<sup>35</sup> We can compare this parable with note 23 that treated Spinoza’s concept of ‘son’. There we saw that the ‘son’ is not a slave because, although he acts on command, this is ‘is advantageous to himself’ (TTP 16/35). Considering that armbands are ultimately advantageous to the novice swimmer, the adept swimmer would act akin to the parent if he commands the novice swimmer, who is akin the son in this comparison, to use armbands.

<sup>36</sup> There we have seen that Spinoza separates the private virtue of ‘freedom of mind or strength of character’ from the virtue of the state ‘security’ (TP 1/6). This entails that any use of secrecy is justified when the supreme power is capable of using it. However, for any use of secrecy to be ethically justified it has to be conducive to reason, meaning it has to be compatible with the private virtue of ‘freedom of mind or strength of character’. In section II, we have seen that the content of an action done on command does not matter in the assessment of whether someone is a subject or a slave. It is ‘the end of the action’, whether this end is advantageous to the agent or not, that makes someone either a slave or a subject (TTP 16/33-34). Herewith we have seen in section III, that the use of secrecy does not necessarily lead to slavery for those subjects for whom the content of the secrecy is withheld but only leads to slavery if the use of secrecy is not conducive to reason for the agent.

words, those things that are necessarily an obstacle in the obtainment of reason are evil in itself, while those things that are necessarily conducive to understanding are good in itself. Although the use of secrecy forms an obstacle to the obtainment of the highest good, it can on the other hand be conducive to reason if secrecy is used as a pedagogical tool, akin to the armbands for novice swimmers. Spinoza has not written directly about the use of secrecy by the state as a pedagogical tool; however, it is revealing to see what he has to say about the use of secrecy in scripture:

*'Scripture, being particularly adapted to the needs of the common people, continually speaks in merely human fashion, for the common people are incapable of understanding higher things<sup>37</sup>. That is why I think that all that God has revealed to the Prophets as necessary for salvation is set down in the form of law, and in this way the Prophets made up a whole parable depicting God as a king and lawgiver, because he had revealed the means that lead to salvation and perdition, and was the cause thereof. These means, which are simply causes, they called laws, and wrote them down in the form of laws; salvation and perdition, which are simply effects necessarily resulting from these means, they represented as reward and punishment. All their words were adjusted to the framework of this parable rather than to truth. They constantly depicted God in human form, sometimes angry, sometimes merciful, now looking to what is to come, now jealous and suspicious, and even deceived by the Devil. So philosophers and likewise all who have risen to a level beyond law, that is, all who pursue virtue not as a law but because they love it as something very precious, should not find such words a stumbling-block'. (Ep. 19)*

This passage shows Spinoza's consequentialism, for if he was committed to attaining the highest good in such a way that he would think that everything that is not truthful, or by which the truth is withheld, to be 'evil', he clearly would not say in this passage that all those 'who pursue virtue' out of their love for it 'should not find such words a stumbling-block'. He would then be committed to saying that these words are a stumbling-block and that rather one should not read them as they are an obstacle in the obtainment of the highest good and thus evil (EIVD2). However, that Spinoza allows for an 'obscure' teaching of eternal truths, and a certain level of deceit if the consequences of this are advantageous to letting people act in accordance with the eternal truths, comes to the fore in the following passage from the TTP:

*'...His [Christ's] mind had to be adapted to the beliefs and doctrines held in common by all mankind, that is, to those axioms that are universally true. And surely this fact, that God revealed himself to Christ, or to Christ's mind, directly, and not through words and images as in the case of the prophets, can have only this meaning, that Christ perceived truly, or understood, what was revealed. For it is when a thing is perceived by pure thought, without words or images, that it is understood. Christ, then, perceived truly and adequately the thing revealed to him; so if ever he proclaimed these things as law, he did so because of the people's ignorance and obstinacy<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, in this matter he acted in God's place, adapting himself to the character of the people. So although his sayings were somewhat clearer than those of other prophets, his teaching of things revealed was still obscure and quite often took the form of parables, especially when he was addressing those to whom it had not yet been granted to understand the kingdom of Heaven. But doubtless, to those to whom it was granted to know the mysteries of Heaven, his teaching took the form of eternal truths, not of prescribed laws. In this way he freed them from bondage to the law, while nevertheless giving further strength and stability to the law, inscribing it deep in their hearts'. (TTP 4, p.32-33)*

