

## Transcript

**Ki-myung Kim - "What would the institution of the universal faith in democracy look like?"**

**Ki-myung Kim:**

So, the leading question of my work is this one. There are two statements about religious institutions in *Tractatus Politicus*: the first type is aristocratic institution of universal faith, and the second type is monarchical institution of private churches. And my question is naturally what would the religious institution in democracy look like in TP, because the Chapter about democracy is not finished?

So, I'll give you five second to look at ... this first type of aristocratic religious institution. Here in the aristocratic institution, there are two elements. The first one is national religion or state's religion for patricians and statesmen. It is based on the universal faith described in TTP as Spinoza said and he think the multi-confessionality among the patricians is very dangerous, so religious political conflicts among the patricians are never allowed.

But the second element of the aristocratic religious institution is the subject's freedom of belief and the private ... church has to be guaranteed. So, there are small sects in private churches and only big assemblies of each sect are forbidden. Some scholars see a very similarity to the idea of cult of the supreme being of Maximilien Robespierre in the French revolution. This cult should be upon every other religions and it's a religion of the state, or a religion of the revolution. And the doctrines are based on the rationalist view of God and moral principles. The scholars like Feuer think it's truly identical to Spinoza's universal faith doctrine. But is it true? That is my question.

I think we should notice that such features are designed for aristocracy whereas Spinoza prefers to be a democrat. So, let's look at the second version. I'll give you five seconds as well...

The monarchical religious institution is very different to the aristocratic version because the issue of a state or national religion with the universal faith is completely taken away. And even the monarch may only have his own private confession and his own court church, just as the subjects do. So, in this statement religion is a private matter.

There is a significant difference between the monarchy ... the feature of monarchy in TTP and that in TP, because in TTP the monarchy is sketched like as a religious totalitarianism. So, the example was the Mosaic and post-Mosaic political system of the Hebrew state. And also, there are many mentions about imperial court like of Augustus or Alexander the Great, et cetera. And there is also his contemporary example, the Ottoman Islamic empire. So, Spinoza mentioned about Mohammedan church, of Turks, as a significant example of religious totalitarianism, coupled with the authoritarian monarchical regime. But in TP the monarchy is coupled with the institution of privatized religion, fragmented religion and there is not much information as to why, as Curley put in his translation of TP.

So, it's just my presumption, designing a monarchical institution, religious institutions, Spinoza may think of a similar thing like Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations". It's quite opposite attempt to Robespierre in the same era and it stands for a free market of private religion. But unlike the economy where the invisible hand helps for prospering, and extension of the economic wealth, the invisible

hand in the religious free market will make a slow demise of religions through fragmentation, that could keep mass mobilizations impossible.

But this type of mere fragmentation has nothing to do with the universal faith in TTP 14, where Spinoza was a convicted democrat. So, then what would the religious institution in democracy look like, in the sovereignty of the multitude. So, there is a space for reasoning. And as a methodology I have two ways of reasoning. So, from TP I will derive some general principles in his design of religious institutions, and from TTP I will take into account the ideological political feature of the universal religion as an instrument of democratic citizen-making.

So, there are two common principles of religious institution in TP. The first one is there must be a common religious fundament, especially in a state where political sovereignty is in the hands of plural persons, because religious diversity among the rulers has a potential for harmful political conflicts.

The second principle is that the multitude is of all religions, indispensable religions, and the multitudes freedom of belief cannot be abolished in any case, because the extent of diversity among the multitude and the magnitude of its power make that an impossible task.

So again, into the aristocracy and monarchy. So, there are there are the rulers and there are the ruled, each in aristocracy and monarchy. So, for the ruler in aristocracy there is one common superior religion of the patricians, and for the ruled there are private churches of the subject. And the monarchy in contrast to the aristocracy, the monarch has his own private church and there is no superiority and no need for universal faith, and the subject has also their private churches.

The problem is that democracy is a political constitution in which the multitude both rules and is ruled, so it's government by all. Thus, in democracy both principles need to be instantiated on the one single plane of the multitude. So, it... therefore it is a kind of aporia. Because it is impossible that there is one national church or cult in a democratic republic, according to the principle 2, namely, the multitude is supposed to have religious freedom.

Nevertheless, according to the first principle the common religious fundament of the multitude is necessary because the masses are plural and they are the sovereign, at least theoretically.

So, I now look into the ideological political function of universal faith in TTP. There is very infamous tension between religious authoritarianism in TTP Chapter 19 and freedom of religion in TTP Chapter 20. And the usual reading of this tension is like, the authoritarian control is about the external piety, the exercise of religion, and the freedom of religion is about the internal piety. So, it's a quite generalized reading of this issue. But I would like to look into a more historical background of Spinoza's discursive strategy in the tension between Chapter 19 and 20.

There were at that time in the 1660s, in this decade, there are there ... was a possible crisis of liberal government of Jan De Witt and the religious minorities due to the defiance and hatred of the authoritarian, or in our modern world, populist, alliance of Calvinist and Orangist. So, the state control of religion in Chapter 19 is likely to be designed not generally against any form of free exercise of religion by any person, rather particularly against the assertion of power and authority by the religious leaders like Calvinist leaders.

