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Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 38, No. 4. (Oct. - Dec., 1977), pp. 623-634.

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DEMOCRACY IN SPINOZA'S UNFINISHED
TRACTATUS POLITICUS

BY GIUSEPPA S. BATTISTI

The *Tractatus Politicus* breaks off, as everyone knows, just at the beginning of the exposition of the democratic system. The elements we find there concerning Spinoza's conception of democracy are therefore meager and limited to a few fundamental principles, while indications are wholly lacking of the solutions Spinoza no doubt intended to draw from these principles for the concrete organization of the State. To fill this gap, in some measure, one can reconstruct, systematically and by way of comparisons, the three types of political system propounded by the author and point out their similarities and dissimilarities. For want of space we postpone such a comparison to another occasion, limiting ourselves here to offering some general observations.¹

Spinoza, too, accepted the traditional distinction of Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy based on the number of individuals exercising supreme authority, namely one (the King) or a number of men (relatively few in Aristocracy, many in Democracy).² However, this schema does not of itself exhaust the possibilities of classification: before the situation in which a single man dominates we can imagine a "situation Zero," the situation, that is to say, in which there is no supreme authority; and after the political structure administered by many, we can postulate a "global situation" in which supreme authority is equally shared by all living human beings. These two limiting situations tend to converge in the sense that they both allow for identical conditions of intersubjective and collective relationships for all the single individuals. But from the point of view of political praxis the two appear to be "hypotheses" or "utopias," whose value would consist rather in their conceptual or wholly mythical instrumentality, than in their availability as concretely realizable alternatives.³ On the other hand, it is precisely in view of these "hypoth-

¹See my article, "Sistemi politici del passato e del futuro in Spinoza," *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana*, 1977. For the bibliography on this subject, which we cannot here discuss, see the indexes of Oko, Wetlese, and, more recent, J. Préposiet *Bibliographie Spinoziste* (Paris, 1973). For the *Tractatus Politicus* (hereafter *T. P.*) we refer always to the Latin text in B. Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. C. Gebhardt (Heidelberg, 1924), Vol. III, which also includes the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

²Cf. Ch. II, 17; III, 1.

³Cf. I, 1, the brief but emphatic words of condemnation of moralisms which instead of founding a new ethical doctrine seem rather to be satires, and of the

eses" that one can appraise fresh possibilities in every political proposal and throw into relief the extent to which, independently of the terms in which it is formulated, it is capable of leading to hitherto unimaginable praxis.⁴

Identifying "situation Zero" with the hypothesis of a coexistence of men not yet transformed into a political society, organized in structures functioning in accordance with established laws (in other words, a pre-contractual and preauthoritarian society), we automatically put at the opposite extreme the hypothesis that the elaboration of political structures has been carried to such a point of sophistication and refinement that every individual enjoys the positive aspects of organized society without losing those positive aspects offered by what is not yet organized. Since historically political structures have rewarded mainly privileged groups in proportion to their acquisition or consolidation of power, the "global situation" would have to effect a redistribution of advantages and powers to all without exception. Consequently, so long as a political system oscillates between attributing supreme authority to one individual and attributing it to many, it remains distant both from achievement (or even from the conception of the possibility of achievement) of the "global situation" and from recovery of the positive aspects of "situation Zero."

In Spinoza the traditional tripartite schema of possible types of state was worked out—as we shall now see—in a way permitting an enlargement, at once quantitative and qualitative, of the democratic conception, though still falling short always of what we have defined as the "global situation." The author succeeds in breaking through the one-many contrast not because he indefinitely increases the number of participants in the exercise of power but because he gives to Democracy a theoretical principle different from that of Monarchy and Aristocracy. His contribution is not to be measured according to the numerical proportions of the supreme assemblies in the several types of state or according to the erosion or absorption of strata of the population excluded from political life,⁵ but rather on the basis of the reasons given for such exclusion and of the reshaping of the conception of political right.

fantastical political systems proposed by theorists and philosophers, which though presenting themselves as fictions, utopias, myths yet offer a further justification of political conservatism, since they accentuate the disjunction between "theory" and "practice."

⁴In this sense even the most abstractly utopian proposals have a positive function, provided that they present a germ or nucleus of innovative hypothesis—unlike moralisms and estheticism which often serve to disguise a real lack of political ideas.

