

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF SWEDENBORG THE PHILOSOPHER—REASON AND FAITH, FAITH AND REASON—A HUMAN PROJECT*

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PART ONE

It was neither science, then, nor new geographical discoveries, not even philosophy, as such, but rather the formidable difficulty of reconciling old and new in theological terms, and finally, by the the 1740s the apparent collapse of all efforts to forge a new general synthesis of theology, philosophy, politics, and science, which destabilized religious belief and values, causing the wholly unprecedented crisis of faith driving the secularization of the modern West. (Israel, 2006, 65)

. . . all the great Early Enlightenment intellectual controversies, . . . , in one way or another hinged on the now thoroughly destabilized and problematic relationship between reason and faith, . . . (Israel, 2006, 65)

But these pages of mine are written with a view to those only, who never believe anything but what they can receive with their intellect [reason]; consequently, who boldly invalidate, and are fain to deny the existence of all supereminent things, sublimer than themselves, as the soul itself, and what follows therefrom—its life, immortality, heaven, etc. These things . . . they reject; and consequently they honor and worship nature, the world and themselves; in other respects, they compare themselves to brutes, and think that they shall die in the same manner as brutes, . . . , thus, they rush fearlessly into wickedness. For these persons only am I anxious . . . and to them I dedicate my work. For when I shall have demonstrated truths themselves by the analytical method, I hope that those debasing shadows will be dispersed; and thus at last, under the

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favor of God, who is the sun of wisdom, that an access will be opened and a way laid down to faith. My ardent desire and zeal for this end is what urges and animates me. (Swedenborg, 1743 (1843), 1:14-15)

Introduction

It is not surprising that Emanuel Swedenborg, the brilliant scientifically inclined son of a pietistic Lutheran Bishop, in his philosophical project chose to tackle the dominant and most vexing problem of his day—the relationship between faith and reason and their connection to obtaining the good. Raised in a home that emphasized faith living in works, he was nonetheless passionately attracted by the elegance and power of reason.

That he wished to philosophically sustain a viable partnership between faith and reason is clear in the quotation above, taken from the introduction to *Regnum Animalii* (The Soul's Kingdom 1743–1745) his last attempt to resolve the issue. He wrote: “For when I shall have demonstrated truths themselves by the analytical method, I hope that . . . a way [will be] laid down to faith.”

The fragile nature of this partnership was challenged on all sides during the seventeenth century. The burgeoning scientific spirit questioned the need for faith; the devastation and destruction wrought by the thirty years war demonstrated the irrationality of faith; and the new Cartesian philosophy questioned the intellectual roots of faith.

Emanuel Swedenborg was born while this crisis still reigned in Sweden. After years of conflict between the Aristotelians (the old) and the Cartesians (the new) at Swedenborg's alma mater, Uppsala University, an edict by King Karl XI in 1689, attempted to silence the dispute. “The King permitted ‘the free use and practice of philosophy,’ provided that the authority of the Bible and the Christian faith remained undisturbed” (Lindroth, 1976, 73). The Cartesian perspective was permitted to have a circumscribed role within the intellectual life of the university. It could be entertained and discussed within the faculties of Law, Medicine, and Philosophy, but it was not permitted near the sacred precinct of theology, nor to challenge in any way the fundamental tenants of the Lutheran faith.

The theologians were disappointed and the philosophers were delighted. They felt they were given leave to preach the new philosophy whenever and wherever they wished, and they did. By 1700 Cartesian physics dominated the curriculum, along with modern mathematics, and experimental science. During Swedenborg's last year at the University, he took a course with Fabianus Törner, Professor of theoretical philosophy in which the doctrine of Aristotle and his followers was contrasted to Cartesianism (Acton, 1957, 14).

The challenge was not merely academic, it was personal as well. Olof Rudbeck, the Swedberg's neighbor and a towering figure at the university was a champion of reason and the new Cartesian perspective, while Swedenborg's father was a defender of faith and the old more traditional Aristotelian approach. On an even more personal level, his father's views clashed with those of Emanuel's brother-in-law, the astute university librarian, Eric Benzelius, a student of oriental languages and a fierce advocate of mathesis and the modern.

It may be remembered also that Swedenborg, on his trips abroad, sought out libraries with books that were new and could provide him with up-to-date information. As he wrote in his diary while in Prague at the "Jesuitencloster": "I entered, too, their superb library, which consisted, however, of only old books, and old manuscripts, dating from the fathers and Euclid and others. The place is richly decorated, but the books are old, and mostly of the schoolmen. . . ." (Tafel, 1890, 41).

It would appear that Swedenborg, like his contemporaries, was convinced that the resolution of the issue could be found within the framework of natural philosophy. He was in active pursuit of the perfect reconciliation for twenty years from 1724 to 1744. His attempt suffered the same fate as those who went before. However, while they abandoned the possibility of finding a natural partnership between faith and reason, choosing either cling to "faith alone" or abandoning it altogether, Swedenborg was led to redefine the parameters of the problem and provided a novel resolution. He wrote in 1770, "Now it is *permitted* to enter with understanding into the truths of faith" (Swedenborg, 1770, § 508:3 emphasis added by JW-H).

In order to understand Swedenborg's novel resolution, it is first necessary to understand the context which encouraged him to pursue his philosophical solution and the passion that drove his attempt.

The European context

In the 1720s, when Swedenborg began his first major philosophical work, the *Principia*, European philosophy was in a deepening crisis. The philosophical debate that began with René Descartes (1596–1650) concerning the relationship between faith and reason had been raging for almost a century. Many philosophers had joined in the fray: Spinoza (1632–1677), Leibniz (1646–1716), Bayle (1647–1706), and Christian Wolff (1679–1754) to name some of the major players. Not only did they discuss and debate among themselves, but joining in the debate were orthodox Christian theologians and philosophers.¹ Jonathan I. Israel suggests an image of a pulsating vortex to identify the swirl of opinion and controversy masquerading as conversation or debate. Each voice loudly asserting the obvious correctness of its own position. Pulsing in the vortex were found: the new biblical criticism, the experimental sciences, the many shades of Cartesianism, Newtonian physics, Locke's psychology, Pietistic fundamentalism, and Leibniz-Wolffian metaphysics. The more philosophical liberty was pursued, the greater the strife and discord. Leibniz had suggested that what was needed was a new general synthesis. Others heartily endorsed the idea that unhindered philosophical enquiry ought to be able to support an inclusive scientific rationality while still upholding faith, authority, and tradition, but the question was "how to achieve it?" (Israel, 2002, 541). Another important question is, how had it come to this?

