Spinoza, an early radical capitalist?

An application of the *Tractatus Politicus* on modern economic systems

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"The end of the state is peace and security of life ." – Baruch de Spinoza

"The end of the state is really freedom." – also Baruch de Spinoza

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1. Introduction

In the past few decades, capitalism and the way this economic system supposedly steers peoples' lives received ever increasing criticism, for allegedly harming people's lives, both rich and poor, that of animals, and the planet. Although criticism of capitalism and its effects has always been there and in the 19th century even resulted in the idea of communism, after the outbreak of the covid-19 pandemic the criticism seems to be at a new high point. One of the claims is that, through facilitating things like excessive flying and meat consumption, capitalism is to be blamed for the outbreak of diseases such a covid-19 and that the disease and its enormous consequences are a punishment for sinful and greedy behaviour (Denys 2020). From this and other premises, more and more people, from politicians to academics, call for a tilt towards more state-planned economies instead of the capitalistic market economies currently dominant in most of the world.

In some ways this tilt also seem to be actually happening. In response to the pandemic and the lock-downs in a bid to contain the virus, governments across the world, irrespective of the dominant economic system in a country, are spending huge sums of money in support of both businesses and individuals. But whereas the support of the latter usually comes with no strings attached, support to the former is often attached to certain conditions, on for example the reduction of the company's impact on the environment or on keeping the size of the workforce intact. It is clear that while governments are stepping into the economy on a scale not seen since World War II in order to minimise the fallout of covid-19, they do this by exerting an increasing amount of control and influence over the economy, and in the process over people.

The way an economy is organised does not come by itself, however. Political systems steer the way an economy is organised, but also vice versa, the way the economy is structured influences political governance. Liberal democracies, for example, often come hand in hand with market economies, whereas state-controlled economies often lead to forms of governments under the control of one person or a select group of people.

During the 17th century, Baruch de Spinoza wrote influential works such as the *Ethica* (1677) and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), the latter being of great influence for political philosophy. Before fully embarking on these and other philosophical projects, Spinoza managed the family importing business in Amsterdam, together with his younger brother Gabriel. During that time, the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands was a breeding ground for the development of capitalism and international trade. Spinoza's business in dried fruit, that capitalised on the family's Jewish connections in France and on the Iberian peninsula – the place the family had to flee because of the Inquisition – is a modest example of the yield from that breeding ground.

In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,* Spinoza argues in favour of democracy and compares it briefly to the two other types of government, monarchy and aristocracy. He also indicates that an extensive discussion of the three types of government is for 'later'. That later comes in the form of the *Tractatus Politicus* (1677), Spinoza's last and lesser known work, in which he not only compares the three main systems of government, but also extensively prescribes how to organise these types of government for them to be the best version of themselves, based on his analysis of man's nature.

In this thesis I connect Spinoza's ideas on political governance with modern views on economic governance: given his ideas on and preferences in types of government, what could have been Spinoza's view on the different economic systems of today? Would Spinoza rather be in favour of planned economies, like communism, or would he be a proponent of market economies, like capitalism?

To answer this question I first summarise the *Tractatus Politicus*, with a focus on Spinoza's ideas about man's nature and sociability and the political structures that fit those analyses. Subsequently, I apply Spinoza's human image, ideas about man's sociability and society, and ends of the state, on the economic systems of today, partly in their intertwinement with modern political types of government. As Spinoza's death unfortunately left the *Tractatus Politicus* unfinished just after he started with the chapters on democracy, I supplement the *Tractatus Politicus* with chapters from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* that contain some of Spinoza's ideas on democracy and ends of the state.

This application could lead to a modest contribution to existing philosophical literature on political and economic systems, for example to the French Marxist literature that incorporates concepts from Spinoza, from the hands of Althusser and his former students. I also aim to contribute to the popular discussion on market and planned economies and their influence on people's lives, by highlighting man's natural characteristics in relation to the elements of these types of economic systems.

2. Spinoza's argument

For this thesis I use the *Tractatus Politicus* from Edward Curley's *The Collected Works of Spinoza Volume II*, the most recent translation of Spinoza's works. Curley's version is rich in commentary on disagreements between scholars about not only philosophical interpretation but also about matters of translation from Latin into English (sometimes via Dutch). The *Tractatus Politicus* (hereafter: TP) consists of ten chapters plus the start of an eleventh chapter. That chapter is also the start of the unfinished part on democracy. To supplement that lacune I discuss a few paragraphs from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (herafter: TTP), also from Curley's collected works.[1]

After an introductory chapter, Spinoza discusses natural right (chapter II), the right of the supreme powers (chapter III) and what matters of state are the exclusive domain of the supreme powers (chapter IV). In chapter V, Spinoza briefly discusses the ultimate end the state should aim for, after which he extensively discusses the set-up and principles of a non-tyrannical monarchic state (chapter VI-VII). In the chapters VIII – X he discusses the composition and organisation of an aristocratic government, the difference between an aristocratic government with one city that serves as its capital and one with several cities, and the fall of aristocratic governments. Chapter XI is the start of his writings on democracy.

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter of the TP, Spinoza sets out the basis from which he will make his arguments in the chapters to follow. First he criticises efforts from other philosophers on the matter of politics. According to Spinoza, their biggest mistake is that they see the human affects by which man is influenced and driven as vices. This means that affects such as love, hate, love of esteem and envy were and are scorned and ridiculed (TP I 4). For that reason, Spinoza says, philosophers never came up with political ideas that are of practical use. Within their political theories, philosophers do not think of man the way he is, but of the way they want him to be (TP I 1).

After that Spinoza puts forward the intentions he has with the TP. He does not aim to come up with something new, but he does aim to demonstrate the things that are most in line with practice. These 'things' are to be deduced from the condition of man's nature, for which it is required that man's actions and affects have to be understood as properties that simply belong to that nature. In other words: human affects are no to be seen as vices but simply as properties that pertain to it, in the same way as properties such as heat and cold pertain to the nature of the air (TP I 4).

[1] I refer to the TP, the TTP and the *Ethica* not by the CMS referencing method that I use for other sources but by referring directly to the paragraphs of the original work, e.g. with TP V 10 I refer to the 10th paragraph of the 5th chapter of the *Tractatus Politicus*.