⁵As we shall show elsewhere, cf. note 1 above, the supreme assemblies envisaged by Spinoza have, especially in federal Aristocracy and in Democracy, a numerical

In the systems propounded by Spinoza one finds a constant subdivision of the population into three categories: (1) those who exercise supreme authority (the King in Monarchy, the Patricians in Aristocracy, the Citizen members of the Supreme Assembly or "Summum Concilium" in Democracy); (2) those who have certain possibilities of participation in political life (Citizens in Monarchy and Democracy, Subjects in Aristocracy); (3) those who are flatly excluded from political life, temporarily or permanently (the Plebeians). The relation between the first category and the third allows no possibility of negotiated change: it can be defined only as total overpowering of the one by the other, both when the supreme authority successfully maintains its dominant role and when, conversely, the Plebeians, together with the second group, determine or contribute to the overthrowing of that authority—which in any case will be promptly replaced by another authority equally detached and dominating. A genuine negotiative relationship does on the other hand subsist between the supreme authority and the stratum of Citizens or Subjects who aspire to public office. It is above all in respect of this middle category that a change of political systems entails an altering of relations and equilibrium in the life of the state.⁶

In Monarchy both the appointments of Citizens and their function in the posts assigned to them are determined by the King, that is to say, by a level of political power which is totally independent of and removed from the lower levels, and which none of those appointed to public positions can ever aspire to—all remain unconditionally subordinate to the King. In Aristocracy the situation is different. The members of the second stratum can be singled out for admission to the group of Patricians, that is to say, of the supreme authority, which can then be influenced and renewed by the incoming individuals. Only later, after admission to the politically privileged elite, can they aspire to public office: but the candidates and those who select them are henceforth all members of the same group, namely the Patricians gathered together in the Supreme Assembly. At this level designation comes about not by appointment from above, as in Monarchy, but by election from among a number of subjects politically equal—leaving on the sidelines all those

size without precedent, align themselves with the most daring proposals emergent during the English Revolution, and foreshadow the dimensions of popular suffrage of the nineteenth-century state.

⁶This situation subsists in every system that provides for exclusions, on whatever grounds, of certain categories from participation in the exercise of political authority. Neither do elective systems succeed in bringing to a same level the two strata of political authorities and political subjects: the body of elected representatives tends inevitably to dominate and control direct and total participation, as one already sees clearly in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century discussions, from Hobbes to Rousseau.

who, though belonging of course to the category superior to the Plebeians, have nevertheless not succeeded in attaining to the Patriciate.

In Democracy the passage of members of the middle stratum to the level of the supreme authority is, as in Aristocracy, a precondition to the right to be a candidate and a voter; but this passage does not depend on the deliberate sifting and choice of every individual by the group already in power. The passage is regulated by constitutional laws that specify on a superpersonal and general level what the requirements are for passage: these establish not the right to enter a stratum of persons eligible for appointment (as in Monarchy and Aristocracy), but the right to be simultaneously candidates and electors, fully exercising the political function (Ch. IX, 1-2). Freeing the acquisition of political rights from the intentional and contingent choice by one or more individuals carries with it the consequence that the sifting grants privileges not to individuals as such and with an eye to the personal aims of a few other individuals but to entire social classes indicated once and for all at the time of the constitutional foundation and according to the will and interests of the participants in the drafting of the constitution. In other words, the choice and determination of future active political relations is referred back to a single spatiotemporal point, the constitutive act, which becomes the essential moment in the formation of the state, but in a sense very different from the moment hypothesized in the theory of the social contract. The latter implies an irrevocable and not further controllable delegation of powers to others, which tends to be identified with an act acknowledging unconditional subjection; the former affirms active participation in the founding of a legal structure whose functioning and possible later interpretations and modifications will be carried out by the same classes that originally determined it (cf. also *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ch. XVI, p. 195).

There is accordingly a qualitative leap among the three types of state. Between Monarchy and Aristocracy this consists in the possibility of recruiting from the inferior political level a limited number of new members of the supreme authority, by way of personal choice; between Aristocracy and Democracy the leap is bound up with the introduction of legislative mechanisms which regulate the recruiting independently of individual will. For the purpose of characterizing the democratic system Spinoza considers this aspect of the matter more important than the number of individuals admitted to the summit of power;⁷ in his view

⁷This in reality brings about a reversal of direction: in Monarchy and Aristocracy the will of the upper class prevails, in Democracy the choices of the lower. In the first case, the persons in power are exempt from responsibility even though on the hypothesis of an original social contract one wishes to consider them "representatives" of the collectivity; in the second case, their "responsibility" becomes a corollary of the new relation between authority, citizens, and constitutional law.

a Democracy could, through its selective mechanisms, permit the presence in the supreme Assembly of fewer citizens than an aristocratic system without for that reason ceasing to be a Democracy, precisely because the number would depend on qualifications specified by the constitution and operating automatically, even if in an extremely limiting way (for example, if they permitted only the admission of first-born sons). Democracy consequently does not necessarily mean rule by the masses.