For clearly this was not always the case. In fact, according to Jonathan I. Israel, "During the later Middle Ages and the early modern age down to the middle of the seventeenth century, western civilization was based on a

¹ In fact, according to Alan C. Kors (1987) "it was the orthodox culture of the seventeenth century that generated, in its debates and inquiries, the component arguments of the atheistic philosophies." In his article "A First Being of Whom We Have No Proof," he sets out to demonstrate the role of Christian theology and philosophy in the development of atheism as each theologian or philosopher attempted to demolish the arguments of their opponents in favor of their own.

largely shared core of faith, tradition, and authority" (Israel, 2001. 3); and a shared understanding of the mutuality of faith and reason. While there were many factors that contributed to the fracturing and fragmenting of this unity, including the Reformation, the wars of religion, and the discovery of distant lands and pagan peoples, this discussion will focus primarily on the role of the new philosophy, and the new science. This discussion must begin with a consideration of the life and work of René Descartes. This is asserted by Ernst Cassirer (1932), R. R. Palmer (1953), and Benjamin I Israel (2001) among others. Cassirer writes that "Cartesian philosophy triumphantly alters the entire world picture" (3); Palmer calls Descartes "a prophet of a world reconstructed by science" (134); and Israel writes of the New Philosophy, especially Cartesianism, that it "[initiated] one of the most decisive intellectual and cultural shifts in western history" (24).

While the conversation begins with Descartes, it will be necessary to follow the thread as it is picked up by Spinoza, Leibniz, and Wolff. Swedenborg is aware of these philosophers and cites all them in his notebook written circa 1741. The notebook was just that, it contained citations from many sources including the Bible gathered in preparation for his culminating philosophical enterprise, what in the end was titled *The Soul's Kingdom*. From some of the philosophers he took copious notes, while other merit only a brief mention.

Swedenborg does not directly engage the on-going conversation in his last work, although he wrote it with an eye toward resolving the issue between faith and reason once and for all. However, in his little work *The Infinite and Final Cause of Creation* (1734), it would appear that he assesses the schools of philosophy that emerged in the previous century. He does not confront them by name, but picks up their legacy and attempts to develop a philosophical framework to move beyond them. He assures the reader that in doing so, his philosophy will use "familiar words and a humble style" divested of metaphysical terminology so that the reader may grasp the essence of the matter concerning the most important of subjects—the Infinite.

This chapter will focus on the philosophical context of Swedenborg's own effort to deal with the question of the relationship between faith and reason. The next chapter will take up Swedenborg's response.

René Descartes' (1596–1650) life and work

Descartes was born in La Haye, France on March 31, 1596. His father was a lawyer and civil servant who was focused on his work. Descartes' mother died when he was an infant, and he and some of his siblings were sent to live with his grandmother. At the age of ten, he was enrolled in the Jesuit college at La Fliche, where he studied for eight years. In 1615, he took his Baccalaureate and License in Law at the University of Poitiers.

In 1618 he enlisted in the army of Prince Maurice of Nassua (Holland) where he most probably worked as an engineer. In this corps, he was engaged in applied mathematics in the design of defensive structures and machinery. The army took him to Breda, and while there he developed a relationship with the mathematician Isaac Beeckman (1588–1637). Beeckman taught Descartes, and his questions encouraged his latent interest in science. Descartes began to work on conceptions of proportions and ratios. Later in life, he minimized the importance of Beeckman in his mature ideas of mathematics and philosophy (Smith, plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works).

During this same period the army traveled to Germany, and Ulm. On November 10th, 1619 Descartes records three dreams that he had. The third dream was the most significant.² He interpreted them, and believed that they were God-given and signified that he would develop a universal science. They altered the course of his life. Descartes left the army at the end of the year, and appeared to have traveled widely during this time. It is thought that he returned to La Haye briefly, regarding the sale of property, and that he possibly spent some time in Italy. In 1625, he settled in Paris.

His sojourn in Paris was important in Descartes' biography. First, through contact with Father Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), his ideas and work became known to some of the key thinkers resident in Paris at that time. For example, Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694), Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), and Thomas Hobbs (1588–1679). Second, at the house of the Papal

² In this dream, he saw two books one Dictionary and the other a book of poetry. The Dictionary appeared uninteresting and of little use; the book of poetry, however, was inviting and seemed to signify the union of wisdom and philosophy. The dictionary was dry and disconnected like a listing or enumeration of the sciences, while the book of poetry was alive with wisdom.

Nucio, he confronted an M. Chandoux, a proponent of skepticism, who claimed that probabilities were the basis of science.³ Skepticism had dominated French intellectual circles from the time of the Renaissance. However, the recent publication (1621) of works by the late Classical writer Sextus Empiricus (c. 160–210 CE), had intensified and deepened the skeptical perspective, particularly of the followers of Montaigne (1533–1592). Descartes assailed the views of Chandoux and Montaigne’s followers, by asserting that only certainty could serve as the foundation of knowledge. He also claimed that he had a method for achieving it.

In 1629, Descartes moved to Holland, where he was to live almost exclusively for the next twenty years, and where he published all his writings. In 1635 he fathered a daughter, Francine. While she only lived for five years, dying of scarlet fever in 1640, there appears to have been some attachment to her. He seems to have provided for her and her mother, Helene, and several sources indicate that he also corresponded with her. During this same year, he also learned that his father and sister had died.

In 1636, Descartes moved to Leiden to oversee the publication of *Discourse on Method* in 1637, which included: “Optics,” “Meteorology,” and the “Geometry.” In this work Descartes develops the metaphysical framework for his system. He may have been developing the section on Geometry from as early as 1619 when he mentioned such a book in correspondence with Beeckman (Smith, 2010, Stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/). In any case, it is the place where he elaborates on how geometry problems can be solved using algebraic equations. These connections provided the means of mathematizing physics, as well as for generating the calculus.

In 1641 he published *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The work included “Objections and Replies” from six philosophers. Descartes had sent *Meditations* to Mersenne, an important correspondent of his, and his contact in Paris. The philosophers who replied included: Mersenne himself, Caterus, Hobbes, Arnauld, and Gassendi—men Descartes had met in Paris many years before. The book was written in French and intended for the educated public and not just academics. When it was republished the next year, it included a seventh reply by Bordin.

³After consulting a variety of sources, nothing more seems to be known about him except of suggesting the Chandoux was either alchemist or a chemist.

