

Spinoza and hobbes on religious and political freedoms



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I. Introduction Dominant interpretations of the Leviathan seem to always point to fear as the affect that convinces Hobbesian subjects to enter the social contract in the first place and to steadfastly obey the sovereign. Hobbes often defines institutions within the landscape in terms of either fear or anxiety. Hobbes even defines religion as, “ Fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind or imagined from tales publicly allowed (42).” There has been a surge of scholarship in recent decades that moves away from this preoccupation with fear and obedience towards other conceptions of how Hobbes’s community operates. Some readings have proposed that Hobbes was in some ways a protoliberal, an advocate for toleration or a voice for bourgeoisie values. J. Judd Owen makes a case, in his 2005 article *The Tolerant Leviathan*, that Hobbes could be classified as a liberal philosopher as his doctrine of toleration is not too different from Locke’s tolerant worldview. Owen argues that although Hobbes does not grant unconditional rights to his subjects he does conceive of a type of government that has limited purposes (139). Owen’s reading of the text deemphasizes the ways in which Hobbes’s system is held together by violence or the threat of violence. Other non-traditional readings of the Leviathan, like Mary Dietz’s essay *Hobbes’s Subject as Citizen*, also deemphasize the authoritarian components in Hobbes’s theory. Dietz argues that Hobbes based his system on the cultivation of civic virtues. According to Dietz, individuals would honor the social contract not simply because they feared the sovereign but also because they would internalize values like generosity and justice which compelled them to look for the common good in society. Internalization of these values would ensure civic community and cohesion among Hobbesian subjects (95-96). The following essay will explore the concept of civic

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community but will not solely concentrate on Hobbes's treatment of the concept. Instead, it will also draw upon Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise and examine the startling differences between the two texts. Hobbes and Spinoza are two theorists that are often aligned against each other not only because they were rationalists who shared the same time period but also because Spinoza was reputedly influenced by much of Hobbes's writing. Spinoza referred to the Leviathan when he composed the Theological-Political Treatise (Elwes's introduction xxxii). This paper will attempt to trace how Spinoza's system offers a more complete and satisfactory conception of civic community. Civic community entails the definition that Dietz highlights in her text as being a society that is cohesive. However, civic community, as defined by political scientists like Robert Putnam, also had additional connotations. According to Putnam, civic community also involves civic engagement, political equality and associations that foster cooperation (87-89). Spinoza, rather than Hobbes, is a true advocate for civic community and cohesion as he grants greater space for religious expression and political freedoms such as freedom of speech. Hobbes' political system is primarily concerned with limiting many forms of public expression and the possible civic community that usually results from such free expression. Spinoza and Hobbes both agreed that religion should not serve as a competing source of authority to a sovereign. They both also maintained that the sovereign should ban forms of speech that could possibly incite rebellion. However, Spinoza grants his subjects much greater freedoms to express themselves within his polity and this freedom helps foster civic community. Empirical examples from the 19th and 20th centuries help illustrate the positive benefits of Spinoza's liberalism. Religious and

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political expression encourages community by fostering charity among worshipers and by allowing space for subjects to question forms of authority. Historical examples such as the Roman Catholic Church's advocacy in Poland demonstrate how infringing upon religious space can cause churchgoers to rebel and precipitate a community crisis. Religious pluralism in places like Poland and 19th century America can inspire social movements that advance egalitarian values and civic engagement. In order to gain a better understanding of their religious ideas one must not only examine their stances on religious freedoms but also examine Hobbes and Spinoza's interpretations of Biblical material. Both offered some radical insights but Hobbes spent greater rhetorical energy in manipulating parts of the text to conform to his political vision. Historical examples, like the antebellum South, demonstrate that such a move can lead to subjugation rather than the construction of a more civic and egalitarian community.

