

Theological-Political Power: Spinoza against Schmitt

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Abstract: In this paper we propose a counterpoint between Carl Schmitt's theological, monarchical and warmongering conception and Spinoza's critique of theological-political power, monarchy and war. To the transcendence of political power in Schmitt, we counterpose the immanence of political power in Spinoza and the defense of democracy.

Keywords: political theology, Theological-political power, monarchy, democracy

The President of the Republic of Brazil, Jair Messiah Bolsonaro, took charge of office on January 1, 2019. On January 6th, he was anointed and blessed by the evangelical pastor Macedo at a ceremony in which the choice of date (the Epiphany of the Christian calendar), the middle name of the president (Messias), and the ritual (the anointing and blessing) intended, in a gesture of political theology, to offer the spectacle of the sacredness of the ruler and political power, although the Brazilian Constitution states that Brazil is a secular republic.

Starting from Carl Schmitt's assertion that the religiosity of an era determines not only theoretical formulations, but also the conception of political power, an interpretative tradition of his work gave to Catholicism a preponderant place, even though it placed it at a distance from De Bonald, De Maistre, and Donoso Cortez. Others, taking his status as a jurist, consider that, after *The Nomos of The Earth*, the discussion about law would have traced the course of Schmitt's work. Undoubtedly, many of the interpretations turned to European historical conditions and, particularly, to the overthrow of the Weimar Republic as references that would explain both previous and subsequent works to these events.

For our part, we think that an interesting way to understand Carl Schmitt's ideas is offered by his insertion in the field of thought instituted by German Idealism, although many may be surprised by this reference, once Schmitt was a fierce opponent of it. We are not referring here to the contents of these philosophies rejected by Schmitt, but to the gigantic theoretical event of dematerialization of reality, the most relevant expressions of which are the Kantian separation between phenomena and noumena, the Fichtean affirmation of the world as Non-I posed by the I, and the Hegelian Absolute Spirit as pure activity of the subject's self-constitution by the position and suppression of his determined negative or of the object. In other words, German Idealism states that the theoretical activity of reason places the world as an object of knowledge and the activity of practical reason places the world as morality, that is, objectivity and morality do not result from the materiality of a natural substance nor of the essence of a human substance, but they are

produced by the rational action of subjectivity. Every being is a being-
posited and that is the reason why the philosophies of German Idealism
are philosophies of action.

Schmitt's kinship with this heritage is evident. Let us highlight
some of his theses: the definition of sovereignty as the absolute power of
decision, that is, as an unconditioned action or an action not conditioned
by the other spheres of existence; the statement that religious action
precedes the Church (or the Church presupposes the religious because
it is put in place by it), political action precedes the State (or the State
presupposes the political because it is set by it), the decision precedes
the norm (or the norm presupposes the decision that places it); the
assertion that war is the *locus* par excellence of the manifestation of the
political, not only because it is pure action but also because it explains
the essence of the political, that is, the opposition between friend and
enemy. These theses, which signal the desire for dematerialization and
the primacy of action, lead to the idea that Church and State are not
substantially different, but legally distinct institutions whose exemplarity
stems from the way in which they operate with the idea and the practice
of representation. These theses also explain Schmitt's criticisms of
Kelsen's legal positivism, Weber's sociology of power and Marx's
historical materialism, but also the statement that we live in the era of the
decline of the State because the political was separated from it (or the
predominance of the institutional and the normative over the action).

It is not our aim here to examine Carl Schmitt's thinking, but only
to point out some of its aspects related to the link between theology and
politics, because, according to him, Western politics has always been
and is theological or mere secularization of religion, since all fruitful
concepts in modern State theory are secularized theological concepts.
And this is true not only because in their historical development they
were transferred from theology to the theory of the State – the fact, for
example, that the omnipotent God became an omnipotent legislator
– but also because of their systematic structure, whose knowledge is
necessary for a sociological analysis of these concepts.¹

Since politics is secularized theology, there was a single historical
moment in which this secularization took place perfectly: in the absolute
monarchy, the glorious moment of European civilization that, after
absolutism, only stopped because of the decay brought about by the
French Revolution, which means the emergence of the republic and liberal
democracy. With absolutism, the origin of the State became fully visible,
as it is born of the pure will of the sovereign, of an absolute decision
that is not based on reason, discussion or norm, but on the absolute
power of the position of the State brought about by the will. Like God, the
sovereign creates *ex nihilo* and has no obligation to be rational or just.