Nevertheless, as we noted at the outset, Spinoza in the *T.P.* established the classification of the three possible types of state accepting the criterion of the progressive increase in the number of individuals at the political summit. In the course of the Spinozan discussion, therefore, qualitative diversification must be accompanied by a gradual quantitative progression. The author says in fact that he wishes to consider the amplest model of Democracy, that, namely, whose constitution provides that all Citizens become automatically both candidates and voters, possessing in this way the fundamental rights of members of the Supreme authority. This choice, justified theoretically by the assertion that such a Democracy would be most consistent with the very principle on which this type of state is founded, in reality carries with it consequences which go much beyond the quantitative fact. Admitting equal rights to all the Citizens, Spinoza in point of fact eliminates the distinction between the second political category and the first and leaves standing only that between the third, the Plebeians entirely excluded from political activity, and the second, the Citizens. In this way a genuine distinction of classes is set up, and constitutionally legalized.

It is natural that at this point the question of exclusions should become particularly important—the question deliberately discussed, in fact, in ch. XI of *T.P.* on Democracy; though even with regard to the other regimes categories of persons are mentioned who must never participate in political life. Once again the quantitative aspect and the qualitative aspects of the innovation the philosopher introduces end up by reciprocally recalling and influencing each other. The number of the excluded obviously depends on the grounds of the exclusions; on the other hand, the problem of the grounds becomes urgent in consequence of the great enlargement of the number of Citizens who have acquired political rights, an enlargement in turn made possible by the qualitative difference of the democratic constitutional laws, compared with the aristocratic and the monarchical. In other words, once the blockage-and-sifting between the second political stratum and the first is dissolved, the blockage-and-sifting between the third stratum and the second also calls for change and a new theoretical foundation. The consequence will be, as we shall now see, a further quantitative increase.

The categories of the excluded in the *T.P.* are chiefly five (VI, 9;

VIII, 14; XI, 3): those who have insufficient means of subsistence and must, to live, work under others (“qui servili aliquo officio vitam sustentant”); those who are true servants, whose entire life is spent in the service of another (“famuli,” “servi,” “qui serviunt”); those who have committed crimes or pursue a base existence on the margins of the underworld (“infames,” “aliquod turpe vitae genus”); women; minors, and those who are under guardianship (“liberi et pupilli”). These last two categories appear explicitly only in connection with Democracy (XI, 3, 4), but it seems to us very difficult to believe that their exclusion does not hold good for the other states as well. Occasionally other less important groups are mentioned, like the physically disabled or those who have married a foreign woman. But in general it may be said that the categories judged inadmissible to political life are just about the same in all the regimes. A single significant difference concerns the first group, of those who can be briefly defined as dependent workers: in the democratic system these are no longer cited among the excluded; and since a banal forgetfulness is not to be thought of,⁸ one must conclude that Spinoza considers them admitted to the stratum of Citizens. That means that a Democracy consistent with its own principles entails, according to the author, a notable augmentation of the politically active population, probably equal to at least double the number of Citizens and Subjects in a Monarchy and an Aristocracy.⁹ Nevertheless there remains always a large residue of the Populace who are politically passive and peremptorily excluded.

For two categories of the excluded the author feels bound to furnish explanations, probably re-echoing contemporary discussions: women

⁸To make the discrimination more explicit, Spinoza sets up a parallelism between the qualifications necessary to become “Citizens” and the categories which via these qualifications he means “expressly” to exclude (XI, 3): to be subject only to the laws of this specific nation signifies excluding strangers; to be juridically independent requires elimination of women, minors, servants; to live respectably rules out delinquents and criminals. It seems clear to us that those who earn their living through some dependent labor cannot be considered either criminals or true “servants” who depend totally on the master.