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Note 1

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Note 1

In this passage, we clearly see the double role Christ played according to Spinoza<sup>39</sup>. On the one side he taught 'eternal truths' for those capable of understanding, while on the other side he explained these in an 'obscure' fashion, or in the form of 'law', to those people incapable of understanding them directly. In the same way as Christ adapted himself 'to the character of the people', the ethically justified use of secrecy in the state should be adapted to the subjects and function as a pedagogical tool to help those people who are not guided by reason to act in accordance with reason. Just as the 'laws' figure as pedagogical tools for those incapable of understanding, and acting in accordance with, the 'eternal truths'. If secrecy is used in this way, it fits Spinoza's consequentialism as put forward by the following propositions in the *Ethics*:

*'By the guidance of reason we pursue the greater of two goods and the lesser of two evils'.* (EIVP65)

In addition:

*'Under the guidance of reason we seek a future greater good in preference to a lesser present good, and a lesser present evil in preference to a greater future evil'.* (EIVP66)

Spinoza says that the 'good that prevents us from enjoying a greater good is in reality evil' and that 'by the same reasoning a lesser evil is in reality a good (EIVP65p). By this, secrecy, which is *necessarily* an obstacle in the obtainment of the highest good and thereby can be considered evil, can still be good if it is a 'lesser evil', compared to not using secrecy. The only way that secrecy is a 'lesser evil' compared to not using secrecy is if the use of secrecy is more advantageous to the people than not using secrecy. We have already established in section III that this can only be the case if the use of secrecy is conducive to harmony while not being accompanied by any species of pain.

#### V. Secrecy, the Civil Position and Love

At the ending of the first section, I put forward Spinoza's description of the end of the civil position. This was that state in which 'men pass their lives *harmoniously* and where the *laws are kept without violation*' (TP 5/2; emphasis mine). In the following section, we have seen that Spinoza's critique of the use of secrecy was aimed at the specific use of secrecy that lead to 'dangerous slavery' (TP 7/29). Additionally, we established in this section that the use of secrecy does not necessarily have to lead to slavery. We saw that the 'end of an action done' is only of importance in assessing whether someone is a slave, not his knowledge of the reason for the action he does on command (TTP 16/33-34). Thereby, the end of the action had to be advantageous to the agent for the agent to not become a slave. In section III, we saw that the advantage of the agent had to be measured in terms of whether his act is conducive to making him more reasonable. By this, we established that Spinoza's consequentialism does not only cover his political philosophy but is also present throughout his ethical teachings. By his strand of consequentialism, as showed in section IV, everything that is ultimately conducive to reason is ethically justifiable, meaning that the ethical justification for the use of secrecy has to be assessed by the consequences of its use rather than the use of secrecy itself. In other words, this means that the use of secrecy, to be ethically justifiable, has to meet the following condition:

- (1) The use of secrecy must be conducive to reason.

This necessarily entails the following:

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<sup>39</sup> For more on this double role of Christ, see chapter five in van Cauter, J.M. (2016) *Spinoza on History, Christ, and Lights Untameable*.

- (a) The use of secrecy may not be detrimental to security.
- (b) The use of secrecy must be conducive to harmony<sup>40</sup>.
- (c) The use of secrecy may not be accompanied by any species of pain<sup>41</sup>.

We have seen in the first section that reason dictates to obey the law of the state and to be obedient to the supreme power, or in other words, to not act against the security of the state (TTP 16/27, TTP 20/17, TTP 20/18). This means that (1) entails that (a) at minimum the use of secrecy may not lead to greater disobedience in the form of transgressions of the law by subjects<sup>42</sup>. By (b), the use of secrecy must always lead to greater unity in the state. If the use of secrecy leads to discord in the state, it is not advantageous to the subjects of the state and thus this use of secrecy is not warranted (EIVP40). However, (c) is necessary to exclude those uses of secrecy that bring about greater harmony by means that are incompatible with reason. By (c), the use of secrecy by the state may not arouse the following emotions in subjects:

- **Hatred**, as 'hatred is pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause'. (EIIID7).
- **Aversion**, as 'aversion is pain accompanied by the idea of a thing which is indirectly the cause of the pain' (EIIID9).
- **Fear**, as 'fear is inconstant pain arising from the idea of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in some doubt'. (EIIID13)
- **Despair**, as 'Despair is pain arising from the idea of a thing future or past concerning which reason for doubt has been removed'. (EIIID15).
- **Disappointment**, as 'disappointment is pain accompanied by the idea of a past thing whose outcome was contrary to our hope'. (EIIID17).
- **Pity**, as 'pity is pain accompanied by the idea of ill that has happened to another whom we think of as like ourselves'. (EIIID18).
- **Indignation**, as 'Indignation is hatred toward one who has injured another' (EIIID20) and hatred is a species of pain.
- **Disparagement**, as 'disparagement is to think too meanly of someone by reason of hatred' (EIIID22) and hatred is a species of pain.
- **Envy**, as 'envy is hatred, insofar as it so affects a man that he is pained at another's good fortune and rejoices at another's ill-fortune' (EIIID23) and hatred is a species of pain.
- **Humility**, as 'humility is pain arising from a man's contemplation of his own impotence, or weakness' (EIIID26).
- **Repentance**, as 'repentance is pain accompanied by the idea of some deed which we believe we have done from free decision of the mind' (EIIID27).
- **Self-abasement**, as 'self-abasement is thinking too meanly of oneself by reason of pain' (EIIID29).
- **Shame**, as 'shame is pain accompanied by the idea of some action of ours that we think that others censure (EIIID31).

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<sup>40</sup> As Spinoza says: 'whatever things cause men to live in harmony cause them also to live by the guidance of reason' (EIVP40p).

<sup>41</sup> As any species of pain is incompatible with reason. 'Pain', according to Spinoza is 'the passive transition of the mind to a state of less perfection' (EIIID3), as the 'perfection' of the mind is measured in terms of reason, and pain is always a transition to 'less perfection', it follows that pain is incompatible with reason.

<sup>42</sup> In addition, considering international politics, this entails that the use of secrecy in the state may not enhance the chances of conflicts with other states.

- **Anger**, as ‘anger is the desire whereby we are urged from hatred to inflict injury on one whom we hate’ (EIIID36) and hatred is a species of pain.
- **Revenge**, as ‘revenge is the desire whereby we are urged from mutual hatred to inflict injury on one who, from like emotion, has injured us’ (EIIID37) and hatred is a species of pain.
- **Cruelty**, as ‘cruelty, or savageness, is the desire whereby someone is urged to inflict injury on one whom we love or whom we pity’ (EIIID38) as inflicting injury causes pain.

By the exclusion of all above stated emotions that are ‘species of pain’ from the means by which harmony may be achieved in the state, we have completely filled in the sub-conditions that make up condition (1). However, as we will see, we are confronted with the need for one final condition, namely that the supreme power has to have love for the subjects of the state. We will see that this condition is necessary as without the disposition of love towards the subjects, the supreme power would not necessarily have to use secrecy in an ethically justified way.

Love, according to Spinoza, ‘is pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause’ (EIIID6). Pleasure is the opposite of pain as it is ‘man’s transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection’ (EIIID2). As love is ‘pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause’ (EIIID6), it follows that, if this ‘pleasure’ is derived from the subjects of the state, the supreme power that acts out of this love necessarily wants his or her subjects to ‘transition from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection’ (EIIID2). As we have seen in our treatment of the highest good<sup>43</sup>, for Spinoza this must mean a transition from a state of less reason to a state of more reason. Love thus also excludes any species of pain as this implies a transition to a lesser state of perfection (EIIID2). Thereby, the disposition of love is compatible with condition (1). However we have seen that Spinoza explicitly excludes ‘the spirit by which the state is administered’ from having an influence on the administration of the state, and thus that the disposition of the supreme power should not play a role in his administration (TP 1/6). However, remember that, Spinoza argues for this on the basis that ‘freedom of mind or strength of character’ is not the virtue of the state, but that this virtue is ‘security’ (Ibid.). From the standpoint of ‘security’, indeed ‘the spirit by which the state is administered’ does not matter. Moreover, the ethical dimension does not matter from this perspective, as the supreme power is allowed to use all means it is capable of using, including those contrary to reason, that contribute to security (TTP 16/24). This would still result in a more virtuous state if the state increases security by these means (TP 1/6). Nevertheless, we have been searching for an *ethically* justified use of secrecy. Since the state’s virtue of ‘security’ itself is insufficient for grounding an *ethical justification* for the use of secrecy, as it is only sufficient for a *justified* use of secrecy, we have to ground the *ethical justified* use of secrecy in something else. For the use of secrecy to be ethically justified, it has to be conducive to the private virtue of its subjects, meaning that it should not only contribute to keeping the laws without violation (i.e. security), but also to harmony. Since harmony is conceptually tied up with reason as, reason urges us to establish greater harmony<sup>44</sup>, while greater harmony is also conducive to reason<sup>45</sup>, this end of the civil position falls not strictly in the domain of ‘security’, but also in that of private virtue. In other words, *ethically justified* use of secrecy cannot solely be grounded in the virtue of the state, security. Since the *ethical* dimension is supererogatory from the perspective of the state, as the state’s virtue does not depend on it, the supreme power has no incentive to use secrecy in an ethically justified manner. The *ethical* dimension has to follow from the ‘spirit by which the state is administered’, it is grounded in the ‘private virtue’ of the supreme power. Our final condition is necessary to bring it about that the