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1 Schmitt 1988, p. 46. For the critics of these ideas see Blumenberg 1983.

Just as God is omnipotent to create the world, so the sovereign's will is omnipotent to create the State. Just as God is not chained by divine laws, so the sovereign, *legibus solutus*, is above the laws imposed by him. Just as God suspends his own laws and interferes in the universe by extraordinary means – the miracle – so, in times of danger, the sovereign's action is not retained by the laws, but responds to the exception with an exceptional act or with the reason of State: “the situation of exception has the same meaning for jurisprudence as the miracle for theology”.² Demiurgy and exception therefore define sovereignty as a monopoly of decision: “The sovereign decides in the situation of exception”.³ And because absolutism was the reflection and manifestation of the cosmos – order and hierarchy, discipline and vitality – the perfect definition of what the State is realized in it, since in the strict sense of the term, the State, a historical phenomenon, is a mode of existence (a state) specific to a people, one that decides in exceptional moments, thus constituting, in relation to multiple imaginable *status*, whether individual or collective, the *Status par excellence*.⁴

In fact, for Schmitt, absolutism, by making explicit the essence of sovereignty and the State as an absolute decision, gives visibility to politics as an autonomous sphere, neither determined by knowledge nor by morality and religion nor even by law and economy. Each sphere of human existence is polarized by a constitutive dichotomy: good and evil, in ethics; the beautiful and the ugly, in aesthetics; profit and loss in the economy. The constitutive dichotomy of politics is the friend-enemy opposition: “the specific distinction of the politician, to which political acts and motives can be returned, is the discrimination of friend and enemy”.⁵ This distinction affirms the autonomy of the political because “it cannot be founded on any other opposition nor can it be reduced to any of them”.⁶ The autonomy of the political presupposes that its dichotomy should not be and cannot be defined according to the criteria of other dichotomies, i.e., friend and enemy cannot be thought of in ethical, aesthetic or economic terms. Politically, a friend is the one who shares our way of life, the enemy, the other, “the stranger”, who threatens our way of life and our existence within it. According to this sense, the enemy, because political, is always a public enemy and only the sovereign or the State has the power to designate it as such.

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2 Schmitt 1988, p. 46.

3 Ibid., p. 15.

4 Schmitt 1992, p.57.

5 Ibid, p.64

6 Ibid.

The distinction between friend and enemy expresses “the extreme degree of union and disunity, of association and dissociation”. An enemy is one with whom the conflict cannot be resolved by pre-established norms or by an impartial arbitrator and whose existence, being a danger to ours, requires war, that is, its neutralization or submission and, in an extreme case, his physical elimination. However, since true politics institutes a decision-making power over life and death, absolute power because it is unique and undivided, one who intends to share or divide the sovereign power will be an enemy and, thus, the enemy can also be internal or the other of our State, which must remove it, punish it, submit it and, in extreme cases, eliminate it. If it is necessary for the State to define the figure of the enemy, it is because it can only exist in a particular way and because moral, religious and economic antagonisms become political antagonisms when they have the strength to regroup men into friends and enemies. In this sense, the war of religions is a political event, as is the class struggle when it changes to a revolutionary form. In other words, the term politics does not designate a way of life that involves the various spheres of human existence or a specific activity, but only the degree of intensity of association and dissociation of human beings for economic, religious, moral, or other reasons for a proof of strength, with sovereignty deciding the conflict and restoring unity. Every war, that is, every situation of exception, depends, on the one hand, on the intensity of the antagonisms arising from other spheres of human existence and, on the other, on the determination of the enemy figure by the State. Its purpose is “the existential negation of the enemy”, a denial that does not necessarily have to mean extermination, it may mean submitting the other to our way of life (that is, colonization) and exterminating him only if this is not achieved.