II. Secular State

Spinoza and Hobbes make numerous appeals throughout their texts for the creation of a secular state in which the sovereign has sole power to interpret and enforce state laws. Neither philosopher alleges that the state can in some way eradicate religious impulses out of individuals. Hobbes maintains in his early chapter on religion (Chapter 12) that, "[it] can never be so abolished out of human nature, but that new religions may again be made to spring out of them, by the culture of such men, as for such purpose are in reputation (83)." Human beings will always be anxious of the future and thus in Hobbes view will always invent religions in order to assuage their anxiety. However, Hobbes is deeply troubled by how religious devotion can inspire men to commit injustices in the name of God and attempt to challenge power under religious decree. Hobbes explicitly states that a covenant with

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God should never be recognized and that the sovereign should be, " Judge of what opinions and Doctrines are averse, and what conducing to peace (122)." Similarly, Spinoza also declares that the church must come under the rule of the sovereign power. Spinoza states, " We see how necessary it is, both in the interests of the state and in the interests of religion to confer on the sovereign power the right of deciding what is lawful or the reverse (242)." He makes explicit his desire for the sovereign to have control over the religious sphere when he states, " we shall easily understand how the sovereign rulers are the proper interpreters of religion and piety (249)." III. Religious Spaces and Conscience While both philosophers argue for secular rule, Hobbes goes much further in attempting to deny private space for worship and the accessing of one's conscience. Hobbes delineates between public and private worship, stating that: " publique, [worship] in respect of the whole Common-wealth is Free, but in respect of Particular men it is not so. Private, is in secret Free, but in the sight of the multitude, it is never without some Restraint, either from the Lawes, or from the opinion of men; which is contrary to the nature of liberty (249)." Hobbes conceives of public and private worship mainly as instruments of obedience. He frames this passage within a discussion of the ways in which prayers, thanks and obedience are worthy signs of honor. When Hobbes refers to ' public worship as free' he is imitating that public worship should be permissible if it intended to somehow honor the good deeds of others within the commonwealth. Hobbes pictures public worship as the, " winning of favour by good offices; as by praises, by acknowledging their Power, and by whatsoever is pleasing to them from whom we look for any benefit (248)."

This concept of worship is limited. People often turn to worship to question <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

the direction of their lives and to question authority. In the above quoted passage Hobbes seems to be condemning the practice of private worship as he intimates that something outside the public gaze lacks restraint and could be seditious. Karen Feldman, in her paper *Conscience and the Concealments of Metaphor in Hobbes's Leviathan*, presents a compelling argument of how Hobbes expresses apprehension towards concepts such as privacy and conscience throughout his work. Her work does provide a helpful framework for understanding how Hobbes viewed private worship. She argues that Hobbes considers privacy to be a dangerous concept because in this space individuals are able to access their conscience and form opinions that contradict those of the sovereign. Feldman states, "The divergences and conflicts produced by private judgment and opinion are thus threatening to the stability of the commonwealth, for they break with what Hobbes describes as the public character of knowledge, reason, and law (22)."

Hobbes most forcefully describes his reservations towards private space and conscience in this passage: "Another doctrine repugnant to Civill Society, is, that whatsoever a man does against his conscience, is sin; and it dependeth on the presumption of making himself judge of good and evil. For a man's conscience, and his judgment is the same thing, and as the judgment, so also the conscience may be erroneous. Therefore, though he that is subject to no civil law, sinneth in all he does against his conscience, because he has no other rule to follow but his own reason; yet it is not so with him that lives in a commonwealth; because the law is the public conscience, by which he hath already undertaken to be guided. Otherwise in such diversity, as there is of private consciences, which are but private opinions, the commonwealth must needs be distracted, and no man dare to obey the sovereign power, <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