The focus of the *Meditations* was to establish the ground work for knowledge (scientia). In order to do this, Descartes develops a series of skeptical questions that are worked out in the seven meditations that follow. Skepticism is the method used to move the reader to the discovery of certainty. At the heart of the *Meditations*, according to Descartes, was the establishment of the foundations for his physics. With his physics, he wanted nothing less than to overturn the principles of Aristotle. He wanted to do away with the old science and establish the new. Extension was the starting point of Descartes' physics. The property of bodies are shape, motion, position, all of which entail extension of length, depth, and breadth. The primary characteristic of these bodies is that they can be measured on ratio scales, and thus they can be encompassed or understood mathematically (Smith, 2010, Stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/).

Pleased with the substance of his work, Descartes suggested to his friend, Mersenne, that perhaps *Meditations* could serve as a text for the Sorbonne. This was a somewhat odd request, since textbooks at that day were for teachers, and were developed by actual faculty members for themselves, or were created when one teacher took over a course from another. Descartes' request may have seemed to be overreaching his status, since he was not a teacher himself. While the book was designated a textbook, there is no evidence that it was ever used. This matter, however, was relatively insignificant in comparison to the issues that emerged with regard to Descartes' physics at the University of Utrecht (Smith, 2010, plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/).

Descartes' philosophy began to attract sympathetic readers, one of whom was Henricus Regius (1598–1679), a Dutch physician who taught at the University of Utrecht. He incorporated elements of Cartesian philosophy into his lectures. In 1643, an important theologian at the University, Gisbert Voetius (1588–1676), discovered this, and began to attack Regius for teachings ideas contrary to traditional theology. Voetius attempted to have the errant professor removed from his position. In addition, he widened his attack to Descartes himself and assaulted his philosophy and his character. Descartes entered into the debate. Regius wrote a defense of his position, which was officially condemned by Voetius, who later became the rector of the University. Regius remained at the University, but was only permitted to teach medicine. This incident greatly troubled

Descartes, and he feared that his works might be burnt and that he would be forced to leave the country (Smith, plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/). This controversy appeared to simmer down; however, it re-emerged in 1648.

The years between the two great controversies were active ones for Descartes. He began a correspondence with Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia and Queen Christina of Sweden. Both correspondents had an impact on Descartes. Princess Elizabeth, interested in the radical separation of *res cogitans* (mind) and *res extensa* (objects) asked Descartes: how was it then possible for the soul to interact with body, and vice versa? Their correspondence stimulated Descartes to produce two new works: *Principles of Philosophy* in 1644, which he dedicated to Princess Elizabeth; and in 1646, a draft of *The Passions of the Soul*. In *Principles*, Descartes outlines the metaphysics underlying his physics. It was a departure from his more mathematically rooted physics; but nonetheless, it did have an impact on several important scientists Robert Boyle (1627–1691), Edmund Halley (1656–1742), and Isaac Newton (1643–1727).⁴ *Principles*, as envisioned by Descartes, was to include two additional sections, one on plants and animals, and another, on man.⁵ (Smith, 2010, plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/).

Two positions that Descartes takes in *Principles* were disputed by Newton and Gassendi. Newton objects to Descartes' denial of the concept of a vacuum and what follows from that, namely, the physical universe is a plenum. Descartes denied the existence of a vacuum because the primary characteristic of the physical world is extension, and that, obviously a vacuum (nothingness) cannot possess extension. This, of course, leads to the idea of a full universe and, according to Newton, this makes motion problematic. Gassendi, however, objected to the idea that matter is infinitely divisible; there must be some initial or first substance, upon which the physical universe depends.⁶ (Smith, 2010, plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/).

⁴ As it will be shown, Both Halley and Newton play important roles in Swedenborg's own biography and scientific/philosophical thinking.

⁵ Conceptually, this appears to have some similarity to Swedenborg's two major philosophical projects, the *Principia* and *Economy . . .* and the *Soul's Kingdom*.

⁶ This idea resonates with Swedenborg's concept of a first finite found in his *Principia*.

In 1648, Professor Regius published *Foundations of Physics*, his own version of Cartesianism. He did this, despite the fact Voetius, who was now in a more powerful position as rector, would certainly be compelled to respond. Not only did Voetius publish his book, but he also published a tract in which he listed twenty-one of Descartes' principles with which he disagreed. He obviously wanted to separate his version of science from Descartes'. Descartes was outraged, and again was drawn to defend his views. He believed that Regius had used some of his unpublished papers and had either misunderstood them or had purposely distorted his views. Descartes published *Notes on a Program* to explain his position. The renewal of the controversy at Utrecht rekindled Descartes' unease, and thus, he welcomed the offer of his other royal correspondent, Queen Christina of Sweden, to come to her court in Stockholm.

He settled in Sweden in 1649, the same year that he published *Passions of the Soul*. The *Passions* was written in large part in response to the questions and commentary of Princess Elizabeth. It is Descartes' attempt to overcome the inherent dualism of his philosophy. *Passions* combines psychology, physiology, and ethics (oregonstate.edu/instruct/phil302/philosophers/descartes.html). The result is a moral philosophy. According to Descartes, our passions are mental states that move us to action, as a result of activity in the brain. The interaction between the soul and the body is located in the pineal gland. The gland is suspended in the brain in such a way that the two distinct realms can communicate while remaining wholly separate.

This position is assailed by Descartes' critics because the discussion in *Passions* implies that the mind has extension; but because the mind lacks a surface it has no extension, making communication with the body impossible. Clearly, Descartes' metaphysical dualism severely challenges the arguments he presents in *Passions of the Soul*.

Passions was to be Descartes' last published work. Not long after arriving in Stockholm (a move the wisdom of which Descartes himself began to doubt) Descartes succumb to pneumonia and died on February 11, 1650.

René Descartes—legacy

An important focus of Descartes' entire project was to discredit the scholastics and move "modern" scientists and philosophers beyond their non-reflective reliance on Aristotelian physics, and metaphysics. In addition he wanted to liberate science and philosophy from their subordination to theology. He also wanted his work to silence the skeptics, and one can see that his intellectual efforts were meant to challenge Chandoux. In doing this, he did not want to discredit either faith in God or a belief in certainty; however, it is clear that his project put them on a different epistemological footing.

To achieve the goal to which his 1619 dreams pointed—a new universal science—Descartes developed a new method, a new physics, and a new metaphysics to support his science and his method. He also made significant contribution in mathematics with which his name is still associated today. According to Gary Hatfield, Descartes "was a mathematician first, a natural scientist or 'natural philosopher' second, and a metaphysician third" (Hatfield, 2008, plato.stanford.edu/descartes/). Despite his brilliance as a mathematician, in assessing his contribution to the world that shaped Swedenborg's philosophical cultural milieu, it is Descartes' natural philosophy and his metaphysics that require our particular attention.