Now, Schmitt puts us before an apparent paradox. In order to ensure the dematerialization and the autonomy of the political, thus refusing politics to be, in the Greek way, for example, a way of life and, in the contemporary way, a specific activity of professionals, Schmitt is obliged to affirm that political action is an event that depends on the intensity of conflicts arising from non-political spheres and that sovereignty is an action or the power to decide on the direction and on the end of the conflicts. What is the paradox? If politics is an event that depends on the intensity of antagonisms in other spheres of human existence, then the autonomy of the political is relative and the demiurgy of the sovereign is closer to the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, who works on a given matter (in conflicts arising from other spheres), than to the God of biblical *Genesis*, which operates *ex nihilo*. Schmitt, however, manages to resolve the paradox: the emergence of politics, in each circumstance, by reconfiguring friends and enemies for a test of strength, is always a situation of exception over which the sovereign's absolute will acts, and, on the other hand, this exceptional reconfiguration indicates

that politics is a form of war. The famous adage states that politics is the war continued by other means, but Schmitt, by distinguishing between the political (the enemy-friend opposition) and the State (the standardized public institution) and between the political as sovereign action and public institutions as inert materiality, and by stating that the political emerges when social divisions are expressed by friend-enemy antagonism, it tells us, in short, that *there is no distinction between politics and war*. War, being an exceptional situation, defines sovereignty – or rather, without war there is no sovereignty and without sovereignty there is no politics inasmuch as only with sovereign there can be a determination of the figure of the enemy – and, since war is the maximum point of the friend-enemy tension, it is the most perfect sign of politics, given that this, after all, is the logic of force. Thus, it is no accident that, in agreement with De Maistre and Donoso Cortez, absolutism or imperial power as a secularized theocratic power seems to him to be the peak of politics, nor that French Revolution is considered the cause of its decay when “the idea of the modern rule of law imposes itself with deism, with a theology and metaphysics that reject the miracle and refuse the rupture produced by the laws of nature, a rupture contained in the notion of miracle and implying an exception due to direct intervention, exactly as they refuse the direct intervention of the sovereign in the existing legal order.”⁷

This quote, at the center of which is the criticism of the abandonment of the idea of the transcendence of power and its fundamental expression through exception, i.e., the miracle, synthesizes the Schmittian refusal of the Spinoza’s interpretation of politics and theology.

Let us follow what Spinoza writes in the preface to the *Theologico-Political Treaty (TTP)*, in the opening of which we read:

“If men could, in all circumstances, decide for the safest, or if Fortune were always favorable to them, they would never be victims of superstition. But, as they are often faced with such difficulties they do not know what decision they will make, and as the uncertain benefits of Fortune that they immoderately covet make them oscillate, most of the time, between hope and fear, they are always ready to believe in anything (...) They even think that God has an aversion to the wise and that his decrees are not inscribed in our minds, but in the entrails of animals, or that they are the crazy, the foolish, the birds, who by instinct or divine breath reveals them. To what extent does fear madden men! Fear is the cause that originates and fuels superstition, (...) men only allow themselves

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7 Schmitt 1988, p. 46.

to be dominated by superstition while they are afraid (...), finally, it is when States find themselves in greater difficulties that fortune-tellers have greater power over the commoners and are most feared by kings.”⁸

Fear is the cause that originates and fuels superstition and humans are only dominated by it while they are afraid. But where does fear itself come from?

If humans could have control over all the circumstances of their lives, says Spinoza, they would not feel at the mercy of the whims of Fortuna, that is, subjected to the imaginary order of the world as chance encounters between things, humans and events. Feeling at the mercy of Fortune because they do not have the mastery of the circumstances of their lives and are driven by the desire for goods that do not seem to depend on themselves, humans are naturally inhabited by two passions, fear and hope. They are afraid that evils will happen to them and goods will not happen to them, just as they are hopeful that goods will come to them and evils will not fall on their heads. Since these goods and evils, not seeming to depend on themselves, seem to depend entirely on Fortune or chance, and as they recognize that the things that happen to them are ephemeral, their fear and hope never cease, because in the same way that good or bad things came to them without knowing how or why, they can also disappear without knowing the reasons for their disappearance.

The genesis of superstition lies, therefore, in the experience of contingency. The imponderable relationship with a time whose course is ignored, in which the present does not seem to come in continuity with the past, and nothing, in it, seems to announce the future, simultaneously generates the perception of ephemeral and discontinuous time with the feeling of uncertainty and unpredictability of all things. Uncertainty and insecurity raise the desire to overcome them by finding signs of predictability for events, leading to the search for signs that allow us to predict the arrival of goods and ills; this search, in turn, generates credulity in omens and, finally, the search for omens, leads to the belief in supernatural powers that, inexplicably, send goods and ills to humans. From this belief in mysterious transcendent powers, religion will be born. In short, because they ignore the real causes of events and things, because they ignore the necessary order and connection of all things and events, as well as the real causes of their feelings and their actions, they imagine that everything depends on some omnipotent will that creates and governs everything according to designs unattainable by human reason. Hereby they abdicate reason as a capacity for knowledge of

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⁸ Spinoza *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, ed. Gebhardt, Carl Winters Verlag, Heidelberg, 1925, T III, Praefatio, p. 5.

reality and expect religion not only to explain this, but also to dispel fear and increase hope.