further than it shall seem good in his own eyes" (223). Public 'conscience' is valorized while private conscience can be both erroneous and is also a hindrance to the commonwealth. According to Hobbes, men guided by their private conscience will act in conflicting ways and nurture seditious thoughts. While Hobbes does not directly state that private spaces primarily inspire this type of thinking, Feldman argues that Hobbes' use of the proposition "in" when discussing conscience implies interiority and private space (23-24). At one point Hobbes asserts, "But this pretence of Covenant with God, is so evident a lye, even in the pretenders own consciences, that it is not onely an act of an unjust but also of a vile and unmanly disposition (122)." Later when describing the duties of the sovereign, Hobbes writes, "as much as in his own conscience he shall judge necessary (231)." At the end of the text, Hobbes once again invokes this construction when stating, "when there is scarce a Common-wealth in the world, whose beginnings can in conscience be justified (486). It is possible that Hobbes used the proposition "in" in these occurrences to signify how Hobbes intended to frame conscience as something that operates in private space. If we grant the possibility that 'in' signifies private space the first quoted passage in which Hobbes refers to unmanly disposition could also be viewed as an injunction against private worship. Because private worship involves quiet, serious contemplation it is a setting where most individuals will access their conscience. This correlation implies that Hobbes was deeply troubled by the practice of private worship and would not encourage it within his polity. Hobbes makes a more explicit condemnation of public faith when he recommends that public worship be thoroughly uniform. In his chapter The Kingdome of God by Nature, Hobbes declares:" But seeing a Common-wealth <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

is but one Person, it ought also to exhibit to God one worship...And this Publique Worship; the property whereof, is to be Uniforme: For those actions that are done differently, by different men, cannot be said to be a Publique Worship" (252-253). Because the sovereign controls all public doctrines public worship for Hobbes would only serve the needs of the state, not the needs of an individuals seeking answers or salvation. In his effort to enforce a uniform doctrine the sovereign would not grant the religious institutions any autonomy to develop their own programs. Hobbes also expresses suspicion towards members of clergy throughout the text and thus would not likely provide churches much freedom to operate. Spinoza—Public and Private Religious Space Near the end of the treatise Spinoza lays out the boundaries between public and private worship and limits the power the sovereign wields in the private sphere. Spinoza states:" Moreover, the rites of religion and the outward observances of piety should be in accordance with the public peace and well-being, and should be determined by the sovereign power alone. I speak here only of the outward observances of piety and the external rites of religion, not of piety itself, nor of the inward worship of God" (245). Spinoza maintains that the intrusion of public authorities into private sphere of religious worship could alienate the citizenry and possibly damage the sovereign's authority in the process. At the outset of his work Spinoza boldly states that, " In demonstrating that not only can such freedom be granted without prejudice to the public peace, but also, that without such freedom, piety cannot flourish nor the public peace be secure (6)." Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza makes no recommendation for a uniform religious doctrine or for complete control over religious institutions.

In the preface to the TPT, Spinoza recognizes the conflict that can arise when <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

ambitious men gain control of the pulpit but he does not view complete incursion into public religious spaces as the optimal solution for this conflict.

How Religious Spaces Help Construct Civic Community

There are numerous historical examples that support Spinoza's assertion that public peace is best secured when the government allows for some type of religious expression. The Roman Catholic Church's resistance to Communist rule is one of the most noteworthy examples of how excessive intrusion into religious sphere can foment political crisis. By the 1950's, Communist leaders began to take aggressive actions against Polish church authorities. Religious leaders were imprisoned and Soviet elites openly discriminated against lay members. Soviet-modeled campaigns also emphasized the elimination of religion (Borowski 390). Intellectuals within the party promoted an idea of 'instant secularization'. Supposedly, Polish society would undergo an instant process of secularization due to anti-religious efforts and urbanization (Borowski 395). The Catholic Church was deeply rooted within Polish culture. According to political scientist Karen Borowski the church was not only a vehicle for salvation but also concerned with, "all matters related to individual and societal welfare of the country, e. g. concerns about the economy, agricultural reform, education, environmental protection, work and re-compensation, value of human life, peace and justice (390)." Soviet intrusion into public and private religious spaces spurred a major uprising against Communist rule. By the 1970s, the Roman Catholic Church assumed a critical role in resisting Communist oppression. The Solidarity Movement, a prominent organizing union with alliances to church officials began winning concessions from Soviet officials in this period. In 1981, the communist government responded by instating martial law and brutally suppressing