Given the characterisation of human affects as simply properties of man, for Spinoza it is certain that man is necessarily subject to them. Man prefers vengeance over mercy, and wants others to live and think as he does (TP I 5). Whatever religion or reason teaches him, in the end those teachings stand no chance against the power of the affects. Although in some situations reason might be able to restrain the affects, in the *Ethics* Spinoza already showed that the path to reason is very difficult (E V P1-P10S, E V P42S).

With the dominance of affects in man in mind, Spinoza goes on to argue that philosophers who think that the multitude, the people, can be induced to live only according to reason, are dreaming. (TP I 5). Again, they think of man as they want him to be, not as he is. Another problem with these dreams is that a state that depends on the good intentions of the people in government will not be a stable state, as these people sooner or later will see their good intentions compromised by their affects. For a government to last it should be organised in such a way that the people who are ruling, just as the people who are ruled, cannot be induced to act badly or disloyal, whether they live according to reason or by affects (TP I 6).

Concluding the introductory chapter, Spinoza observes that everywhere people form some sort of civil order, in order to combine their forces with each other, whether they are 'Barbarian' or 'civilised'. This observation strengthens Spinoza's resolution to study man and thus the way civil order is governed, with man's nature in mind and not man's reason. In the following chapter, on natural right, Spinoza discusses this study (TP I 7).

2.2 On natural right[2]

In the second chapter of the TP Spinoza explains his views on natural right, those views forming an important part of the foundation of his arguments to come. From Spinoza's ideas of God's power and right, it follows that each natural thing has as much right by nature as it has power to exist and have effects (TP II 3).[3] Spinoza's equates the right of nature as a whole to the power of nature as a whole, as by that right Spinoza's understands the laws or rules of nature according to which all things happen (TP II 4). Using a modern marketing phrase this notion can be put this way: all the things that happen are 'powered by' the laws, the right of nature. Using an algebraic expression the notion can be (over)simplified by the following equation:

$$\text{Right} = \text{Power}$$[4]

[2] The titles of the chapters do not come directly from Spinoza's hand but in most cases Curley supplied them from a letter Spinoza wrote to one of his friends. In turn, I also edited some of Curley's titles.
[3] As it falls outside the scope of this thesis, I do not discuss the metaphysical and religious aspects of this chapter any further.
[4] Or to stay closer to Spinoza's own way of formulating: Right, *or* Power. Also note that here it should be understood as 'power to' and not 'power over' (Curley 2016, 649).

For man, being born and for the most part living under nature, no other equation applies: the right of each man extends as far has his power extends (TP II 4, 7). That implies that *if* man's nature was such that he lives only according to the power of reason, the right of (man's part of) nature would be determined by the power of reason only. But given that man is not only 'powered by' reason but often and sometimes mostly driven by affects (desires), it follows that the natural power (right) of man is not defined by reason (only) but by whatever desire causes him to act in order to preserve himself (TP II 5). The underlying assumption here is that each thing strives as far as it can to persevere in its being. For Spinoza there is no difference between being led by reason or only by affects, as in both cases what causes man to act, is a display of the power (right) of nature by which man strives to preserve himself (TP II 5).

In either case, whether he is led by reason or by desire, man remains his own master insofar he can live according to his own mentality. Insofar he is under another man's power, he is a subject to that other man's control (TP II 9). Yet, if two men agree to join forces, together they have more power than alone, and thus jointly they also have more right over nature than each man on his own. The more men join this agreement, the more right these men have together (TP II 13). This is the basis of civil order, but it is not enough.

As discussed, man is by nature subject to affects, to desires that lead him to anger and envy. These lead men to be contrary to another and makes them by nature enemies, something Spinoza also argues in the *Ethica*. For example, while two men might agree with each other on what they love, e.g. fresh butter, if the men are different in terms who owns butter or not, the one without the butter would hate the one having it out of envy, and the latter, while in pleasure with having (and eating) butter would hate the former in return of the received hate (E IV 34). This could easily break the agreement they had on rational terms, as there are numerous possibilities for how men could be contrary to another (TP II 14).

As long as a man retains the power and thus the right to break the agreement because he is able to protect himself from being overpowered by other men, when he judges, rightly or wrongly, that the agreement does him more harm than good, he is ought to break it by the right of nature. But if a man does not have that power because he is unable to protect himself from the other men, whatever he judges, breaking the agreement will do him more harm than good, he is ought to not break it (TP II 12). In the butter case, he ought to steal it if having and eating the butter gives him more good than the breaking of the agreement gives him harm.

However, in almost all circumstances, man does not live with just one other man, but with a least a dozen. In that case it could be seen as futile for a man to protect himself from other men. This leads Spinoza to conclude that as long as man's natural right is determined by his power, there is no human natural right on an individual basis, as there is no way for him to sustain that right (TP II 15).

The combination of idea that the more men join a common agreement the more power they have together, and the notion that there is no individual human right as long as man cannot defend himself against other men, leads to Spinoza's understanding of the basis of a political order. Backed by his practical observation that man can hardly sustain himself and develop his mind without mutual aid, he concludes that for man, the right of nature can only really be conceived in cases where multiple men have a common agreement and common rights, with which they have the power to protect themselves from any outside force and to claim and cultivate lands (TP II 15).

For Spinoza this also entails that in a civil order, men live according to the common opinion of all. The more men agree as one, the more right they have together, just as more *men* agreeing leads to them having more common right (TP II 15) . In situations which Spinoza describes as being led as if by one mind – with the emphasis on 'as if', for he does not (necessarily) mean by one person (Curley 2016, 514) – this results in the individual man being bound to do what he is commanded by the 'one mind' and only getting what the common right grants him, simply because he has no power, no right, compared to that of the one mind (TP II 16).

For that situation to abound, however, one more thing is needed. Men are not simply to be led as if one mind. For that laws are needed, laws established according to the prescription of reason (TP II 21). Whoever by the common agreement is in charge of making and interpreting those rational laws has the common right of men absolutely. These supreme rights, or supreme powers, can also be called sovereignty. If making laws and all other public affairs are in the hands of one person it is called monarchy. If the supreme powers are in the hands of a certain group of people, Spinoza calls this aristocracy. If these rights are with a council or representation of all men Spinoza call it democracy (TP II 17).

Before Spinoza actually discusses the three systems in detail, he explains his views on the right of the body that wields the supreme powers of the civil order, what matters of the civil order depend on the governance of that body, and what the highest aim of the civil order should be.