In his natural philosophy, according to Hatfield, "he offered a new vision of the natural world that continues to shape our thought today: a world of matter possessing a few fundamental properties and interacting according to a few universal laws. This natural world included an immaterial mind that, in human beings, was directly related to the brain; in this way, Descartes formulated the modern version of the mind-body problem." (Hatfield, 2008, plato.stanford.edu/descartes/).

In his metaphysics, "he provided arguments for the existence of God, to show that the essence of matter is extension, and that the essence of mind is thought. Descartes claimed early on to possess a special method, which was variously exhibited in mathematics, natural philosophy, and metaphysics, and which, in the latter part of his life, included, or was supplemented by, a method of doubt" (Hatfield, 2008, plato.stanford.edu/descartes/).

To discover certain knowledge, Descartes begins with doubt. At the time this was a novel approach. It attracted a great deal of attention, and the success of the method can be seen in the fact that it drew many adherents. Not long after Descartes published his *Discourse on a Method* (1637), and his *Meditations* (1641), there were Cartesians. Perhaps they were the people of good sense, including women, to whom Descartes had recommended his works. These Cartesians were men and women who subscribed to his scientific and philosophic view of operating principles of the world. The fact that there was such a positive response, suggests that the intellectual world of the continent was eager to break with the past and was hungry for a new, rational paradigm.

The extent to which they accepted Descartes' entire system varied. This is made clear not just by the questions of Princess Elizabeth of Bohemian, but also by the contentious dispute with Regius in Utrecht. Descartes' writings shook the world. His new philosophy quickly attracted not only adherents of differing commitments, but also critics and opponents.

Descartes most certainly wanted his method, his physics, and his metaphysics to aid in humanities' search for truth, and the improvement of the human condition. While doubt was his starting point, clarity and certainty were the end or purpose. Descartes took on his pseudo followers, he took on his critics, and he took on his opponents. He took part in an ongoing conversation in his search for the truth. His dialog with Elizabeth and with his critics in *Meditations*, as well as his *Notes on a Program* are key examples of this.

Nonetheless, after his death, he no longer could defend the integrity of his program. While reading Descartes was the necessary starting point for seventeenth-century scientists and philosophers that followed him, he could not guarantee their response. Some chose to repudiate him—the man who first broke with the past. One of them was Baruch Spinoza.

In 1663, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) published his critique of Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* (1644). This is the only work that Spinoza published under his name during his life-time. In it he takes issue with Descartes' dualism, and posits nature as a unified, uncaused whole which he identifies with God. In fact, Spinoza, develops a rational philosophical system that is essentially in opposition to Descartes'. In contrast to Descartes'

dualism, Spinoza gives reality a materialistic and atheistic (some say pantheistic) interpretation. A more detailed exposition will follow later in this chapter. One could say that Descartes' use of the inner psychological "I" as the starting point of his philosophy, opened the way for other "Is," such as Spinoza, to develop alternative grounds for reality, with logic or reason as the only measure of the "truth" of either system.

While it cannot be said that Spinoza's critique of Descartes was the catalyst, as there were others (even supporters who could have brought his work to the attention of the Curia), the Roman Catholic Church, in 1663, put his works on the *Index of Forbidden Books*. Descartes' defense of human freedom as an ingredient of salvation, may have sparked the censorship rather than his inadvertent support of atheism. In any case, this was done, even though Descartes saw himself as a sincere Catholic, and in his own way, a defender of the faith.

As more and more scientists and philosopher began their own development and understanding of the world by reading Descartes, by the end of the century Cartesianism was implicated either by assent or dissent in almost any and every philosophical and scientific position. The "Father of Rationalism" opened the floodgates of rationalism that eliminated more and more elements from what, in fact, can be known; until David Hume (1711–1776) not only challenged our ability to know the world of extension, and, of course, God; but he denied the existence of the subject, as well. This is the unintended legacy of Descartes.

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) life and work

Baruch Spinoza was born in the relatively open intellectual atmosphere of Amsterdam in 1632 (Nadler, 2008), where the Cartesian influence on philosophy was strong. His parents were respected members of the city's Jewish community, and belonged to the Jewish Portuguese Synagogue. Spinoza's education took place in this environment. In 1656, at the age of twenty-four, he was expelled from the congregation and the community for teaching and practicing heresies. He had questioned the authority of the Torah and the existence of the Jewish God, the very essence of Judaism. The *cherem* took place on July 27th, and the words of the charge were exceptionally harsh: "Cursed be he by day and cursed be

he by night; cursed be he when he lies down, and cursed be he when he rises up; cursed be he when he goes out, and cursed be he when he comes in. The Lord will not spare him . . ." (Nadler, 120).

No one in the community was to have any contact with him from that time onward; in addition, they could not live near him or read anything he had written. Not long after this, in 1661, Spinoza left Amsterdam and, for a time took, he up residence outside of Leiden in Rijnsburg. In this setting, he devoted himself to philosophy and he earned his living grinding lenses, although there is some question about the nature of the lenses he crafted, whether they were for telescopes or for eye glasses. In 1663, he moved once again, this time to Voorburg, outside of The Hague. He lived there for six years, moving once again in 1669 to The Hague, where he lived on Paviljoensgracht in the home of Hendrik van der Spyck until his death in 1677.

Spinoza lived a quiet, almost ascetic life focused on his philosophy and lens grinding. He did, however, have a circle of friends: students, intellectuals, and fellow philosophers with whom he conversed and exchanged correspondence. His known correspondence dates from the time of his move from Amsterdam in 1661.

In 1663, as already noted, he published his work on Descartes: *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy with Metaphysical Thoughts*. This work contained an Introduction by Lodewijk Meyer (1629–1681) and the printing and publication of the work was overseen by him. In fact, it may have even been through Meyer's suggestion that the book was published at all. In this short work, Spinoza wanted to present Descartes' philosophy "for the benefit of all men" (Shirley, 1998, xiv). He was interested in spreading the truth, and "making this little work welcome to all" (Shirley, 1998, xiv). However, he did not simply re-present Descartes concepts and ideas. He wanted to arrange them in what he believed was a more appropriate order. Thus, while he offers Descartes philosophy, he also gives the reader some of his own, as well.

Meyer, in his Introduction, indicates the essential differences between Spinoza and Descartes. There are three main differences: First, "he [Spinoza] does not consider the Will to be distinct from the Intellect, and [second] it is far less endowed with the freedom that Descartes ascribes to it" (Shirley,

1998, 5, 6). And finally, he does not believe in the substantiality of the human soul. What Spinoza appreciates about Descartes was his use of doubt, and his desire to adhere closely to the structure of mathematics as he lays down the “solid foundations of the sciences” (Shirley, 1998, 7).