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organizers. After brutal suppression the church remained the only organized voice in the country. Eventually, the church and union activists toppled the Communist regime and helped usher in a period of radical liberalization and privatization in the early 1990s (391). The Polish example is a valid demonstration for how Spinoza's political system is more conducive for establishing order and encouraging forms of civic community. Poland currently enjoys greater stability, civic engagement and political equality than it enjoyed during the Communist years. Granting religious space to religious organizations has not led to any type of religious domination or caused a deterioration of civic community. Now Poland enjoys consumer society, higher education levels and democratic rights like voting. Martin Myant and Terry Cox's 2004 surveys of Polish citizens indicate that majority of Poles do not want the church to influence elections or take a position on legislation (135). Poles also overwhelmingly supported Poland's membership into the EU despite the fact that it is not a Catholic federation. If one measures civic community by voter turnout, Poland's civic community should be deemed quite healthy. Presidential election turnout in 1990 was at 61 percent; in 1995 it ran at 65% and dropped a little in 2000 to 60% (Myant and Cox 131). Hobbes's political system would have difficulty reconciling a case like Poland's in which religious space did not lead to a major decline in civic order in the long run.

IV. Religious Spaces and Charity

Spinoza also grants this private sphere for religious worship and the access of individual conscience because he felt that such space would inherently encourage both obedience and charity among subjects. He states, " Faith consists in knowledge of God, without which obedience to Him would be impossible (185)." Spinoza does not require men to master the Bible in order to gain

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knowledge of God but he does recommend that men devote part of their time to religious study in order to cultivate a greater understanding of faith. He writes, “ intellectual or accurate knowledge of God is not a gift, bestowed upon all good men like obedience (177).” It is something that can be understood even by those with “ the slowest intelligence” if the individual place effort into studying it (175). Men who possess genuine faith will hold love in their heart for their neighbors and charitably act for the benefit of others (186). Charity is the central tenet in Spinoza’s doctrine. Spinoza assesses, “ that we can only judge a man faithful or unfaithful by his works... faith without works is dead (185).” These passages imply that Spinoza is drawing a correlation between religiosity and charity. For Spinoza, religious sentiment compels selfless giving. Essentially, Spinoza describes the private sphere of religious devotion in strikingly different terms than Hobbes because he views it not as an arena where seditious thinking is possible but instead as a practice that instills obedience and charity among worshipers. Unlike Spinoza, Hobbes was not a major advocate for charity motivated by religious devotion. He maintained that, “ obedience to his Lawes [sovereign] is the greatest worship of all. For as Obedience is more acceptable to God than Sacrifice; so also to set light by his Commandement, is the greatest of all contumelies. And these are the laws of that Divine Worship, which naturall Reason dictateth to private men (252).” It seems significant that this passage Spinoza highlights private men rather than religious institutions committed to charity. He is prone to cast suspicion on clerical officials claiming to hold answers and thus would also likely doubt the sincerity of institutions providing charity. Historical Examples of Religious Worship and Charity Empirical research demonstrates that Spinoza’s correlation between <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

religious worship and charity has some validity and can be said to be an ingredient towards the construction of a civic community. Charitable giving, according to political scientists such as Robert Putnam, is a legitimate measure of civic community (88). American sociologist Arthur Brooks, in his article Religious Faith and Charitable Giving, argues that religious faith correlates to charitable giving. Brooks draws upon the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCCBS), undertaken in 2000 by researchers at universities throughout the United States and the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. Brooks defines 'religious' people as respondents that report attending religious services every week or more often. This is 33 percent of the sample. In contrast, those who are 'secular' report attending religious services less than a few times per year or emphatically state that they have no religion. Brooks used regression analysis in order to control for variables like gender and political affiliation. Brooks found that religious citizens who make \$49,000 contributed about 3.5 times as much money as secular citizens with the same income to charitable causes. He found that they also volunteered twice as often and were 57 percent more likely to help homeless persons. Furthermore, these individuals were two-thirds more likely to give blood at their workplace (2). Brooks also finds that religious charitable giving is usually not self-serving but instead contributes to the larger community. In other words, religious philanthropists gave to both religious and nonreligious causes in greater quantity than secular philanthropists. Sixty-eight percent of the total population gives (and 51 percent volunteers) to nonreligious causes each year. Of this total, religious people were 10 points more likely to give to nonreligious institutions than secularists (71 percent to 61 percent) and 21 points more likely to volunteer