2.3 On the right of the supreme powers

Building on his equation of right to power, in the third chapter Spinoza explains further on the rights of the body that holds sovereignty. In order for that body to maintain its supreme powers and for the civil order not to collapse, it is required that no man that is part of the civil order is allowed to live according to his own mentality, to be his own judge in life (TP III 3).

Although man will never lose his ability to judge, in the civil order he cannot be allowed to *be* his own judge. This means that the interpretation of laws and rules of the civil order is not up to the individual men, but only to the supreme powers (TP II 4). A man has no right to decide on what is right or wrong or what is fair or unfair within the civil order. As that order needs to be

led as if one mind, the will of the supreme powers regarding right or wrong should be seen as coming from each man. A man might think that a rule of the civil order is wrong, but he still needs to abide by it. Without men abiding to the rules, the civil order is not led as if one mind and will collapse, the men falling back into the natural state (TP III 5).

For Spinoza, the more a man is led by reason, the more he will abide by the laws and rules of the civil order, and the more a man will be free (TP II 11). Even in case a command by the civil order is incompatible with reason, it should nevertheless be followed, even – or maybe especially – by a man who is sometimes guided by reason. This is the consequence of another rational consideration, namely that if faced with two sources of harm a man chooses the lesser of the two. According to Spinoza, the harm of following a command incompatible with reason does not outweigh the harm done to the civil order, of which a man is part and derives a lot of benefit. Put differently, the benefit of being part of the civil order – which entails following its commands – easily outweighs following an irrational command (TP III 6).

This is not to say that the civil order can operate by issuing many irrational commands. The right of the civil order is determined by the combined power of the men who are led as if one mind. This model of one mind would be completely fictional if the civil order would not aim at what would be reasonable seen as useful to all men (TP III 7). The latter is something Spinoza comes back to in chapter V.

But even if a man would not approach the issue of following the civil order's commands rationally, whether they are based on reason or not, and would not see that following the commands bring greater benefit in the end, he can be induced to follow it by threat of punishment by the civil order. Depending on the severity of the punishment – Spinoza often speaks of the capital punishment – the threat of it would make the man in question follow the command, provided that he approaches this choice rationally, namely that he would choose the lesser of two sources of harm Another way for the civil order to have its men in control and of inducing men to follow orders, is through offering rewards (TP III 8).

Yet another possibility for men to be under control of the civil order is through love for the civil order. The difference with the other possibility of control is that the body of the civil order cannot have an active role in it. Just as a man will always keep his ability to judge, he will also keep his ability to love or hate, or to honour or dishonour (TP IV 4). No threat of punishment or promise of reward can make a man love the civil order and its commands (TP III 8).

What commands are part of the exclusive role of the body of the civil order is the topic of the next chapter in the TP.

2.4 On the exclusive matters of the state's supreme powers

Expanding on the previous chapter, in the fourth chapter of the TP Spinoza discusses the exclusive responsibilities of the holders of the supreme powers. Next to deciding what is right or wrong, fair or unjust, the body of the civil order, as holder of the supreme powers, also exclusively possesses the right to make war and peace, and to make, interpret, and repeal laws. [5] This also entails that is it is not bound to the will of somebody or someone else. In short, the body of the civil order is exclusively in charge of handling public affairs.

Being the exclusive holder of these rights (powers) on public affairs, by being sovereign, the body of the civil order is not bound by any civil law. At most it is bound by nature's laws, by which it is bound to preserve itself and to remain its own master. The civil order is able to do so when it acts according to reason, as discussed in the previous chapter (TP III 7). When it acts against what is reasonable seen as useful to all men of the civil order, the civil order actually fails itself (TP IV 6). Of a civil order that fails itself it could be said that it does not preserve itself properly and as such it also acts against nature's laws.

To be bound to the laws of nature and reason does not mean obedience, however, it means freedom. Just as with men, for the body of the civil order freedom does not exclude the necessity of acting but it assumes it. In the state of nature man is bound to preserve his life and remain his own master, by taking care to not having himself killed, and this includes not being an enemy to himself (TP II 11). The same goes for the civil order for which this care of having itself not destroyed, whether by outside or inside forces, is not obedience but freedom (TP IV 5). In the next chapter Spinoza discusses how this freedom can be best put to use.

2.5 On the ultimate and highest end a state can aim at

In previous chapters, Spinoza argued that both a man and the civil order are most powerful and remain most their own master, when they are led by reason. Also to preserve themselves in the best way, they should be guided by reason, but *optimal* self-preservation is a step further than mere self-mastery. As Spinoza makes the distinction, it is one thing to do something by right (power) but another thing to do it in the best way. So the body of the civil order may hold the supreme powers and have the responsibility of public affairs, but this is not say that it governs those affairs in the best way (TP V 1). What the approach is to govern in the best way is the topic of the fifth chapter of the TP.

Earlier in the TP Spinoza already argued that the more the civil order aims for what is reasonably useful to all men, the stronger the civil order is and the closer it gets to optimal self-

[5] It is interesting to note that only 30 years earlier, in 1646, when Spinoza was 11, the Spanish agreed that the States General of the Seven United Netherlands were sovereign to enter into peace talks with the Spanish Crown. Two years later the Peace of Münster, as part of the Peace of Westphalia was finally signed, which marked the recognition of the sovereignty of the Dutch States General. These events mark an important transition from sovereignty based on an individual monarch to one based on states (Groenveld 2009).

preservation (TP III 7). To know the best condition of the civil order or state, Spinoza points to the end of the state, which, in the TP, is for him nothing other than peace and security of life. This means the best civil order is one where men live peacefully and harmoniously. For this optimal state of self-preservation it is required that the laws of the civil order are not broken by its men.

If this optimal condition of the civil order is not reached and laws are violated and violence breaks out, this is to be blamed on the failure or corruption of the body of the civil order, and not on the 'wickedness' of the men. In line with his earlier arguments that men are always (partly) subject to affects, Spinoza points out that men are not born civil, but become civil (TP V 2). Also vice versa, when men do live peacefully and do not violate the laws, this is to be attributed to body of civil order, in this case one that is incorrupt and virtuous.