But the preface of the TTP continues: if fear is the cause of superstition, three conclusions are necessary. The first is that everyone is naturally subject to it not because they would have a confused idea of divinity, but, on the contrary, they have it precisely because they are superstitious – superstition is not an effect but a cause of ignorance about divinity. The second is that superstition must be extremely variable and fickle, since the circumstances in which fear and hope vary, the reactions of each individual to the same circumstances vary, and the contents of what is feared and expected vary. The third is that superstition can only be maintained or endure longer if a stronger passion persists, such as hatred, anger and fraud. Humans easily fall into all kinds of superstitions. They hardly persist for a long time in one and the same. Now, says Spinoza, there is no more effective way to dominate men than to keep them in fear and hope, but there is also no more effective way to make them seditious and fickle than changing the causes of fear and hope. Therefore, those who aspire to exercise domination need to stabilize the causes, forms and contents of fear and hope. This stabilization is done through religion.

Officers of cults, lords of the morality of believers and rulers, authorized interpreters of divine revelations, and the priests seek to fix the fleeting forms and the uncertain contents of the images of goods and ills and the passions of fear and hope. This fixation of forms and content will be all the more effective the more believers believe that its source is the will of God Himself revealed to some men in the form of decrees, commandments and laws. In other words, the effectiveness in controlling superstition increases if the contents of fear and hope emerge as revelations of the will and power of a transcendent deity. This means that the revealed religions are more powerful and more stabilizing than the others. Religious power becomes even stronger if the different powers that govern the world are unified into a single omnipotent power – monotheism is a more powerful religion than polytheism. The strength of religion increases if believers are convinced that the only true god is theirs and that he has chosen them to send his will. In other words, a monotheistic religion is most potent when its faithful consider themselves elected by the true god, who promises them earthly goods, revenge against their enemies and salvation in another life, which will be eternal. And, finally, the strength of this religion is even greater if its believers believe that the god reveals himself, that is, he speaks to the faithful, telling them what their wills are – the monotheistic religion of the election of a people and the revealed god is the most powerful of all.

Now, the revealed divine will will have a much stronger power if the revelation is not something ordinary and available to everyone, but something mysterious addressed to some chosen ones – the prophets.

Thus, the core of the revealed monotheistic religion is prophecy, because from it comes the unity and stability that fix once and for all the contents of fear and hope. This fixation takes the form of divine commandments or laws, which determine both the liturgy, that is, ceremonies and cults, as well as the customs, habits, ways of life and conducts of the faithful. In a word, revelation determines the forms of human relationships with the divinity and with each other. On the other hand, prophecy is also the revelation of the divine will regarding the government of men: the divinity decrees the laws of social and political life and determines who should be the ruler, chosen by the divinity itself. In short, revealed or prophetic monotheistic religions found theocratic regimes in which the ruler does not represent his rulers but rather represents the power of the god, ruling by divine will.

However, even though the prophecies are enshrined in inviolable sacred writings – the revealed monotheistic religions we speak of here are the three “religions of the Book”, Judaism, Christianity and Islam – the fact that these writings are the source of theocratic power turns them into a permanent object of dispute and war. This dispute and this war take place around the interpretation of the sacred text, whether around those who have the right to interpret it, or around the content itself. It is in the dispute and war of interpretations that the figure of the theologian emerges. This means that theology is not a theoretical or speculative knowledge about the essence of God, the world and man, but a power to interpret the power of the god, enshrined in texts.