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(60 percent to 39 percent). Neighborhood and civic groups, elderly support and youth programs were the non-secular causes that Brooks identifies. He finds that religious people had a 7 point higher likelihood for volunteering for neighborhood and civic groups, 20 point higher likelihood for volunteering to help the poor or elderly, and a 26 point higher likelihood for volunteering for school or youth programs (3). Brooks also discounts the notion that secular individuals were more likely to offset charity by giving informally to family and friends. Using 1999 data from the Bureau of Labor Standards, Brooks finds that informal and formal charity are not substitutes for each other (3) Overall, Brook's research does provide compelling evidence that religion stimulates charity in general.

V. Interpretations of the Bible

Spinoza's Interpretation of the Bible

Spinoza's primary project in much of TPT is advocating for a plural understanding of religious faith rather than presenting a hierarchy of which religious doctrine constitutes truth. Unlike Hobbes, he does not alter Biblical scriptures in order to promote a self-serving political agenda. Spinoza scholar Steven Frankel argues that his aim in the Theological Political Treatise is to, " further undermine biblical support for theocracy and establish a religion more friendly to tolerance and freedom (301)." Spinoza does this by denying the Jewish notion of divine election and by humanizing major prophets. Spinoza dismisses the idea of Jews as a chosen people when he writes, " Jews of that time were not more beloved by God than other nations...God was, as we have said already, and are now demonstrating, equally gracious to all (49)." Spinoza also debases the concept of hierarchy by arguing that prophets, although wise men, were not the divine incarnations that many suppose. He states that prophets did not possess superhuman minds (18) and that, " the power of prophecy implies

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not a peculiarly perfect mind, but a peculiarly vivid imagination (19).”

Frankel alleges that Spinoza attributed human flaws to the prophets in order to point to inconsistencies in religious doctrines and support ideas of pluralism and universality in religious faith (302). Spinoza preferred that a believer had simple faith in God rather than rigidly cling to a particular dogma. Spinoza also expresses disapproval for those who attempt to shift scripture in order to serve political purposes. After laying out how the principles of reason can aid one in understanding scripture Spinoza declares, “ Lastly such a theory supposes that we may explain the words of Scripture according to our preconceived opinions, twisting them about, and reversing or completely changing the literal sense, however plain it may be. Such license is utterly opposed to the teaching of this and the preceding chapters, and moreover, will be evident to everyone as rash and excessive (117).”

Hobbes’s Interpretation of the Bible Hobbes does not promote the type of pluralist thinking that Spinoza embodies and instead aggressively manipulates Biblical scriptures in order promote his political agenda. Unlike Spinoza, Hobbes does not ascribe any value to religious pluralism and instead intimates that divergent views inspire violence: “ Whence comes it, that in Christendome there has been, almost from the time of the Apostles, such jostling of one another out of their places, both by forraign, and Civil War? such stumbling at every little asperity of their own fortune and every little eminence of that of other men? And such diversity of ways in running to the same mark...we are therefore yet in the Dark” (418). Because pluralism is dangerous Hobbes offers a set of civil laws that resemble scripture in order to replace it. Much of the argument in the Leviathan is concerned with