A peaceful and harmonious state is not yet sufficient for the civil order to be in its optimal condition. The peace in which the men live, should be of certain nature, in which the peace is not understood as simply the privation of war, in which the men live in fear for the threat of war, but a peace which arose from strength of mind. A strength that exists in the constant will of men to abide by the commands of the body of the civil order, in the knowledge that this brings them the greatest benefit in life (TP V 4). Spinoza describes this kind of willingly living in a harmonious civil order a human life, contrasted with living an animal life, as it is mostly defined by reason and true virtue and not merely by the circulation of blood (TP V 5).

How the set-up of each of three types of civil order - monarchy, aristocracy, democracy – should look like so that the most optimate condition of the civil order, one of peace and harmony is reached, is the topic of the rest of the TP.[6]

2.6 On monarchy

The first type of civil order, or government, Spinoza discusses is monarchy, in which the body of the civil order in principle consists of one person. This individual is the sole holder of the supreme powers. Already in the beginning of the chapter Spinoza puts forward his main concern with this type of government. In his earlier analysis of man's nature he argued that every man can at every moment be subject to his affects and those will overpower his ability to use reason. Because of this fallibility it would be unwise to ask from a single man that he always looks out for the interests of his subjects and never gives in to his affects, especially given the tempting circumstances monarchs usually find themselves in (TP VI 3).

Another reason for it being unwise to have only one man making up the body of the civil order is that given Spinoza's notion that right is determined power, it is actually not plausible

[6] Whereas the discussed foundations of chapters I – V are of high importance for this thesis, the detailed prescriptions for the optimal civil orders in chapter VI - XI are of less importance. As such only the most relevant considerations of each type of civil order are discussed. Also note that at some point the paragraphs numbers in this thesis will not follow the chapter numbers of the TP anymore.

that just one man has enough power to control the right of the supreme powers. Put differently, the immense burden of the public affairs is not something one man can carry (TP VI 5). Because of this a monarch surrounds himself with counsellors or friends whom he gives responsibility and control not only over the well-being of his subjects but also that over himself. This way, a monarchy becomes always an aristocracy in practice, but a covert one, which Spinoza labels as the worst kind of aristocracy (TP VI 5).

As it takes only the replacement of one man to obtain control of the civil order, the monarch faces a constant risk of plots against him. This is in turn causes the monarch to constantly fear his subjects and this leads him to actually work against his subjects instead of looking after their interests as he should be (TP VI 6). To summarise, a monarchical civil order is prone to disorder and instability

From here it follows that in order to be most his own master, a monarch must actually not have the most absolute right of the civil order, as this would increase the chance and impact of others trying to lay claim to his position in various ways. Instead, the foundations of the monarchical state should be solid so that the position of the monarch is safe, allowing him to look after the well-being of his subjects (TP VI 8). Discussing Spinoza's detailed prescriptions for these foundations falls outside the scope of this thesis, with one exception.

One of the things he namely prescribes is that all the land within the realm of a monarchical civil order, including the houses or anything that is so attached to it that it cannot be carried away, should be public property. The monarch should then lease the land to the subjects for an annual rent but he should remain in control over it. In peace time no further taxation of the subjects should be in place (TP VI 12, VII 19).

2.7 On aristocracy

The second type of government in the TP is aristocracy, which for Spinoza means something else than a hereditary ruling class. For Spinoza an aristocracy is a civil order in which a group of selected men, the patricians, have the right to rule. Selection and succession of members of the aristocratic group is – in principle – not based on family ties, but on the choice of the current members of this aristocratic class (TP VIII 1). To prevent the forming of factions and subsequent infighting, something that would weaken the civil order, the number of aristocrats needs to be high enough, this also to prevent them from issuing irrational commands.

Of importance are the comparisons Spinoza makes between aristocracies, monarchies, and democracies. First when comparing monarchies and aristocracies, he lists four main differences. The first differences is that while for a monarch the burden of the public affairs is actually too big, the size of the aristocracy allows it to have enough power to control the supreme right. That is the reason why the supreme council of aristocrats does not need counsellors, while

a monarch does. Another difference is that while monarch is obviously mortal, a supreme council is not, meaning that power struggles that might occur after the death of a monarch are unlikely within an aristocracy (TP VIII 3).

From these and other differences Spinoza concludes that the right to rule for a large enough supreme council is absolute or at least near absolute, or, in order words, in which the council has absolute power to decide without there being a risk that its decisions are overruled by any human will from outside of the supreme council (Curley 2016, 613). As long as there is no consultation or any form of voting right resting with the ruled men, this absolute power rests with the supreme council (TP III 3).

The only reason the supreme council's rule is not absolutely absolute is that the ruled people as a whole still have the possibility to overthrow the government of the aristocrats, this not being very different than with a monarchic civil order. Also comparable to that of a monarchy is Spinoza's analysis of and prescriptions for an aristocracy to mostly remain its own master, meaning that the foundations of the aristocratic state should be such that it depends exclusively on the will and power of the supreme council (TP VIII 4).

Despite indications for the opposite being true, to Spinoza this does not mean that the ruled men should be in fear to be as slaves to the aristocratic rulers, given the latter's absolute rule. The power and will of the supreme council can only be that large, that absolute, if it is determined by reason. It cannot be that large if it is determined by evil desires. Invoking an earlier argument, Spinoza argues that men being pulled in directions by their affects, can only be led as if one mind if what they desire is honourable or at least appears to be honourable. This seems to be a modification of the use of this argument in his prescriptions for a monarchy. The rest of the paragraphs in the chapters VIII – X cover the prescriptions for the other foundations of the aristocratic state. These fall outside the scope of this thesis, save one.

Different than in the monarchic civil order, in which all land and buildings are publicly owned and rented out by the monarch, in an optimally organised aristocratic order the lands should be sold to and owned by the people. Within the aristocratic state the people are not allowed to vote or participate in councils, and as such – as if they are foreigners – have no share in the state. The consequence of them having no such share is that in time of war and unrest, people would not see a reason to stay and defend the lands and cities. To prevent them from quickly abandoning the state, the people should be in ownership of the lands, but instead of an annual rent, the people should be subjected to annual income tax (TP VIII 10).

2.8 On democracy

The third and last form of civil order in the TP is democracy. Just as with his concept of aristocracy, in almost an inversion of modern conceptions, Spinoza explains his idea of the democratic state

as one where one has hereditary political rights. Every man whose parents are citizens inherits the right to vote and stand for office, and the same applies for people who were born within the borders of this civil order or who for any other reason are granted citizenship by law. Inc contrast to Spinoza's concept of aristocracy, in which membership of the ruling class is based not based on family ties but on choice of the members that are already part of that ruling class (TP XI 1).