So, in such a multi-religious society like the Netherlands or Dutch Republic I think Spinoza's aim to write these Treatise is first to deprive the Calvinist leaders of their ideological influence over the majority of the vulgus or multitude. Second to design a way of building a liberal republican hegemony by making an ideological alliance of the liberal government and the religious multitude. And it is not about just only some "wise merchant" as Mogens Laerke yesterday said about.

Third, to find a way of citizen-making in and through the religious education apparatus for the sake of democracy. I thought of Althusser's famous article "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in this regard. So, what is the universal faith, at all?

There are there are two elements of universal faith in TTP 14. Spinoza firstly extracts from the existing religions some common doctrine. It was seven ... doctrines in TTP 14, but I think it's rather historical and conjunctural doctrines not really general. But the really general doctrines are just justice, charity and obedience, is the truly universal core doctrine of every religion, as Spinoza said. And more importantly Spinoza identifies obedience with charity, it's really interesting point.

The second element of universal faith is freedom of interpretation of the bible and all other religious matters by everyone, at least theoretically.

So next to the ideological politics of citizen-making, why is obedience equals charity so important? Because the translation of obedience equals charity could be into political language the loyalty equals solidarity, or patriotism equals tolerance. So, in the religion you can say like if you are faithful you shall love your neighbour. And in political language you can say like, if you're patriot you shall demonstrate your solidarity with your fellow citizens. So, it's kind of democratic republican ideology or way of life, ... with which the multitude is supposed to be educated.

One more problem about this issue is: who is my fellow citizen? There is a significant difference between theocracy and democracy. I think Marie will say more about this issue in the evening. So, in the Mosaic, post-Mosaic theocracy, fellow citizens are only my equals. People with other beliefs are my enemy. So, the summary of this mindset is in Chapter 19: love your neighbour and hate your enemy. And it is, as Spinoza said, one of the reasons why the Hebrew state collapsed.

In contrast to the theocratic idea of a fellow citizen, for Spinoza fellow citizens are particularly the others. And this means people with other beliefs. There is very interesting passage in Chapter 14. I quote: "the true antichrist are those who persecute honest men and lovers of justice because they differ from them in doctrines and do not adhere to the same tenets of belief as themselves. But we know that those who love justice and charity ... sorry ... are faithful by this measure alone and he who persecutes the faithful is an antichrist".

So, charity for Spinoza means always love your fellow citizens of other beliefs.

So, the second aspect of universal faith was the freedom of biblical interpretation and I think it's not just about an individual or private freedom of belief as such. It's rather about educational measures for the collective subjectivity of a multitudo libera, so free multitude, again not only of some wise merchants, that in democracy needs to be able to exercise its sovereignty together, without interference of priests or prophets. And I think the modern language... of modern vocabulary of the figure of prophets in TTP could be translated into demagogues or populists in our time.

I think the freedom of belief so can be a catalyst of public discourse in civic education, in the republic. Freedom is the purpose of the state, the the famous statement of Spinoza, therefore doesn't refer to the individual freedom as such but to the politics that make the free exchange of opinions in the republic possible.

So, in conclusion I think in democracy the most natural state, Spinoza says, there doesn't need to be one single national church as in aristocracy. And in this regard the later scheme of the state secularism, like secular state versus religious religions or civil religion versus private religions, may not be compatible with TTP. And nor is Lockean style multiculturalism or relativism. So, the idea of universal faith needs to go with more delicate treatments of ... religions existing in the society. I think there could be a bottom-up aspect and top-down aspect, because the multitude is the ruler and the ruled at the same time. And the number one goal of both is to weaken the power of religious leaders or political demagogues or populists.

So, I think as a bottom-up aspect the universal faith can be a civil and ecumenical movement of the existing religions, sects, as well as of the individual believers as praxis of charity. And again, the praxis of tolerance or solidarity. And the top-down aspect of universal faith, the role of government the government has a control upon the leadership of churches and sects, particularly against their hate speech toward the rightful government of the multitude and religious minorities.

And it should support freedom of religion, opinion and speech of multitude which can damage the authority of the church leaders. So, you know in Chapter five I guess there are there is very interesting statement... it's like Spinoza says like we need a teacher who can teach the the vulgus, the layperson, rightly about the meaning of biblical history etc. So yeah, it I think it's coupled with the freedom of interpretation of biblical studies etc, and the government also should embrace existing religions and religious imaginary, and the government should use religious language for the sake of the democratic solidarity of the multitude as a citizen-making ideology.

So, there is a interesting statement in Chapter 19, I quote "furthermore what I meant by kingdom of God here is plain enough I suppose from Chapter 14. We show there that a person will face the law of God by practicing justice and charity at God's command from which it follows that the kingdom of God is a kingdom in which justice and charity have the force of law and command. I cannot see that it makes any difference here whether God teaches and commands the true practice of justice and charity by the natural light of reason, or by revelation."

It's of course about the authority of the state of a religion or the true elements of true religion, but I think it's also about the need for an ideological strategy of citizen-making in and through the existing religious complex in the society, and in the best case, in democracy. That's it, thank you for listening to my stuff.