⁹We refer here to what has been ascertained concerning the non-servant franchise demanded by the extreme wing of the English Revolution by C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, (Oxford, 1962): extending rights to non-servants, the number of voters in the time of Cromwell is said to have doubled (to about 416,000). The manhood franchise, on the contrary, including servants and beggars but leaving untouched the discrimination against women, is said to have increased the number of voters to 1,700,000. For a weighing of these data and of the discussions of Macpherson’s study, cf. Th. Keith, “The Levellers and the Franchise,” in *The “Interregnum”: the quest for settlement (1646–1660)*, ed. G. E. Aylmer (London, 1972). The fact that Spinoza, in discussing Democracy, extends voting rights to dependent laborers leads one to think that he pondered the claims of the Levellers and in part adopted their demands.

and servants.¹⁰ As for the first, the author gives no theoretical justification but falls back on history. In his opinion, human experience through the centuries shows that women's condition derives from a state of innate dependency, that is to say, born of their physical and mental weakness ("ex earum imbecillitate oriri," XI, 4). If that were not so, then at some time or other and somewhere in the world they would have had the opportunity to develop that "force of intellect and understanding in which above all human power consists and consequently the right"¹¹ that such power is capable of conquering. In other words, women would either have shared power with men or, alternatively, in a total reversal of the situation, would have ruled over men and subjected them to those cultural and psychological conditionings that historically one finds only in the sphere of women.¹² History seems here to become, even for Spinoza, an instrument of prejudice.

The direction in which the author intended to go in treating the situation of servants in the part of *T.P.* left unwritten, or at any rate not come down to us, we can in part imagine, bearing in mind what Spinoza said about obedience in *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Ch. XVI (Vol. III, p. 195). No type of civil society guarantees to individuals, whatever their social or political level, the right to live wholly as they please; each is bound to give a certain type of obedience, even in that democratic system which most nearly approaches the situation of maximum liberty conceivable in conformity with human nature. Subjects, servants, sons must all submit and adapt themselves to an authority that imposes something on them; but the purpose for which an action is ordered differs from case to case. So a son is bound to submit to the paternal will ("sub potestate parentum"); but the orders the father gives him have as their aim and end the benefit of the agent, that is to say of the son himself. The subject receives commands from the supreme authority: the end of the action required of him does not exclusively concern his personal benefit but does imply it indirectly, in that his interest as an individual in a democratic society coincides with the common interests, provided that in such a society all share equally in the conduct of public affairs. The servant, on the contrary, is by definition constrained to obey a command given solely because the action that must then follow is foreseen as useful to the one who commands, not to the one who obeys. The servant is accordingly an individual useless to himself ("sibi inutilis").

¹⁰These are wholly in the power of husbands and masters: "in potestate virorum et dominorum . . . sunt" (XI, 3). For children and wards the formula is different: these are "under the power (*sub potestate*) of parents and guardians."

¹¹" . . . animi fortitudine, et ingenio, in quo maxime humana potentia, et consequenter jus consistit . . ." (*ibid.*).

¹²" . . . nationes quaedam reperirentur ubi uterque sexus pariter regeret, et aliae ubi a foeminis viri regerentur, atque ita educarentur, ut ingenio minus possent." (*ibid.*).

We cannot, of course, exclude the likelihood that the problem of servants would have been further developed had the author been able to continue with his work. But it seems to us evident that in this case, as in respect of the asserted inferiority of women, Spinoza does not try to reach back to a principle justifying the servile condition, nor does he mean to take account of its origin or cause. He limits himself to defining exactly a factual situation, perceived in its actuality and in its social relations.¹³ This observation brings us to a remark of a more general order: in Democracy, as in Monarchy and in Aristocracy, the distinction between levels of political participation is never directly connected with the economic situation of the individual, for example, with the inventory of his wealth, his real estate or personal property, his income and standard of living, and so on. These qualifications can be stipulated (in the case, e.g., of a more restrictive Democracy) but are not determining. The distinction is founded rather on the principle that the individual must be independent enough in respect of work and means of subsistence to guarantee the presumed capacity and independence of judgment, and therefore the independence in action and voting, of the political person. It can happen that a man economically independent earns less than another who works partly or wholly in dependency upon others; he is entitled nevertheless to consider himself juridically autonomous (“*sui juris*” and not “*in potestate*” of others, as women and servants are) and therefore capable of an opinion and a political comportment not determined by the interests of others. This conception is particularly evident in Monarchy and Aristocracy, because in these the political exclusions include dependent workers: but the fact that this category is no longer mentioned in Democracy confirms the class (but not only economic class) nature of the political participation envisaged in the Spinozan models of the state. In other words, the groups of the population are fixed in their social and political situation for preconceived reasons (preconceived, even if obviously connected with the advantage and smooth functioning of the economic system) and not by a critical revision of the conception of man.