Moreover, of the three types of civil order, democracy is the one that is the most absolute, understood in the sense that theoretically no outside human will can overrule the decisions of the democratically elected supreme council (TP XI 1). Put differently, all men who can vote and stand for the supreme council that makes law in the same way as the aristocratic supreme council does so, are equally bound to those laws. In principle the rulers and the ruled are the same entity. With only three paragraphs written, the TP stops here, but the TTP can supplement on some elements of the democratic state that were covered in paragraph 2.6 and 2.7 for the monarchical and aristocratic state.

The same as in the two other types of government, the body that holds the supreme power is not bound by any (civil) law. Everyone must follow its orders and as such the rule of that body, in this case the democratic supreme council, is absolute (TTP XVI 23). This does not mean that people turn into slaves or docile subjects. When people follow the laws, based on reason and with the reason of the advantage of the state and thus of themselves in mind, they are actually free subjects, an argument extensively discussed in the TP.

Also recognisable from the TP is the notion that the people should not fear to be confronted by orders and rules based on irrationality and driven by affects. If this would happen the power of the supreme body and thus that of the civil order breaks down, resulting in the end of both. According to Spinoza, the chance of this occurring in a democracy is actually very limited (TP XVI 29). If the size of the supreme council – or assembly as it is called in the TTP – is big enough Spinoza calls it almost impossible that a majority of its members would vote in favour of absurd actions. On the contrary, the foundation and aim of the democratic state is to prevent absurdities and limit people's irrationalities in their interactions with other people as much as possible. These rational limits allow people to live in peace and harmony (TTP VII 30).

In a combination of the last two arguments, Spinoza shows what the foundations of the democratic state are. If the supreme law in a civil order is the well-being of the whole people and not that of one ruler, following the laws that reasonably follow from that supreme law make the subjects more free not less and allow them to live peacefully (TTP XVI 34).

3. Spinoza's argument applied

In this chapter I apply Spinoza's 17th century ideas about and prescriptions for political structures on the current ideas about and practice of economic and political structures. Before everything else I discuss the different ends of the state Spinoza formulated in both the TP and TTP, and the perspectives of Balibar and Curley on those formulations. After that I briefly provide definitions and elements of market economies (like capitalism) and planned economies (like socialism and communism) in paragraph 3.2. Without claiming it is possible to speak of one universal definition for these systems, I do think it is possible to provide the basic, mostly descriptive elements that are generally accepted, but are yet not well understood by many people, even by graduates in economics. The latter are extensively trained in approaches and ideas of certain schools of economic thought, but are less explicitly educated in the foundations that underly these schools. Subsequently, in paragraph 3.3, I discuss my characterisation of both sides of the spectrum of economic systems. Thereafter, in paragraph 3.4 I discuss man's image and sociability from the TP in relation to man's image in modern economies, with a focus on his self-interested behaviour. Then, in paragraph 3.5 I do the same with the ideas on society and state. I conclude in paragraph 3.6.

3.1 The ends of the state

Although paragraph 2.5 of this thesis already covered 'the ultimate and highest end a state can aim at', when taking into account other works from Spinoza, it is not as one-dimensional as he presents it in the TP (III 7).

In chapter XX of the TTP Spinoza sets out his arguments on freedom of thought and expression. First he argues that no man can be compelled to transfer or give up his ability to reason freely or to judge things, an argument also present in the TP (TTP XX 1, TP II 4). This means that the supreme powers, even while they are the sole judges on what is good or bad, and want the people to think as they do, they are never able to stop a man from making his own judgement (TTP XX 6). On top of that comes that men in general, from the wise to the ordinary, do not know how to keep quiet but have the strong tendency to share their thoughts and judgement (TTP XX 8).

So a government that aims to make men say only what they prescribe and to deny men to express other judgments than the judgements of the government, will end up being a violent one (TTP XX 9). As this violence brings great danger to the foundations of the state, Spinoza argues that the supreme powers actually do not have the absolute power (right) to try and control thought and expression (TTP XX 7).

Conversely, a government that does grant every man freedom of thought and expression will be one of a moderate rule, and from this and other considerations, Spinoza argues that the

ultimate end of the state is not to control men by fear but actually to free each man from fear, so that he can live as securely as possible (TTP XX 11). Put differently, the end is not to change men from rational beings into automata but to enable men to perform their functions and to reason freely, without them getting into conflict with each other. Thus, Spinoza argues, the end of the state is really freedom (TTP XX 12).

As Curley also points out this end of freedom seems to be in tension with the end of the state Spinoza derives in chapter III of the TTP: to live securely and conveniently (Curley 2016, 346). The implication seems to be that if a state aims for the end of freedom for the men of that state, it cannot (fully) provide those men a secure and convenient life, or vice versa, if a state aims for a secure and convenient life for its men, it cannot provide complete freedom. I wonder what kind of freedom this entails. Is it straightforwardly the freedom of thought and expression from chapter XX or is it also freedom to own things and to do the things you want to do?

In the TP, Spinoza seems to take a position even more sober, while at the same time seeming to try and solve the tension between the two ends of the state formulated. As discussed before, Spinoza is highly critical of philosophers who think of human affects as vices and imagine man's nature how they want that nature to be (TP I 1). Even explicitly criticising More's *Utopia*, in which the citizens need to be granted as much time from service of the body to the freedom of the mind, Spinoza argues that for the security of the state it does not matter at all in what spirit the people in government act, as long as they do it properly (Curley 2016, 504). For him freedom of mind or strength of character (good intentions) are private virtues, whereas the virtue of the state is security (TP I 6). Earlier I discussed how in chapter V of the TP Spinoza argues that the best condition of the state is one where men live harmoniously and where the laws are kept without violation, given that the end of the state is peace and security of life.

In paragraph 5 of the same chapter V, Spinoza seems to nuance this position by introducing the adjective 'human' to 'life'. So when he writes that the of the state is for all men to live a peaceful and secure life, he means a peaceful and secure human life. This is not merely defined by the complete functioning of the body, like blood circulation and breathing – as this could also define the life of animals – but a life mostly defined by reason, that which Spinoza labels as the true virtue and life of the mind (TP V 5). This seems comparable to the notion in the TTP that the end is not to change men into beast or automata, but the difference is that in this paragraph 5 of the TP, Spinoza does not mention that the end is in fact to reason *freely*, maybe once again implying that this is a private virtue and not a public virtue.

