

Dr Beth Lord
University of Aberdeen

The concept of equality in Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*

It is claimed that one of Spinoza's contributions to the Radical Enlightenment is his endorsement of equality, usually taken in the moral or political sense. However, in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* his appeals to equality are ambiguous. Equality appears to be both natural and artificial, both good for peace and bad for sovereignty. Our 'equal right' extends from the state of nature into the civil state, and yet no one should be compelled to 'serve his equal'. The *Ethics* compounds the uncertainty over this matter. There, Spinoza's metaphysics makes way not for the moral equality of persons, but for their profound inequality, based on a hierarchy of our natural powers. How should equality figure in politics and ethics if, as Susan James has recently argued, the *Theologico-Political Treatise* describes the society in which the ethical and liberating purpose of the *Ethics* can be realized? What does Spinoza mean by equality, and what kind of equal society - if any - does Spinoza think we should aim for? In this paper I will discuss the meaning of equality in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, and suggest that understanding equality in economic terms, rather than moral-political ones, can help us to address these questions.