In any event, if we run over the theory of the social accord and of the conflict between individual and society as this is succinctly expounded again in *T.P.*, we come to realize that the discussion of political discriminations is framed in a vast perspective that embraces the whole course of the history of human society.

Spinoza establishes the identification of natural right, natural laws or rules and natural power (II, 4), three concepts which from different

¹³*T.T.P.* and *T.P.* do not make clear whether in Spinozan society “servants” become such through want of money or for family reasons or through some other causes. Since criminals are considered apart it seems excluded, or at least doubtful, that servitude could be imposed as a penalty.

angles provide paradigms for judging, in the general order of reality, the relations between individuals or between simultaneous or successive events. The concept of power (*potentia*) serves to lead back to and to concentrate on the origin of these relations in the essence of the individual; the "essentia" accordingly is the containing form or potential nucleus from which the action of the individual confronting the surrounding world will spring. Natural laws (*naturae leges*) represent the constant characteristics of the action of the individual, action in which precisely the power of his essence reveals itself; finally, natural right (*naturale jus*) is the sphere of individual appropriation that action realizes in conformity with the possibilities implicit in the essence. The extent of the natural right of an individual is recognized therefore in the moment in which action is taking place, for only then can one measure the extent of appropriation this action realizes; and conversely the action in its realization, in conformity with the power of the essence, renders explicit the extent of the right of the individual, heretofore implicit in the power of the essence. The essence is therefore the origin and cause both of the action which makes the power explicit and of the measure of right that this obtains within the limits of the realized appropriation. However, for us at least the power is knowable and determinable only at the same time as or after the events that flow from it. Consequently there is no inconsistency between right and power, nor is there any need to adapt the first to the second or to define the second in relation to the first: the two flow together in the presence of the individual's action.

Nevertheless a conflict between right and action does in fact continually arise. Since power is not knowable a priori and since action is delimited by the global structure of all the actors and all the concomitants acting contemporaneously, the limits of action of each are always correlated with the oppressive situation of the totality of the others and do not depend only on want of power in the essence of the individual. The correlation is so weighted against the individual that the complex of power-action-right tends for him, if he is considered in isolation, to approach zero. The human condition appears then already to be an essentially political condition even in a hypothetical state of nature, by virtue of the mere coexistence of many men in a definite time and place and with definite relations.¹⁴ Since this is so, the passage to a common accord does not really mean safeguarding against others a private, a personal vital sphere practically inexistent in the state of nature; it means rather creating for the first time a space for action and survival. The collective space established politically by the accord is not the sum of the individual spaces but is the sole foundation on which the individual

¹⁴The fact that these relations are not yet ordered in laws according to fixed conventions does not detract from their political nature.

spaces can finally be marked out. But this also entails that the space of the individual can never be exclusively individual; it belongs at once, in the instant of the accord, to all simultaneously, that is to say to the collectivity. In other words, the passage from the natural right of the individual to a universal common right comes about directly and with a qualitative, not quantitative, leap.

Upon this universality of the political collectivity typical Spinozan expressions converge, hinging on the adjective "communis": "common multitude," "common judgments of all," "common consensus," "common decision," "common laws of the nation" through which "the civil state is naturally instituted, with the object of abolishing common fear and eliminating common distresses" (III, 6; p. 286). To the community of an original existential situation in which fear and wretchedness are for all the expression of the impotence of the isolated individual, a community is contraposed of will, decisions, laws in which all act together "guided as if by a single mind" (II, 16). But this is exactly the optimal situation which only the democratic state, where the supreme authority "is composed of the common multitude," (II, 17), can successfully establish: Democracy is in fact defined as "the universal union of men who together, in collegiality, have a total right to everything over which they have power."¹⁵ To recover a condition of automatic political right for the plurality of men means therefore to reverse that historical process of degradation, synthetically described by Spinoza himself (*T.P.*, VIII, 12), in which every new collectivity takes shape initially as a Democracy, so that all or a great part of the people exercise together, in collegiality, the democratic sovereignty,¹⁶ and subsequently, by a progressive seizure and concentration of power, is transformed into Aristocracy and Monarchy. And bringing back ever ampler sectors of the population to the exercise of democratic right is to be considered part of that desirable movement toward the restoration of the original, and not yet degenerate, moment of political accord, reconquering that condition humanity was unable to preserve: "the whole society, if possible, must exercise sovereignty collegially, in order that all may be held to serve themselves and no one be obliged to serve one of his peers."¹⁷

And yet what sense can there be in a discourse reaching out towards liberty and rights for all if in the profoundly important moment of political participation discriminations are reaffirmed, and precisely against the weakest? Certainly it is not a question for Spinoza of defend-

¹⁵"coetus universus hominum, qui collegialiter summum jus ad omnia, quae potest, habet" (*T.T.P.*, XVI, 193).