In *Spinoza and Politics,* Balibar deepens out the political elements of Spinoza's thinking and places them on the background of the volatile politics of the Dutch Republic in the second half of the 17th century. Especially the power struggle between the monarchists, the orthodox Calvinist pastors and the majority of the people on one side, and the more tolerant elite of the

wealthy merchants and governors from the cities on the other side, most likely played an important role in Spinoza's (changing) thinking in the TTP and TP.

One of the elements Balibar discusses extensively is Spinoza's concept of freedom. In fact, Spinoza most closely associated himself with the social group of the governing and trading elite (Regents), that group by then also labelling itself as the 'freedom party'. Being born out of the national struggle for independence from the Spanish Empire, it favoured a state based on civil liberties over a monarchical, absolutist, notion of the state, as was by then still common in Europe. It promoted and defended freedom of individual conscience, autonomy of scientific research, and to a certain degree the free circulation of ideas. While Spinoza was indeed a supporter of these ideas for a free Republic, in the TTP there is no unequivocally endorsement of the ideas the freedom party saw as self-evident. Spinoza found the identification of freedom with the politics and so-called universal interests of a specific group problematic (Balibar 2008, 3). Among other things, his TTP is aimed at freeing man and philosophy from the bondage of theological prejudice and at analysing the reasons for collusion between monarchical and religious authority, that mobilises the people against the interests of the nation and thus of themselves. This puts it clearly on the Regents' Republican side, but Spinoza could not exclusively accept their ideology and interest, if all the different interests of the state did not converge in a coherent way. As Balibar puts it, the real 'freedom party' was actually still to be created (Balibar 2008, 24).

But given the focus of this thesis on the TP, of importance is Balibar's analysis of how and why the TP is so different from the TTP, not only in style and use of sources, but mostly in the logic and theory advanced. With regard to the latter, among other differences, Balibar points to the fact that while in the TTP the end of the state was clearly identified with freedom, in the TP this changed to peace and security of life. This could have happened under influence of the events of 1672 – *het Rampjaar* – in which the Dutch Republic narrowly escaped total defeat by three major foreign powers. It also saw the monarchist (Orangist) revolution erupt, including mass violence and the lynching by an angry mob of the Republic's *de facto* political leader Johan de Witt, and ultimately the defeat of the Regents' 'freedom party' (Balibar 2008, 52). These events faced Spinoza directly with the power of the people, the 'multitude', to overthrow its government and this is arguably the reason why the theme of keeping the multitude within bounds is so recurrent in the TP. This could also explain Spinoza's attention for the complex relations between the (power of the) multitude, the power of institutions, the security and freedom of the individual, and the ability of a democratic system to create a unity from the ever fluctuating minds of the people (Balibar 2008, 75). How interesting delving deeper into those relations might be, it is not in scope of this thesis.[7]

[7] Even more outside of the scope of this thesis, yet highly interesting – and disturbing – is the violent storming of the US Capitol by an angry mob during the confirmation by the Senate of the democratic election of President-elect Biden,

A suggestion I wish to make is that the ends of the state could be seen as points on a progressive spectrum and not as exclusive options, especially considering the conditions of today compared to that of the 17th century. Depending on the circumstances of the state, both internal – the foundations of the specific civil order – and external, it comes with a certain end and is able to progress to a next stage. The minimum end of the state would also the bare minimum of the civil condition, namely to provide a peaceful and secure life, as argued for in the TP (V 2). If this minimum is not met the civil order ultimately falls apart, given that men would be better off alone. The circumstances permitting, the next step would be the end of providing not only a life of peace and security, but also a human life (TP V 4), and in a small step further, a life of peace and convenience (TTP III 20). Lastly, if the circumstances but mostly the foundations of the state are optimal, the end would be to provide all of the aforementioned, but then in freedom (TTP XX 12).

3.2 Four elements of market and planned economies

In this paragraph I describe four basic elements of both market economies and planned economies. These will then serve as the framework for my characterisations of both types of economic systems in the next paragraph. In turn, the characterisations form the basis of my comparison of Spinoza's image of man and his sociability – with a focus on his self-interested behaviour – with those images in market and planned economies in paragraph 3.4, and of my comparison of Spinoza's 17th century ideas about society and the state with those ideas in the two modern economics systems in paragraph 3.5. In his contribution, Arnold defines and discusses socialism and communism by contrasting them to the basic elements of capitalism (Arnold 2014). Given the clarity of the structure used I employ it as the basis for my descriptions of planned and market economies. Of market economies, the four basic elements could be described as following.

1. The factors or means of production being labour, capital – an umbrella term for things such as land, machinery, financing but also patented ideas – and 'entrepreneurship' are mostly privately owned and this private ownership is facilitated by various property rights. Entrepreneurship is the organising, creative and risk-taking force of companies and individual entrepreneurs that combines labour and capital.

2. The consequence of labour being privately owned, or put differently, that people own their labouring power, is that they are free to sell it to others, through employment contracts or other forms of agreement.

fired up by current President Trump, leaving five people dead in the process. To form an union of the minds in a non-violent way seems to be an ability the US democracy has lost, hopefully only temporary.

3. By gearing the produced goods and services, the fruits of the production factors, towards meeting human needs and desires, entrepreneurs aim to maximise their profits. Arnold argues that production is generally oriented towards profit rather than use and needs (Arnold 2014). I would argue that in most cases making profits and meeting people's needs are co-dependent rather than two more or less mutually exclusive options (Smith 1790, vii-xxix).[8]

4. The three aforementioned elements come together in the fourth element of free markets, in which through forces of supply and demand, the production factors are efficiently coordinated such that what is produced is theoretically exactly what is asked for. Economists would refer to these workings as 'the invisible hand' (Smith 1790, vii-xxix). Prices are then the result of the interplay between (all the factors of) supply and demand, and reflect what people are willing to pay for goods given the utility they derive from having it (Gregory and Stuart 2003, 538).

Then, planned economies are in many respects what market economies are not. I describe the four basic elements of planned economies, such as socialism and communism, as follows.

1. The means of production are not privately owned or not in full control of private entities. Instead everything that produces is in social or public ownership or, in a weaker form, decisions on how it should be put to use is highly regulated (Busky 2000). Note that planned economies in principle do not call for personal property, so everything that is not 'productive', to be owned publicly.