buttressing the belief that God is aligned with the sovereign power and that
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the civil laws comply with God's edicts. In his effort to support this thesis, Hobbes radically alters parts of the Bible to conform to his political theory. For example Hobbes argues that the authority of the Mosaic Law over the Israelites was established by their consent. He even alleges that their consent established Moses, not God, as their sovereign (Owen 5). Hobbes seemingly makes such radical revisions but yet clings to Biblical structure and ideology in order to give his natural rights doctrine moral force and appeal. Paul Cooke, in his book *Hobbes and Christianity*, argues that the, "natural rights teaching needs the covering of religion because the civil association based on self-preservation cannot always easily find the moral authority to secure the devotion required (227)." In a sense Hobbes religious project, in the last two parts of the book, helps beautify his natural rights doctrine and help tie it to some idea of transcendence (Cooke 227). Hobbes does not view the subject's prior beliefs as a major obstacle for his indoctrination. He states famously, "Common-peoples minds, unlesse they be tainted with dependence on the Potent, or scribbled over with the opinions of their Doctors, are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Public Authority shall be imprinted in them (233)." Value of Pluralism in Historical Context: Transposing Hobbes and Spinoza's thinking on religious pluralism and the manipulation of the Bible into a modern historical context reveals how Hobbes's thinking can lead to forms of violence and repression. America's history of slavery provides one textbook example of how perverting religious doctrine can enforce subjugation. Slaveholding as an institution was able to sustain itself for so long partially because Southern profiteers successfully manipulated Biblical interpretations to justify their business. Pro-slavery preachers argued that slavery was justified because <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

African slaves were the descendants of Ham. Ham's son, in Genesis 9, was sentenced to servitude for Ham's sin. Other pro-slavery forces pointed to diverse examples in the Bible of slavery to demonstrate that slavery was not morally wrong (Carter 92). Slaveholders also forced conversions of blacks in order to blunt their likelihood of rebelling against the institution. Slaves were less likely to express dissatisfaction with their current life when promised a blissful afterlife (Carter 94). Southern legislators began propagating laws by the 1650s that deemed that blacks were not eligible for manumission even if though they were recognized as Christians. The slavery edifice was essentially supported by Southern whites' selective interpretation of Biblical texts. Obviously, pro-slavery forces glossed over New Testament doctrines that preached 'loving thy neighbor as yourself' and the condemnation of slave traders (Timothy 1: 9-11). This is a striking example of how manipulation of the Bible for a political agenda can have disastrous consequences. While manipulation of the Bible allowed slavery to continue, religious pluralism in American society was a critical component to ending the institution. Much of the energy behind the abolition movement came from white churchgoers from Methodist and Quaker backgrounds (Carter 94). They debated, wrote pamphlets and raised awareness about the inhuman condition of slavery. Obviously, the American tradition of tolerating religious expression and pluralism was integral to the ultimate elimination of slavery. The battle of course ultimately led to violent civil war and numerous deaths but the end result was a more cohesive and egalitarian community. By debasing hierarchy and advocating for religious freedom Spinoza's political system, unlike Hobbes's, fosters more civic and egalitarian communities like American society after abolition. Religious Diversity and Violence Even in the <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

face of examples such as the abolition of slavery, some political observers may still side with Hobbes and argue that religious pluralism encourages political violence. Conservative observers are especially prone to point to Islamic culture as one that is prone to violence against other religious sects. In recent decades, conservatives within Europe and the US have consistently sought ways to curb Islamic practices and thus limit the concept of religious pluralism. However, recent political science research persuasively counters the claim that Islamic culture is inherently violent and that limiting religious expression is the only path to peace. Ashutosh Varshney's work in India provides evidence that ethnic violence correlates with the type of associational bonds developed within a community rather than the type of religious culture citizens' practice. Varshney argues that ethnic conflict is inevitable in most plural societies but that ethnic violence in places like India tend to occur only in particular regions where civic community is nonexistent or strained. Varshney specifically studied Hindu-Muslim violence and looked at riot patterns in forty cities in India from 1950 to 1995. Major violence was confined to eight of these cities. Varshney compared these cities with high riot patterns with similar cities that rarely experienced riots (371). Varshney finds that religious violence was unlikely if members of the Hindu and Muslim community shared ' associational and everyday forms of engagement (363).' Business associations, professional organizations and trade unions are examples of associational forms of engagement, while everyday forms of engagement include participation in festivals, eating together, etc. Both forms of engagement tended to defuse religious tensions between Muslims and Hindus (363). Cities that displayed this type of vibrant community like Calicut and Surat were much less likely to engage in violent rioting than <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