Descartes was the necessary starting point for the modern philosophical enterprise, but Spinoza was certain his approach was an improvement on it, providing a means for seeing things clearly and distinctly. To this end Spinoza not only published *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy with Metaphysical Thought*, but he also wrote *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (published posthumously), *Theological-Political Treatise* (published anonymously in 1670), and *Ethics* (published posthumously).⁷

Spinoza scholar Steven Nadler has called him “one of the most important philosophers—and certainly the most radical—of the early modern period;” and of all the seventeenth century philosophers, perhaps the one who is most relevant today (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>). In the preface to a later work—*A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza’s Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (2011)—Nadler goes even further and writes that “his philosophical, political, and religious ideas laid the foundation for much of what we now regard as ‘modern.’” Matthew Stewart, in *The Courtier and The Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (2006), views Spinoza as “the first great thinker of the modern era” (312). Don Garrett in his “Introduction” to *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (1996) suggest that he is, to say the least, controversial. He was, as Novalis wrote, “the God-Intoxicated man,” who was also from the days of his youth called an “atheist.” His philosophy is based on an uncreated infinite substance “*Deus sive Natura*” (God-or-Nature) rather than a personal deity. He was a calm, rational necessitarian and causal determinist who nonetheless passionately called for an ethical idea of individual freedom (Garret, 1).

Spinoza was reared in the Sephardic Marrano Jewish community of Amsterdam, a community created by those who fled both the Spanish and

⁷ In addition to these, included in Spinoza’s corpus are also the *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being*, his *Political Treatise*, a *Compendium to Hebrew Grammar*, and his correspondence.

Portuguese Inquisitions. The son of Michael and Hanna (Senior) Spinoza, he attended the Talmud Torah School until the time he was about fourteen years old. The focus of his education was the study of Holy Scripture written by the finger of the transcendent God of Abraham and Moses. He studied the Pentateuch, the other twenty-four books of the Bible, and the Mishna. He was schooled in the laws of “God’s chosen people.” His education was rigorous, methodical, and demanding.

He was educated within a close-knit and prosperous immigrant community that nonetheless was thankful to breathe the free air of the Dutch Republic during its “Golden Age.” While travelers found many astounding things in Amsterdam—elegant public buildings and mansions, neat and tidy citizens, new fangled street lamps, wonderful technology and inventions (clocks, microscopes, and telescopes), advanced medical practices and clean hospitals—nothing impressed visitors and perhaps her immigrants more than the Dutch love of freedom (Stewart, 2006, 21).

This was certainly true of Benedictus (Baruch) Spinoza in his mature political philosophy, and thus one can imagine that it was also true of him in his youth. Unlike other cities in Europe where Jews took refuge, in Amsterdam, they were not confined to a Ghetto. They lived and worked freely among the Dutch. Walking to and from the Torah Talmud School, day after day, year after year, Bento breathed in the heady air of freedom. As many commentators have noted this lead him at first to ponder and then question the very foundations of his education—the nature of God, the source of the Scriptures, and the origin of the law, and the way of salvation.

In the end, it would appear that Spinoza absorbed the importance of the meticulous method of his education, and he even acknowledge the centrality of its concepts, but he radically rejected its substance. Much of Spinoza’s philosophy is geometrical in form. His *Ethics* is demonstrated with “geometrical order,” instead of rabbinical rigor; he invokes God but identifies his substance with “*Natura*”; scientific philosophy replaces the Scriptures; reason replaces the law; and seeking to fulfill one’s conatus replaces the ritual piety of his forefathers. No longer a Jew (more because he freely chose not to be one than because of the *cherem*), and not a

Christian, Spinoza in his philosophy opens the way for every secular natural individual to find the “blessedness” of “a true good.”⁸

How does he do it? What is his philosophy? And how does it work? And finally what is his legacy?

Spinoza’s philosophical project

Ethics

In choosing geometric demonstration as the method of his philosophy, Spinoza transforms human ethics. As Seymour Feldman states: “Spinoza’s method is his philosophy” (Spinoza, 1992, 8). Philosophically, ethics was long thought to be associated with freedom of choice or an exercise of the will. Spinoza, however, demonstrates that, in fact, ethics are merely a matter of knowledge of understanding. Ethics are geometrical—they are like the perfect proof of the perfect form. They are the right thinking, the clear and distinct knowledge, that is consistent with or corresponds to our nature (our eternal nature). When we are ethical from Spinoza’s perspective, we are free. That is, in such a state we are as consciously aware as it is possible for a finite being to be of “the essence of its body under a form of eternity . . . we know all the things that can follow [be determined] from this given knowledge of God” (Spinoza, 1992, 217). In a certain sense we know the divine theorem of our being. In such a state, the notions of good and evil around which ethics previously was thought to revolve do not exist. For as he states in *Ethics* Part IV, Proposition 68: “If men were born free [in the order of their life] they would form no conception of good and evil so long as they were free” (Spinoza, 1992, 192).

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza unveils his path to the “right way of life.” It has five parts. He begins with God or “*Deus sive Natura*,” then he turns to the

⁸Spinoza’s opening statement in his *Treatise on The Emendation of the Intellect*, written early but published posthumously, is often quoted by Spinoza scholars to show the inner motivation of his philosophical enterprise. Given Spinoza’s geometric method, and his reticence about self-revelation, even in correspondence, this statement stands for the goal or “purpose” of his “purposeless” natural universe. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics, Treatise on The Emendations of The Intellect, and Selected Letters*, Edited and Introduced by Seymour Feldman, trans. Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992, 233.

“Nature and Origin of the Mind” which he identifies as only intellectual knowing by way of reason. And because each mind or mode must realize its *conatus* or its endeavor to persist in its own being he then expounds on the “Origin and Nature of the Emotions” before he confronts the reader with the role Emotion play in our “Human Bondage.” The goal of the *Ethics* is to escape bondage, which occurs when the power of the intellect achieves the intellectual love of God—through the third or highest kind of knowledge—which is eternal. Awareness of the eternal, to understand the necessary order and connection of all things, that is salvation.

God

“*Deus sive Natura*,” translated “God or Nature,” is at the center of Spinoza’s philosophy. He begins his *Ethics* by defining God. He writes: “By God I mean an absolutely infinite being; that is, substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence” (Spinoza, 1996, 33). Paraphrased, one can say that at the most basic level, “the universe is a single, unique, infinite, eternal, necessarily existing substance” (Nadler, 2011, 13). What that means is that God is not transcendent—he is neither the Creator nor the Redeemer. “Natura” has no will and understanding, no love and wisdom, no goodness, use or justice. There is no beginning or end, no providence and no purpose. There is only absolute necessity and the stark causal order determined by Nature. As Steven Nadler, in his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article on Spinoza, writes, in the creation of the world: “God could not have done otherwise. There are no possible alternatives to the actual world, and absolutely no contingency or spontaneity within that world. Everything is absolutely and necessarily determined” (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>).