2. In many respects planned economies are a reaction to capitalism's notion that human labour is simply to be seen as a production factor. At the same time, some schools of socialism would call instead for 'fair' wages, which implies that in principle the transaction of a man's labour for financial compensation should not be abolished. On the outer edges, the end state of communism is that labour is not being seen as a productive, instrumental concept, that serves as a means to life, but rather as life's want. This also means the end of the division of labour and of the link between contribution and reward.

3. In the approach of planned economies, production should be geared towards meeting human needs only, their 'real needs'. Firms should not be producing for the sake of

[8] Without some profits – also required in order to invest in innovations – most firms would go bankrupt in the long-run, thus losing the ability to meet people's needs. Vice versa, by not producing goods and services that meet people's needs, firms would go bankrupt as they are unable to sell those products. On top of that comes the role of profits as a driver to force companies to be more efficient in their use of production factors, therewith creating greater possibilities to produce better or more for more people. Either way, this discussion falls outside the scope of this thesis.

making profits, or in some forms of socialism, at least not in first instance (Lawler et al. 1998, 61-63).

4. Within planned economies the means of production should not only be in social ownership, but there should also be social planning of the deployment of those means in order to produce goods and services and determining the needs of the people. The allocation of the different production factors should not be left to market forces but to a central body, although some socialist thinkers, called 'market socialists' think that socialism is compatible with markets in which firms seek profit (Gregory en Stuart 2003, 142).

3.3. The characterisation of economic systems

3.3.1 Of market economies

Characterising the four elements of market economies would be one of a voluntary and decentral nature. Barring a few exceptions people are free to enter in any transaction, to buy or sell the products and services they want or produce. Property rights over both personal goods and production factors, including any profit made, allows individuals and companies to aim for personal well-being and profit themselves.

This lack of a need for centralised steering allows for capitalism to operate without a strong, hierarchical role for the government in the economy. Except for the role of an independent judge in conflicts between the different market participants, and in some cases the role of a market maker to prevent a participant from becoming so strong that it destroys the free market, the role of the government in capitalist economies can be limited.[9] Libertarian capitalists would even argue that no state is needed, allowing markets to operate completely free.

3.3.2 Of planned economies

Taking into account the four discussed elements of planned economies, these types of economies could be characterised by an involuntary and centralised nature. Especially when all means of production are publicly owned, as in communism, decisions about the what, the how, the when, the how much, the where, the by whom, and even the why of production are not taken by individuals or companies but by a central body. That requires a strong and hierarchical government that would always strive for omnipotence and omnipresence, as, given the interconnectedness and complexity of economies, failing to cover any part of the behaviour of its

[9] In most economic theories on capitalism it even *should* be. With government interference the market mechanism that allows for efficient allocation of production factors is compromised, resulting in inefficient results, for example in over or under production. This falls outside of the scope of this thesis, however.

subjects and information on its production factors, causes the foundations of those government decisions taken far in advance to collapse.

The failures of these decisions, usually bundled in the form of five-year plans, lead to inefficient allocation of production factors and suboptimal output, or to put it in less clinical economic terms: shortages of essentials like food and clothing. This also means that in most cases people are not free to enter in any transaction they want, as buying or producing goods and services is at least heavily regulated and often simply not possible, as either the products are not available or the production factors are not theirs to decide on. If entering into transactions outside the system is possible, it happens on black markets, where people getting caught in this 'overthrowing of the system' would be labelled as capitalist enemies of the state and risk being lead to places darker than the market, unless one expects light at the end of the tunnel.

As said not all types of planned economies involve that production factors should be owned publicly, but all of them have extensive regulations in place that determine and limit many aspects of production input, already affecting efficient allocation. Also on the output side many regulations, covering everything from quantity to quality and from price to place, are in place to plan the economy in the desired direction of the government in place.

3.4 On man's image and sociability in the TP and in economic systems

3.4.1 On man's self-interested behaviour in planned economies

In bringing about the ideas of planned economies, it seems clear that its creators imagined man how they want him to be and not how he is, a fundamental error in Spinoza's view. Especially in communism but also in socialism people are thought to be or at least able to be without egoism, the claim being that self-interested behaviour is merely caused by capitalistic systems. In a communist society, self-interest, the interest of family, friends, but mostly that of firms, are to be erased as vices and replaced by one interest, that of the state.

For multiple reasons coming from the TP this idea of interest replacement is destined to fail. The most fundamental one being that affects such as envy and love for oneself and one's family, are seen as vices, and not simply as properties of human nature (TP I 4). Man being necessarily subject to affects, whatever the communist or socialist ideology has taught him, even when it is grounded in reason, means those teachings stand no chance against the affects. The thinkers and leaders of states that aim for a communist society are then dreaming a dream from the start, one that usually ends in misery. The reason of this being a doomed dream is two-folded. First by thinking that the people can be induced to live according to communist reason. Second, by making it dependent on the good intentions of the people in charge of that government (TP I 5-6).

With respect to the second part of the dream, in a situation of a government that would actually have the means to control the people such that they can 'practically' be induced to live in a communist way, it would be foolish to assume that the people in government are always benign and reasonable (TP I 2). Just as with the people who they lead, the people who lead are necessarily subject to affects, and human history shows infinite examples of people in power being under influence of love for esteem and power, and the nasty and brutish consequences that has.

Regarding the second element, as seen from the individual perspective, how strong a promise of loyalty to the communist ideal and the punishment of breaking it might be, Spinoza would argue that sticking to loyalty would only hold if it is the lesser of two evils. Being confronted with shortages of food, fuel, shelter and clothing, an average man would only choose for loyalty and not enter into illegal black market transactions to prevent starvation or hypothermia, if he is faced with immediate or almost immediate death, through execution, torture or a ticket to the gulag. These are choices the people of the formerly communist Russia, Ukraine, China were and the people North Korea are not unfamiliar with.