cities where inter-ethnic and inter-religious association were rare. In cities where associational bonds were prevalent citizens would form peace communities that helped dispel rumors before rioting became extreme (382). VI. Political Rights: Freedom of speech Hobbes's stance towards political expression does not differ markedly from his stance on religious expression. Hobbes argues that the sovereign is the ultimate judge concerning, " what opinions and doctrines are averse" and has the right to abridge any type of free speech he sees as seditious (124). In Hobbes's conception the purpose of the state is to ensure peace and security and thus Hobbes's views the alienation of political liberties as being a necessary prerequisite towards securing peace. In his assessment of Hobbes's political system Owen writes, " No line can be drawn circumscribing liberties that circumstances may not require to be crossed (137)." In other words, the sovereign cannot grant freedoms like free speech because circumstances always arise in which the sovereign will need to infringe on liberties in order to institute order. Hobbes's also recognizes how ambitious men will use speech in order to inspire converts to their cause, thus threatening political order in the process. Hobbes draws from the historical example of Julius Caesar to make his case: " Also the Popularity of a potent Subject (unlesse the Commonwealth have very good caution of his fidelity) is a dangerous disease; because the people...are drawn away from their obedience to the Lawes, to follow a man, of whose vertues and designes they have no knowledge...By this means it was, that Julius Caesar, who as set up by the People against the senate, having won to himself the affections of his Army" (229). The phrase ' won to himself the affections of his Army' implies that Caesar used his rhetorical skills in order to win supporters. Because Hobbes

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views common men like 'clean paper' he suspects that they are easily susceptible to manipulation by men with rhetorical talents. Freedom of Speech-Spinoza In contrast Spinoza offers a spirited defense of freedom of speech in the last chapter of TPT. Spinoza maintains that, Not even the most experienced, to say nothing of the multitude, know how to keep silence. Men's common failing is to confide their plans to others, though there be need for secrecy, so that a government would be most harsh which deprived the individual of his freedom of saying and teaching what he thought (258). This need to express oneself is so natural that the government's attempts to abridge this speech are not only an impossible task but also one that could, "stir up seditions and perpetuate any crime (262)." Spinoza, like Hobbes, does recognize instances where the sovereign must circumscribe speech in order to preserve order but he does not advocate the level of censorship and control that Hobbes demands. Spinoza makes no demand that the sovereign inspects all doctrines or monitor public speeches. Spinoza extends his commitment to freedom of speech even into the court sphere, suggesting that speech should occasionally be permitted as a check to civil authority. In the last chapter he writes, For instance, supposing a man shows that a law is repugnant to sound reason, and should therefore be repealed; if he submits his opinion to the judgment of the authorities (who, alone, have the right of making and repealing laws), and meanwhile acts in nowise contrary to that law, he has deserved well of the state, and has behaved as a good citizen should (259). This passage implies that subjects in Spinoza's system have a limited right to challenge perceived injustices. The passage does not state directly that subjects have the right to challenge the misbehavior of an authority figure but Spinoza does seem to permit this possibility in a later

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section. Spinoza acknowledges that, “ However, I do not deny that there are some doctrines which, while they are apparently only concerned with abstract truths and falsehoods, are yet propounded and published with unworthy motives (261).” Spinoza’s redress for men with unworthy motives is to advocate that, “ the voice of the majority has the force of law, subject to repeal if circumstances bring about a change of opinion (263).” The passage implies that the common people do have a right to challenge authority if there is substantial consensus to do so. For Spinoza, the rights of the sovereign and his subjects are primarily guided by reason and thus it is not hard to imagine circumstances where public authorities should be challenged. Through freedom of speech Spinoza seems to be allowing members in his polity the ability to challenge certain edicts by authorities.