Theology is defined by the Jewish and Christian tradition as supernatural science, since its source is the divine revelation enshrined in the Sacred Scriptures. Spinoza considers that such a conception is a contradiction in terms (and a fraud). In fact, says Spinoza, philosophy is the knowledge of the essence and the power of God, that is, the rational knowledge of the idea of being absolutely infinite and of its necessary action; on the other hand, the Sacred Book does not offer (nor is its purpose to do so) a speculative rational knowledge of the essence and potency of the absolute being, but rather a very simple set of precepts for religious and moral life, which can be reduced to two: love God and the others (the precepts of justice and charity). In the sacred texts there are no speculative mysteries or philosophical knowledge about the essence and power of God, nature and men that can justify the existence of theology as a form of speculative knowledge, because a revelation is a knowledge through images and signs with which our imagination creates a figure of divinity with which we can relate by faith. In the case of the Judeo-Christian Bible, Tanach, called by Christians as the Old Testament, we are faced with the historical document of a determined people and their state, the Hebrew theocracy; the New Testament, for its part, is the historical account of the coming of a savior, of his life, his deeds, his death and his promises to those who follow him. In other words, the Old

Testament is a political-religious foundation while the New Testament is an ethical-religious foundation, with no political content, that is, without reference to the foundation of a State and its government. In other words, there is no scriptural basis for a *Christian State*.

Spinoza continues: since the sacred writings of religions do not address the intellect and conceptual knowledge of God, there is no theoretical basis in them for the emergence of theology understood as a rational or speculative interpretation of the being of God and divine revelations. That is why, appearing to give rational grounds to the images with which believers conceive of divinity and its relations with them, the theologian invokes the reason for, “after guaranteeing for correct reasons” his interpretation of what has been revealed, he finds “reasons for make reason uncertain”, fighting it and condemning it. The theologians, explains Spinoza, in chapter XV of the TTP, took care to discover how to extort from the Holy Books their own fictions and arbitrariness and therefore “do nothing with less scruple and greater temerity than the interpretation of the Scriptures” and the only thing that worries each one is to have the authority of his interpretation contested by others who dispute with him the power to interpret.

Theology, therefore, is a system of images with pretension to the concept in the scope of obtaining, on the one hand, the recognition of the theologian’s authority (and not of the intrinsic truth of his interpretation) and, on the other, the submission of those who listen to him, all the more so if it is achieved by inner consent. The theologian seeks to obtain the desire to obey and to serve. That is why *all theology is an exercise of power and a foundation for a specific type of politics, tyranny*. Useless for faith – because it is reduced to very simple contents and few precepts of justice and charity – dangerous to free reason – which operates according to an autonomous internal need – theology is harmful to political freedom because it precludes the labour of the social conflicts considering the sake of peace, security and citizens’ freedom. Nothing is more terrible for freedom and politics than political theology.

However, the stabilization of superstition through rites and doctrines may not be sufficient to ensure durability for political power. Indeed, the visibility inherent to politics seems to place sovereignty very close to other humans and within their reach, unlike religion, which, more distant because it would be closer to the god, seems to be heading towards invisibility. So we read in the preface of the TTP, those who know that “there is no way more efficient to dominate the crowd than superstition,” seek to deify the political and induce, “under the guise of piety, to love the kings as were gods or hate them as the scourge of mankind “. The sacralization of political power is the work of theology, which now holds the secrets of the political. Captured by theological seduction, rulers adhere to the sacredness of political authority due to the ceremonial, the secrecy, the censorship laws, the possession of

armies and fortresses, and the use of imprisonment, torture, and death of the opposition, turned into enemies to be exterminated.

Therefore, born of fear, superstition gives birth to two new and powerful fears: in religion, one is afraid of the god (for, as it is read in the Holy Scriptures, “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”), and in politics, one is afraid of the ruler (because the “reason of State” hides the real reasons of power from citizens and reduces them to the condition of vassals) – but not only that. In an endless mirroring, the fear of the divine, invisible or what is visualized by the rites, creates in the religious imagination of the believers the fear of the theologian and, in this, the fear of heterodoxy and rivals. Fear of the human, under the effects of social and political division, creates in the political imagination of the dominated the fear of the governor and, in this, the fear of the governed. Thus, in order not to be subject to the vicissitudes of Fortune, immoderately craving goods that do not depend on them and fearing evils that do not seem to depend on them, humans, after all, accept to be at the mercy of powers whose form, content and action seem to them to bear security, as long as they are directly obeyed or their representatives are obeyed.