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<sup>43</sup> See section III.

<sup>44</sup> By EIVP31, EIVP35, EIVP36, EIVP37, EIVA9.

<sup>45</sup> By EIVP40, EIVP73, EIVA9.



supreme power does not act from the amoral virtue of the state, security, by which the state may use all forms of secrecy that are *justified*<sup>46</sup> but that the supreme power acts *ethically*, thus using only secrecy that is compatible with condition (1). The ethically justified use of secrecy by the supreme power thus supervenes on the love the supreme power has for its subjects. This is the reason why we need our final condition:

(\*): The user of secrecy has to have love for its subjects.

With this, I hope to have shown that the use of secrecy can be ethically justified by the philosophy of Spinoza. We have seen that for secrecy to be ethically justified, its use is heavily constrained by the condition mentioned earlier in this section<sup>47</sup>, that it has to be conducive to reason. Furthermore we have seen that (\*) is necessary to bring it about that secrecy is used in an ethically justified manner by the supreme power. Herewith we have reached an end of our enquiry in to the ethically justified use of secrecy, meaning we can answer the research question<sup>48</sup>.

## VI. Conclusion

We have seen that the supreme power is always justified in using secrecy if it has the capability to do so. However, whether this is also desirable from an ethical point of view, depends on the effect it has on the subjects. The use of secrecy must have as its consequence that it is conducive to reason for the subjects as otherwise the use of secrecy leads to their slavery. We have seen that some of the deceitful behavior that is allotted to Spinoza by Lambert van Velthuysen and Leo Strauss, namely that he hides the real meaning of his words through stealth and deceit, may also be used by the supreme power. Furthermore, I have argued that this can even be desirable if the above stated condition (1) is met. The supreme power may thus put forward doctrines 'ad captum vulgi'<sup>49</sup> accommodating to what elements it thinks are useful to rule and hold back on information it thinks to be useless to this end. However, in the end, the use of secrecy is only desirable when it is conducive to reason and this can only be ensured if the supreme power acts out of love. This means that, although Spinoza holds that if matters are administered properly, the spirit by which they are so administered 'does not matter' (TP 1/6), this is only the case for those aspects of rule that fall within the virtue of the state, i.e. security. The desirable use of secrecy is supererogatory from the perspective of the state, meaning that it depends on the private virtue of the supreme power to act accordingly. Not only may the supreme power use secrecy, its ethical use is completely reliant on its disposition *vis a vis* its subjects. Meaning that the ethical use of secrecy depends on the kind of character of a philosopher king. By this, we may never anticipate that secrecy will be used ethically, as 'a state whose well-being depends on someone's loyalty, and whose affairs cannot be looked after properly unless those who handle them are willing to act in good faith, will not be stable at all' (TP 1/6). Therefore, although an ethical justification for secrecy is possible, it is only prudent to follow Spinoza in his critique in chapter 7 of the TP, in which he says that the use of secrecy leads to slavery.

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<sup>46</sup> As we have seen, this is everything the state is capable of doing (TTP 16/8).

<sup>47</sup> Either (1) or (1\*).

<sup>48</sup> Is the supreme power allowed to use secrecy and if so, is this desirable?

<sup>49</sup> See note 1.

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