Freedom of Speech: Civic Community While Spinoza’s definition of freedom of speech is not nearly as clear or perhaps as expansive as what is contained in a doctrine like the First Amendment, one can argue that the spirit of Spinoza’s definition conforms to modern manifestations like America’s framework. Like the American system, Spinoza’s treatise does guarantee a certain level of expression without fear of criminal prosecution. The Civil Rights Movement is a compelling illustration of how freedom of speech rights can help foster a civic community. The Civil Rights Movement could not have won major victories during the 1950s and 1960s period without the aid of federal government intervention. Government officials often intervened in First Amendment disputes. Using the First Amendment framework, the government often afforded protection to civil rights organizations that challenged racial discrimination. The NAACP was often the focus of legal attacks by white Southern authorities who were eager to derail the

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organization's activism. In the mid 1950s southern state delegations introduced legislative bills demanding that the NAACP publish its membership list. Southern delegates like Virginia's Harrison Mann argued that NAACP activism was primarily the result of, " outside agitators who were stirring up trouble," among a generally happy populace (Finan 209). Between 1957 and 1963, six cases came before the Supreme Court asking for membership rolls to be published. The Supreme Court threw out all the cases because they viewed such publications as a violation of the NAACP's free speech protections. This protection helped the NAACP continue operating with considerably less intimidation, thus paving the way for civil rights victories in the 1960s (209). Civil rights organizations also used their rights to successfully attack white officials in media advertisements. Organizations like the NAACP took out large ads in papers like the New York Times that alerted readers to the violent and repressive tactics of Southern officials. After receiving scrutiny due to the ads, some officials like Montgomery city commissioner L. B. Sullivan attempted to sue organizations and media sources for libel. These attempts were largely unsuccessful. The New York Times v. Sullivan case eventually reached the Supreme Court in 1964 (Finan 210-211). The court ruled that the New York Times had not committed libel in its criticism of Sullivan. In his book *From the Palmer Raids to the Patriot Act: A History of the Fight for Free Speech in America*, Christopher Finan argues that the New York Times victory inspired other news organizations to more freely report on the violent and repressive tactics of Southern public employees. Before this decision, many publications were reluctant to report on various abuses because they feared they would be held accountable for libel (215). Wider news reporting drew supporters to the civil rights cause

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and placed greater pressure on federal officials to grant concessions.

Freedom of speech was a critical ingredient in African Americans' struggles to gain citizenship protections and be recognized as equals. It was an ingredient that helped foster a more civic and egalitarian community. VII.

Conclusion Empirical examples from modern history suggest that Spinoza's defense of religious and political freedoms will promote a more civic and egalitarian society than Hobbes's more authoritarian vision. Both thinkers represented a major break from past intellectual traditions and advanced notions that were influential during the Enlightenment period. However, Hobbes's ideas seem to have less value for developing countries that are currently seeking ways to promote community and stability within their borders. Hobbes's manipulation of the Bible and his constriction of religious and political space can lead to dangerous tyrannies rather than the civic order he champions. Future comparisons of Hobbes against Spinoza would be valuable, as scholars could explore concepts such as *conatus* and how such concepts relate to Hobbes and Spinoza's constructions of religious practice. Scholars could examine other texts by both figures in order to broaden our understanding of how religious and political freedoms operate in Hobbes and Spinoza's universe. Some political theory scholars maintain that the political ideas Spinoza espoused do not receive sufficient attention. In the preface of his book *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*, Spinoza scholar Steven B. Smith writes, "Only rarely is Spinoza regarded, as he will be here, as someone who thought long and deeply about the fundamental problems of political life (xii)." Spinoza's ideas regarding religious and political freedoms do warrant greater attention and provide critical insights for modern leaders. Works Cited: Borowski, Karen. "The <https://assignbuster.com/spinoza-and-hobbes-on-religious-and-political-freedoms/>

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