3.4.2 On man's self-interested behaviour in market economies

In market economies it seems to be the other way around. Rather than self-interested behaviour being caused by capitalism or other market economies, market systems are the result of the human tendency to look after its own interest and that of family, friends and the firm it is working for, the latter both because he belongs to the group of people that makes up the firm and is paid by it. The compensation he receives allows him to look after his own interest, while looking after the interest of the company at the same time.[10]

Capitalism in itself does not ask for loyalty. Maybe in the United States where a strongly capitalist economy is blended with patriotism, or nowadays in China where a mix of state and market capitalism is combined with strong nationalism, but in both cases the idea is mostly about becoming better and better-off personally, so that the country as a whole progresses.[11] Clearly this system is not without rules and regulations either. You cannot steal someone's property, whether it is owned by a company or by an individual. You (usually) cannot take someone's building and live in it. You cannot sell something that is not what you said it was. But these are laws to prevent or at least limit the behaviour caused by human desires, not to try and destroy those desires. It does not imagine people to be something, it looks at how people are, based on the things they do. Contrary to communist and to a certain degree, socialist ideas, human

[10] Albeit usually with a small lag between the work done and the compensation received.
[11] This is not to ignore the severe human abuse in some parts of China or poverty in the US, but that goes beyond the point I try to make.

behaviour is regarded as a characteristics of nature, a notion Spinoza would most likely agree with.

3.5 On society and state in the TP and in modern economies

In the TP, Spinoza already links a monarchical type of government to a society in which the lands and the buildings within the borders of the state are publicly owned and rented out to the people, and an aristocratic government to a society in which the lands and building are privately owned but initially sold to the people by the aristocracy. Although Spinoza did not write down what approach he would imagine for a democratic state, it could be that in such a state the lands always have been privately owned or at least have not been sold to the people by the government, because, among other others reasons, the government *is* or at least represents the people as a whole.

Within an aristocracy the idea is to prevent the people – who are considered foreigners in Spinoza's model – from fleeing the lands in times of war. This idea can be extended to the situation of communism, in which one of the problems was to motivate the people who do not have a direct interest in the exploitation of production factors, like land and machines, and to work on and with those, especially in times of hardship. For example, during the Ukrainian Holodomor ('Great Famine'), people left the lands en masse, that were forcibly taken from them before. The collectivisation caused, among other factors, the yields to diminish sharpy, and this, combined with the crops being taken from them and even exported, led to millions of deaths by starvation. At the same time, to enforce the food rationing implemented, theft of food was made punishable by death or ten years of prison (Reid 2017).

The Holodomor is just one example of how communism requires at least strict and usual brutal enforcement of its system. And even when a communist state manages to provide its subjects with the basic necessities, this still goes hand in hand with extreme control of its citizens. In for example East Germany (DDR), the communist party, its aristocracy, was able to provide a certain standard of living, but only by controlling or at least ceaselessly trying to control every facet of the lives of its subject, including people's expression and forming of judgment.[12] This sort of control only being possible by threat of violence and through its infamous internal secret service, the Stasi, which was supported by an extreme number of (forced) informants, likely to be at a ratio of 1 informant per 6.5 inhabitants (Keefe 2006). That a state exerting this kind of control would end up being a violent one is also something Spinoza already imagined (TTP XX 9). So even when a communist state has the means to provide for a relatively convenient life for all its people, this leads to an extreme tension with another end of the state: freedom.

[12] Officially called the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, but both its nature and leadership were predominantly communist.

On top of that Spinoza would argue that it is one thing to do something by right (power) but another thing to do it in the best way (TP V I). The DDR communist may have held the supreme powers and total responsibility of public affairs, but this is not say that it governed those affairs in the best way, rather on the contrary.

The eventual fall of the DDR could also be explained by Spinoza. When a state acts against what is reasonable seen as useful to all men of that civil order, it fails itself, as it is unable to preserve itself and eventually falls apart (TP IV 6). To try and compensate for this future loss of power, its communist party tried to instil love for the state, the party, and communist ideology in its subjects. But as Spinoza already argued, no threat or reward can make subjects love the civil order and its (communist) commands, let alone some parades on May 1st or other propaganda (TP III 8).

Within market economies there seems to be less of a tension between freedom and convenience on the one hand, and security and peace on the other hand. The main reason why Spinoza at some point argued that democracy is the best type of government is because it allows for the most freedom for its citizens. As said, markets, through forces of supply and demand, lead to production factors being efficiently coordinated and the freer the markets and the people operating in those markets are, the more efficient the means of productions are being used and the higher and better the output. Put differently, this freedom as a public virtue, contrasted with freedom merely being a private virtue (TP I 6), is necessary to allow individuals and companies to aim for personal well-being and profit – which is either spent on reinvestment or on the well-being of the ones who, through their property rights, have the full right to enjoy it. Assuming Spinoza would envision full property rights in democracy, this explains why the general convenience provided by a market economy and the security, peace and freedom of a democracy go hand in hand.

3.6 Conclusion

To summarise, it is possible to say that planned economies, communism in particular, always incur losses, not only in economic terms – inefficient production to the detriment of providing convenient lives to the people – but also in terms of freedom, as they require at least a strictly controlling but usually an oppressive form of government. Market economies, however, usually come with two types of gains, one in economic terms – economic freedom allowing people to secure convenient lives – and one in terms of civic freedom, as these economies are usually in a happy marriage with non-oppressive forms of government, often democracy. Market economies also seem to better fit man's nature, especially his self-interested behaviour, their existence also being caused by that behaviour and not vice versa. Allowing Spinoza's different notions of the end of the state to be seen as a progressive spectrum would put a market economy at the positive end

of this spectrum, and would as such always be superior over planned economies. It is namely not only capable of providing a secure and peaceful life, but also a human life, one with convenience, but with most of all: a freedom that is not merely a private virtue but also necessarily a public virtue.

Considering all of this could then allow for the – maybe speculative – conclusion that Spinoza was not only an early radical enlightenment thinker, arguing in favour of democratic rights for the whole (male) population, but could also have been an early market economy advocate. Maybe he would even have been an early radical capitalist, had he been familiar with the modern notion of it, its fit with man's nature, and its implications and possibilities for human freedom.

In the 17th century, Spinoza's ideas about democracy were considered radical, leading to his books being banned across Europe, even in the for that time liberal Dutch Republic. In the 21th century, I do not have the illusion or fear that my ideas about market economies, as derived from Spinoza's work, will be considered radical, let alone them leading to this work being banned, but given the current circumstances and zeitgeist, I cannot reasonably expect a warm welcome either. Every man is subject to his affects, however, so I may hope for a lukewarm reception in a later stage – probably only after the people have felt the controlling cold of the planned economy.

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