“*Deus sive Natura*” was not created but it is the only substance that exists. It exists “in itself,” and is “conceived through itself.” God is one, infinite and absolute.

God is the only substance, and so everything is either a substance or in a substance. Since God is the only substance, “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God” (Spinoza, 1996, 40).

Oneness or unity is the over-riding principle of Spinoza's system. By positing an infinite substance with an infinite number of attributes each of which express that infinity, Spinoza not only claims thought as an attribute of God, but extension as well. In this way, Spinoza overcomes the inherent dualism he believed to be so problematic in the philosophies of predecessors such as Aristotle and Descartes.

The concepts of clarity, certainty, and coherence exist as a function of no gaps within the totality of his system. That is, they are associated with a system where nothing essential is unaccounted for and everything is absolutely and necessarily determined.

As Feldman states, "For Spinoza there is a fundamental continuity [and connection] between the ultimate cause of everything, God or substance, and that which is caused, or the modes" (Spinoza, 1992, 10). Spinoza's "*Deus sive Natura*" is infinitely productive, infinitely causative, and infinitely expansive, and infinitely rich. Thus, it contains everything that is and could possibly be. God is the immanent cause dwelling in the extended world, just as all the vast and endless expressions of that world are in God. This unity dissolves the distinction between God and nature. As Spinoza writes in Part IV of the *Ethics*, "God or Nature"—which really means "God, or what amounts to the same thing, Nature" (Nadler, 2011, 158).

There are, however, two different types of modes, infinite and finite. Infinite modes are those that are universal and eternal—they are permanent and enduring features of the God. Nadler refers to them as "the general laws of the universe" such as the truths of geometry, the laws of physics, and the laws of psychology (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>). Edwin Curley, while coming to essentially the same conclusion—"infinite modes are causal features of the world, and a statement attributing such a mode to the world would be a basic causal law"—suggests that Spinoza himself does not make it explicit (Garrett, 1996, 73). Finite modes on the other hand, such as particular and individual things are casually more remote from God. They are: "nothing but affections of the attributes of God" (Spinoza, 1992, 49).

The fact that in Spinoza's system there are two types of modes, suggest that there are also two casual orders, one that governs the general order of the universe, and one related to the world of particulars. The

implication of this is that the actual behavior of a particular body is governed by both the general laws of motion and by all the other bodies in motion with which it comes in contact. This truth has important implications for the realization of the *conatus* of a human being.

One other characteristic of “*Deus sive Natura*” that is worth noting is “power.” According to Spinoza, the last three propositions concerning God that he presents revolve around power. In Proposition 34, he writes: “God’s power is his very essence.”

He continues: Proposition 35 “Whatever we conceive to be in God’s power necessarily exists.” And he concludes in Proposition 36 that “Nothing exists from whose nature an effect does not follow” (Spinoza, 1992, 56, 57). This is the end of his propositions concerning God.

However, in order to engage the reader and any doubts they may have concerning his proofs, he writes an appendix. The appendix begins with a restatement of his view of God making it explicit that God:

necessarily exists, that he is one alone, that he is and acts solely from the necessity of his own nature, that he is the free cause of all things and how so, that all things are in God and are so dependent on him that they can neither be nor be conceived without him, and lastly, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from his free will or absolute pleasure, but from the absolute nature of God, his infinite power” (Spinoza, 1992, 57).

Spinoza wishes to reassert his perspective because of the prejudices of others—prejudices that he will unmask before the “bar of reason” (Spinoza, 1992, 57). These prejudices needed to be addressed not just because they were wrong, but because “if men understood things, all that I have put forward would be found, if not attractive, at any rate convincing, as Mathematics attests” (Spinoza, 1992, 62). This sentiment is reinforced by Spinoza’s response to a hostile critic, when asked, why he knew his philosophy was true? He wrote: “I know it is the same way that you know that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles” (Stewart, 2006, 37). While Spinoza also thought that other reasonable men would see the same truth, his awareness of the critical prejudices of others suggests

that the source of these differences must be found in Spinoza's view of the complex mode that is human.

*Human nature—the human mind and the emotions*⁹

Human beings are individual or particular modes of God. They are conceived in God, live and have their being in God, and persist in indefinite time in God. Spinoza is quick to point out that human beings are modes of God in the same manner and in the same fashion as stones, trees, chairs, and dogs are modes of God.

Human beings are not, as many think, “a kingdom within a kingdom” just because they exhibit emotions; quite the contrary. In the Preface of Part III of the *Ethics*, Spinoza lays out his argument. He assures the reader, that if one understands human emotions as he does, then it is obvious that:

in Nature nothing happens which can be attributed to its defectiveness, for Nature is always the same. . . So our approach to understanding the nature of things of every kind should likewise be one and the same; namely, through the universal laws and rules of Nature. Therefore, the emotions . . . , considered in themselves, follow from the same necessity and force of Nature as all other particular things (Spinoza, 1992, 102–03).

Thus, the mind, Spinoza asserts, operates in complete accord with the laws of nature.

As Jonathan Bennett summarizes: “[T]he whole truth about human beings can be told in terms which are needed anyway to describe the rest of the universe, and . . . men differ only in degree and not in kind from all other parts of reality” (Garrett, 1996, 257).

Spinoza makes this clear in the Preface of Part III, when he claims that he will “treat of the nature and strength of the emotions, and the mind’s

⁹ It would appear that Spinoza when he speaks of the human mind, he is referring to an adult mind that in the process of seeking to persist and to realize his own nature and who has developed in time based on many confused ideas and some adequate idea. He presents a psychology of that adult mind rather than a developmental psychology from birth to old age. He himself says, “I do not know how one should reckon a man who hangs himself, or how one should reckon babies, fools, and madmen” (Spinoza, 1992, 100).

power over them, by the same method as I have used in treating of God and the mind, and I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, or bodies” (Spinoza, 1992, 103).