Religion rationalizes (in a psychoanalytic sense) fear and hope; submission to political power as the power of a secret sovereign will, situated above the individual wills of the governed, rationalizes the permitted and the prohibited. This double rationalization is most potent when religion is monotheistic, revealed and destined for a people who think they are elected by god. The potency of this political-religious rationalization is even greater if some experts or specialists claim the exclusive competence and the power to interpret the revelations (therefore the divine wills), deciding on the content of the good and the evil, the just and the unjust, the true and false, permitted and prohibited, possible and impossible, in addition to deciding who has the right to political power and the legal forms of civil obedience. This domination is religious and political – it is political theology.

Superstition delegates to religion and this one delegates to theology the delusional task of finding an imaginary unit, able to cover and reconcile a reality perceived as fragmented in space and time, made of multiple and contrary forces, a unit that appears to ensure the continuity of events and control over angry Nature, which pacifies angry governments, guarantees hopes and conjures terrors. This unity cannot, of course, belong to the same dimension as that of the fragmented and lacerated world, but it must transcend it, in order to keep the isolated and opposing parts cohesive. This cohesion can only be obtained by the extraordinary power of a will and a look capable of sweeping in a single stroke the totality of time, space, the visible and the invisible. Thereby, the fragmentation experienced with anxiety by imagination leads an imaginary unification also, whose household is the providential will of a divine ruler. Due to this power, which is one because it is transcendent

to the fragmentation of nature and the divisions of society, the course of events seems assured and the fate of each one safeguarded.

However, the safeguard is precarious. Because this power is imaginary, it remains unknown and surrounded by mysteries, the image of God becomes an incomprehensible amalgam, since the omnipotence of his will, the place where the intelligibility of his action would lodge, means, on the contrary, that he does everything he can as it sees fit and it is therefore contingent and arbitrary. Secrets are his reasons. Mysterious is his omniscience. Thus, in order to be seen as omnipotent and omniscient, divine power must be seen as unfathomable and illocalisable, duplicating the mystery of the world that had demanded it.

This image of the high powers or the power of the High seems to descend from heaven to earth. The same desire to submit to a single and sovereign power, because transcending the fragmentation of the conflicts that tear society and politics, produces among men a relationship that will lead, in the end, to submission to the mysterious power of the rulers. With the advent of the *arcana imperii* – the secrets of power or the “reason of state” – men, we read in the conclusion of the preface to the TTP, “fight for serfdom as if it were their salvation”. In reality, however, and Spinoza does not tire of repeating it, this representation has risen from earth to heaven – *politics is not religion or secularized theology; on the contrary, religion and theology are sacralized politics.*

Spinoza’s critique of theological-political power aims to untie the bond that holds the experience of contingency, the feeling of fear and the imaginary of transcendent power in a single fabric. To this end, Spinoza distinguishes between two ways of facing contingency or chance.

In one of them, since, being unable to dominate all the circumstances of our lives, we conclude that we have no power over some of them – this is living in fear of the uncertain future, in doubt and anguish, in insecurity, which gives rise to superstition, to the belief in the transcendence of divine power and the divinatory power of magicians and priests, in short, which gives rise to theological power and monarchical power. *Power born out of fear alone is always imagined as transcendent and separate from men (power of God), from believers (theological power) and from citizens (monarchical power).*

There is, however, another way to face contingency. We now distinguish between what is completely subject to the power of external causes (or what is outside our power) and what is in our power under the circumstances. We direct our effort and our power towards the conservation of these circumstances and the expansion of their presence or, in other words, we seek to reinforce the present so that it is able to determine the future, in such a way that, thanks to us, circumstances receive stability or a kind of necessity. In this case, we move from hope

to security⁹ and to preserve it we need to maintain the circumstances that allowed it. Now, the increase in circumstances in our power does not change the hope of security except when we establish the instruments of time stabilization, that is, political institutions that are and remain in our power. This means that the instituted political power is not separated from the citizens, but is immanent to the citizens, that is, it is the democratic politics. So, in TTP¹⁰, democracy is considered the most natural form of politics, and in the TP¹¹, the superior form of politics, *absolutum imperium*, since power remains immanent to society or to the group of citizens that instituted it, realizing the natural desire to govern, because, “it is certain that each one wishes to govern instead of being governed”.¹² It is democracy that makes explicit the identity of the enemy, whom Spinoza designates with the term *privatus*, that is, the individual or group of individuals who, in the name of their private interests, give themselves the power to abolish or decree the laws and decide without the consent of all citizens.