¹⁶"imperium democraticum omnes, vel magna populi pars collegialiter tent" (*T.T.P.*, XX, 239).

¹⁷"Tota societas, si fieri potest, collegialiter imperium tenere debet, ut sic omnes sibi, et nemo suo aequali servire teneatur" (*T.T.P.*, V, 74).

ing the concept of authority against those who have not reached political maturity. Between the lines of the *T.P.* he carried on a constant polemic against all the forms of the monopolizing of authority, from the figure of the monarch, like everyone else subject to physical and moral weaknesses which can leave him at the mercy of his courtiers, to the figure of the general or dictator prompt to exploit internal and external emergency situations, or of judges greedy to confiscate (VI, 26; VII, 21) the goods of others, or of the clergy who urge on the politicians and let loose intolerance (VII, 30). An analogous attitude became in the *T.T.P.* an essential lever for uprooting the pretences of a connection between the laws of human political organization and ethical and religious laws of divine derivation, or given out to be such. The desacralizing criticism of the biblical text carried out by Spinoza on a revolutionary philological foundation cleared the field and made possible the construction of any state on exclusively secular or lay bases. The unmasking of religious pretences is followed in *T.P.* by the unmasking of elitist charisma: it is not true, Spinoza says, it is not to be believed that Aristocracy gives access to power only to the best, while Democracy, functioning without intentional discriminations, grants a voice in political life even to the worst and the most incompetent. The Patricians, like the Monarch and like all men, do not act for the public good but because they are driven by their own interest: they choose those bound to them by economic bonds (the rich) or by family bonds (relatives) or by bonds of business or friendship (XI, 2), calling them "the best" ("optimi"). All men have the same nature; they desire to outstrip their fellows, in order to live better and more pleasurably. Therefore liberty dies easily when the few command: and conversely, the larger the number of those entitled to discuss, to express an opinion and vote, the freer from possible errors will be the decision that must be made (VIII, 14). There is no fixed political verity to which one must adapt: there exists only a continual effort of determination and self-determination that from time to time leads to political solutions, to be modified anew as soon as they show themselves to be insufficient. Concentration of power and authority impedes this complex decisional mobility. Then the army becomes an instrument of repression, the law gives no guarantee of just dealing (VI, 26), the bureaucracy becomes deeprooted in its uncontrollable corrupt ways (VIII, 44), and finally, academic culture serves not to enlighten minds but to condition them (VIII, 49).

On the other hand, the dismantling of the idea of authority does not suffice if, on the opposite bank of society, there is no parallel growth of the capacity to appropriate a place or a share in power along with growth of the consciousness of the possibility, the right, even the duty to obtain and preserve that share. Exclusions consequently must strike, paradoxically, those who have not arrived at that capacity (minors and wards)

or who are believed to be incapable of arriving at it (women and servants), precisely because they may become the tool of those in power at the very moment when they should be exercising their political right. But there remains a possibility or prospect for the future, a hope, although one can hardly think it an optimistic certainty. Since the "potentia" of the essence of each person—which we cannot measure a priori in our contemporaries nor foresee in future generations—is knowable only in the moment of action, political right cannot be delimited in extension once and for all, but develops and is realized wherever the vital force of the individual (the "vis in existendo" of the *Ethics*) struggles to conquer its own proper vital sphere and own portion of liberty. The conquest, like the struggle, is never definitive; therefore in the dialectic of political relation right is reshaped every time action compels an alteration of equilibria. In consequence the very constitutional structure must be from time to time modified or completely reinvented. There remains, then, a way open to the discriminated against, the ignored and rejected. Someone can point it out to them, but it devolves upon them to recognize it, choose it, pursue it. In the sweep of human history this is precisely the progressive and toilsome approach to that "global situation" of which we spoke at the outset and which has as ultimate, utopian goal the reestablishment of "situation Zero."

University of Rome. (Translated by Nathan Berall.)