Human beings are particular finite modes of “*Deus sive Natura*.” Like other finite modes they are composed of Thought and Extension. Nonetheless, because Thought and Extension are two distinct attributes, they have no casual connect between them. Matter and mind are both casually closed systems. Despite their radical difference, there is a parallelism or correlation between them. This is so, because according to Spinoza, for every persisting extended mode or body there is a corresponding mode of thought. As he writes in the *Ethics* Part II Proposition 7: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (Spinoza, 1992, 66). In this way Spinoza attempts to overcome the problem of dualism he found so disturbing in Descartes.¹⁰

Human beings are clearly complex creatures. This complexity is evident in the body of a human being both with regard to its composition and its ability to act and be acted upon. This can also be seen in the mind or its corresponding idea. To a certain extent, Spinoza resolves this complexity, according to Nadler, by asserting that “the human mind and the human body are two different expressions—under Thought and Extension—of one and the same person” (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>). Thus, “whatever happens in the body is reflected in the mind. In this way the mind perceives, more or less obscurely, what is taking place in the body. And through the body’s interaction with other bodies, the mind is aware of what is happening in the physical world around it” (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>).

The mind and the body, despite being radically other, nonetheless are interdependent. As Spinoza state in the *Ethics* Part II Proposition 22: “The human mind perceives not only the affections [what affects the body] but the ideas of these affections [affects]” (Spinoza, 1992, 81). Spinoza follows

¹⁰ Whether his solution really addresses the problem of dualism or not is a question, as Stewart says, “One could argue, . . . , for example that the division of Substance into two attributes of Thought and Extension amounts only to an assertion *that* mind and body are the same thing, not an explanation of *how* the identity of these two very different kind of phenomena comes about. In other words, Spinoza’s theory, when considered as a positive doctrine, may simply be kicking the mind-body problem upstairs, from humankind to God” (Stewart, 2006, 170).

this thought by saying that “The mind does not know itself except in so far as it perceives ideas of affections [affects] of the body” (Spinoza, 1992, 81). The problem with this is that these ideas which are related only to the human mind are not clear and distinct but confused or as he later says are inadequate (Spinoza, 1992, 83).

Spinoza is quite clear; adequate or true ideas come only from God. Sense perception of a particular individual reveals only the common order of nature, and thus, provides men with only fragmentary, confused and ultimately false knowledge. True knowledge, according to Spinoza, is equally in the part as well as the whole (Spinoza, 1992, 88).

At this point in his demonstration about the nature of the mind, Spinoza presents the reader with three types of knowledge: 1. knowledge from casual experience or from opinion and imagination; 2. knowledge from reason; 3. intuitive knowledge (Spinoza, 1992, 90). Knowledge of the first kind is the source of falsity; and knowledges of the second and third kind permit one to distinguish truth from falsity. The first kind of knowledge lead to the false idea that there is such a thing as contingency, whereas reason acknowledges only necessity or what is necessary. Reason furthermore “perceives things in the light of eternity” (91). Intuition confirms true ideas, because true ideas are not only adequate, but they are self-evident (91).

Spinoza ends Part II of the *Ethics* by reinforcing the two ideas: first, that there is no absolute, or free will in the mind; and second there is no volition. He equates the will and the intellect and provides a proof that they are one and the same, and that only misconceptions have encouraged men to think otherwise.

With this Spinoza turn his attention to Emotions or affects, and what they are, so that in the end he may inform us concerning the role they play in in our “Bondage.”

Spinoza’s aim in Part III and IV of the *Ethics* is to paint for the reader a true and unvarnished picture of our human status. While the reader may think that his will and his emotions allow him to stand apart from or above nature, Spinoza makes it clear that he like everything else is properly a part of nature. Nothing, not even the human mind, stands apart from nature (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>).

Part III

Spinoza's picture of the naturalized human mind, show it to be both active and passive. It is active when it holds adequate ideas, and it is passive when those ideas are inadequate. Nonetheless whether a person is active or passive or whether he acts or is merely acted upon, he is changing, because he is either increasing or decreasing his power to persevere. Spinoza postulates that everything in nature has a *conatus*, that is it "endeavors to persist in its own being." *Conatus* is associated with "will" when it refers to the mind; "appetites" when it refers to the mind and body together, and "desire" when "an appetite is accompanied by the consciousness thereof" (Spinoza, 1992, 109).

Spinoza elaborates, "this conatus . . . is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself" (108). Not only does it endeavor to persist, but it does so indefinitely. The mind is, in fact, conscious of its *conatus*, whether it has adequate or inadequate ideas. Nevertheless, the mind, in so far as it is able, seeks to think of those things that will increase the active powers of its body and furthermore, in so far as it is possible it also turns away from thinking of things that diminish its power or *conatus*.

Affects can be both active and passive. Affects that are actions have their source in our nature alone, while affects that are passions have their source outside of us. Since *conatus* inscribes on us an autonomous sense of being, we should attempt to be as "free" as possible from passions which reduce our autonomy. The way to do this is to pursue adequate rational knowledge, and to gain clarity about the source of our inadequate ideas—ideas that came from bodies outside of ourselves. These inadequate ideas are based on sense impressions and imagination, not on the power of reason.

Because we seek to persevere, we pursue things that will increase our power, and we shun those things that will decrease our power. Knowing this, Spinoza developed a means of identifying or cataloging our passions. Those passions that increase our powers he calls, pleasures, and those that decrease our powers he calls pain. However, passions because they originate outside of us can never be controlled and therefore need to be examined and shunned. A good deal of Part III explores various emotions and assesses them in terms of whether they enhance one's own "self and its power of activity" (Spinoza, 1992. 135). Passions categorically cannot

increase our power, because they do not allow any of us to know our own self. Nonetheless, they cannot be entirely eliminated, because we are, like them, part of the causal chain of nature.

However, as Spinoza explains in Proposition 53, “the mind *can* regard its own self” (emphasis added by JW-H). This is important because a man only “knows himself through the affections of his body and their ideas.” When this happens, he writes, “by that very fact it is assumed to pass to a state of greater perfection.” This gives a person a sense of pleasure, and this pleasure increases the more distinctly it images itself and its activity (Spinoza, 1992, 135). Spinoza is interested in discovering the circumstances when this can occur, not just incidentally, but in an on-going rational way.

Part IV bondage

The aim of the *Ethics* is to demonstrate the way to live the actual or real expression of one’s own essence. This can only be done by escaping from the “bondage” of the passions, and discovering a life of “freedom.” Spinoza defines “bondage” as “man’s lack of power to control and check the emotions. For a man at the mercy of his emotions is not his own master but is subject to fortune, in whose power he so lies that he is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse” (Spinoza, 1992, 152). Spinoza makes it clear that to be compelled against one’s nature is the gravest assault a person could endure. Such thralldom is pathetic, although Spinoza sees it to be the lot of most of humankind. While being tossed about on the seas of the passions can result in seasickness, our imagination and our inadequate ideas whisper to us that there is no way off the boat. What Spinoza does, to a certain extent, is to agree that there is no way off the boat but that there is a way to remain on the boat in tranquil self-contentment.