Now, since the origin of political power is immanent to social actions, then the political subject is a collective subject (the *multitudo*), the civil law is the potency of the *multitudo*¹³ and the constituents of the collective subject decide to act in common, but not to think in common, the theological-political power is three times violent: first, because it intends to deprive humans of the knowledge about the origin of their social actions and policies, placing them as the fulfillment of transcendent commandments of an incomprehensible or secret divine will, the foundation of the action of the ruler or of the “reason of State” as an absolute and exceptional decision; second, because the revealed divine laws, put as political or civil laws, prevent the exercise of freedom, since they regulate not only habits and customs, but also language and thought, seeking to dominate, in addition to bodies, spirits; third, because, insofar as it instrumentalizes religious belief to ensure consented obedience and make humans think it honorable to shed their blood and that of others to satisfy the ambition of a few, this power gives rise to voluntary servitude, a desire to serve those above to be served by those below – submission that is the desire for tyranny.

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9 Spinoza distinguishes between hope and security: the first refers to the uncertainty of the coming of a good or of preventing an evil from happening; the second refers to the certainty that good will happen and evil will not come.

10 TTP, op.cit., Chapter XVI. Spinoza describes the materiality of the emergence of social life through the community occupation of the soil and the equitable exchange of products, which lead to the institution of a political power that preserves this initial equality, therefore, to democracy.

11 Spinoza 1925, T.IV, chapter XI.

12 Ibid, 309.

13 “The right of the City is defined by the power of the multitude (*potentia multitudinis*) that is driven in some way by the same thought and this union of minds cannot be conceived if the City does not aim to accomplish what reason teaches all men that it is useful to wait”, Ibid Chapter III, p.

We will better assess the break with Schmitt when we understand that Spinoza's critique of theological-political power is aimed at understanding what monarchy is and its essential link with war, because it is the political regime that originates from the fear of war and is sustained thanks to this fear, as announced in the preface of the *Theological-Political* and developed in the *Political Treaty*. In other words, it is inevitable that, in thinking politics as war, Schmitt articulated political theology and absolute monarchy, articulation whose meaning is revealed by Spinoza's political analysis. Indeed, in Chapter VII of the *Political Treaty*, Spinoza writes: "if a king is often elected due to war because kings war better, this election is stupid, because to make war more happily one chooses to live in bondage during peace, and this admitting that let there be peace in a state where sovereign power has been transferred to one man simply because of the war inasmuch as in this one the boss has a value that serves everyone and appears best on that occasion."¹⁴

However, in chapter X, Spinoza takes up the genesis of the monarchy starting from a certain determination in the social experience which makes that "stupidity" mentioned in chapter VII to be something less stupid than we might suppose. Now we read:

"Those who are terrified by the enemy do not let yourselves be held back by any fear: throw yourselves in the water, rush into the fire to escape the opponent's irons. However well regulated the City may be, however excellent its institutions may be, in times of anguish for power, when everyone is possessed by a panic and a fear, when nothing else exists but the terror of the present, everyone is carried away by the dictated tendency out of fear, without worrying about the future or the laws, and all eyes are turned on the man whose victories were exhibited. Everyone places him above the law, by a disastrous decision they prolong their power and entrust him with public affairs".¹⁵

Political experience is determined by images of the social and the political. When these images are permeated by the fear of death and the loss of self, they produce a remedy that is a real poison: the need for a savior who is given much more than the immediate hope of salvation, because, to obtain it, the *multitudo* gives to someone the future right to oppression. The Schmittian praise of the absolute monarchy is opposed by Spinoza's conclusion:

"Experience seems to teach that, in the interests of peace and harmony, all power should belong to one. Indeed, no state has remained as long without any noticeable changes as that of the Turks, and in contrast, no city has been less stable than the popular or democratic

.....
14 Ibid, p.307

15 Ibid., p. 357

cities, nor where so many seditions have occurred. But if peace has to be called servitude, barbarism and loneliness, there is nothing more regrettable for men than peace. (...) As we have already said, peace does not consist in the absence of war, but in the union of spirits, that is, in harmony. It is, therefore, servitude, not peace, that requires that all power be in the hands of one".¹⁶

Translation by Diogo Faia Fagundes

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¹⁶ Ibid., p. 298.

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