What the affects or the passions do is prevent self-actualization. They encourage passivity not action. They can do this because all human beings are finite and possess only limited amounts of power, and are always subject to external forces. They can do this by encouraging in us the idea that self-actualization is not virtuous, when Spinoza clearly states that “virtue or power is man’s very essence” (155). Virtue is self-actualization.

The passions also create the affects that divert us from virtue, as defined by Spinoza; and also by encouraging us to pursue false ideas such as honor, reputation, and gain.

While adequate ideas are important in combating the passions, the force or power of the passions is not directly related to their truth or falsity, but to their strength. Thus, one can remove the constraints of an affect only through summoning a stronger opposite affect (Garrett, 1995, 275) Affects are more powerful if they are: present and not past or future, near rather than far, the object is free rather than necessary, and the cause is necessary rather than possible; and the object possible rather than contingent¹¹The bottom line is that the imagination can lead us to think that an affect is stronger than it really is. We are in bondage and reason can lead us out.

Part IV reason

The path is through the process of self-actualization or as Spinoza writes:

Since reason demands nothing that is contrary to nature, it therefore demands that every man love himself, should seek his own advantage (I mean his real advantage), should aim at whatever leads a man toward greater perfection, and, to sum it all up, that each man, as far as in him lies, should endeavor to preserve his own being (Spinoza, 1992, 164).¹²

¹¹ According to Garrett, this last distinction in Spinoza entails “Conceiving of something as contingent and conceiving something as possible both involved ignorance of the things actual existence; however, the latter requires a knowledge of and attention to the thing’s manner of production that are lacking in the former” (Garrett, 1996, 311).

¹² After wrestling with Spinoza over the past year, and having recently been immersed in his work and in books about his work, this passage spoke to me about Spinoza’s biography and the intimate relationship between his biography and his philosophy. I imagine Spinoza sitting uncomfortably in the Talmud Torah School without the least feeling of self-contentment or well-being. At each and every moment he felt “his own being,” his sense of his own *conatus*, his own mind and body being assaulted. He became increasingly unhappy because he was not able to preserve his own being due to the flood of forces out side of his control. It occurs to me that Spinoza developed his method and his philosophy in order to justify his seeking his own being, his own virtue, and his own happiness. He felt radically other in this environment and he left to find an environment that supported his definition of himself. His method and his philosophy turned his Jewish education on its head. His political program became the overthrow of theocracy. According to Stewart, “his political commitments would seem prior to his philosophy. That is, his metaphysics would be intelligible principally as an expression of his political project” (Stewart, 2006, 163).

Spinoza presents three ways in which reason is of use in the project of self-actualization. First, because it helps us to order our emotions. Reason requires us to examine all of them in relation to our true self-interest. Reason permits us to examine such emotions as pride, honesty, piety, and humility. It helps us to see both pride and humility in an equally negative light. Both of these emotions are rooted in a weakness of spirit.

Pleasure, so often derided by Christians, in fact is useful.

It is part of a wise man to make use of things and to take pleasure in them as far as he can (but not to the point of satiety, for that is not taking pleasure). It is, I repeat, the part of a wise man to refresh and invigorate himself in moderation with good food and drink, as also with perfumes, with the beauty of blooming plants, with dress, music, sporting activities, theaters and the like, in which every man can indulge without harm to another (Spinoza, 1992, 180).

When we appropriately order our emotions to support self-love, we are, in fact, virtuous; and it follows that the more we actualize this self-love the more virtuous we become. Spinoza assures us that the use of reason in this way, actually promotes community and charity. Those who are guided by reason treat others (each other) with respect. However, Spinoza warns against taking favors from the ignorant. This is because the ignorant do not understand the virtue of reason, or the nature of "free men." Spinoza counsels us in this way, lest we appear "to despise them" (Spinoza, 1992, 193). Spinoza makes it clear that "only free men are truly grateful to one another" (Spinoza, 1992, 194). Reason encourages like minded rational men to associate with one another, because they are of one mind.

The second way in which reason serves the person who seeks self-realization is by helping him to see the inner necessity of things and in this way to maintain contentment even though there exists a vast array of things out side of and beyond our control. He writes:

If we are conscious that we have done our duty . . . if we clearly and distinctly understand this , that part of us that is defined by the understanding, that is, the better part of us, will be fully resigned and will endeavor to persevere in that resignation. For insofar as we understand,

we can desire nothing but that which must be, not, in an absolute sense, can we find contentment in anything but the truth. And so insofar as we rightly understand these matters, the endeavor or better part of us is in harmony with the order of the whole of Nature. (Spinoza, 1992, 200)

According to Stewart, despite the resonance of this sentiment with the Stoics, Spinoza is not a fatalist, but rather a “lover of fate” (Stewart, 2006, 176).

Part V

If we persist in life under the guidance of reason, Spinoza assures us that we can find the third and final gift of reason. That gift is an emotion supported by reason itself; it is “the intellectual love of God.” In giving us this gift we have achieved freedom through the power of the intellect. This power is associated with the third way of knowledge or intuition. This confirms contentment of mind and leads to a state of blessedness. With Blessedness the mind comes to “a knowledge of itself and the body under a form of eternity, a necessary knowledge of God, and knows that it is in God and is conceived through God” (216). In addition, with blessedness comes an acceptance of death, knowing that the greater part of the mind is eternal. “Blessedness is not the reward of virtue but it is virtue itself” (223). With blessedness comes perfect freedom because one is causally connect to the necessity of “*Deus sive Natura*.” When blessedness is achieved, one is in one’s perfect order. This is salvation. The immortality offered here is not personal. It offers one particular intellect or any other that will take the journey the opportunity to be united with the timeless eternal order of “*Deus sive Natura*.” So ends the *Ethics*.

In Spinoza’s philosophy it is possible to glimpse somewhat more than a rational explanation of the human condition. For not very deeply disguised within it is a longing for transcendence and some sort of immortality. In this way it seems to echo countless other religious narratives. According to Stewart, some interpreters of Spinoza have even found in his work recognizable Jewish themes. They see his monism reflecting the central tenant of the Jewish faith that “The Lord our God is One;” and to them, the traces of mysticism appear Kabbalistic.

If Spinoza's *Ethics* offers a religious path, it is clearly only for a select few—an elite. As he cautions in the last paragraph of the *Ethics*:

If the road I have pointed out leading to this goal seems very difficult, yet it can be found. Indeed, what is so rarely discovered is bound to be hard. For if salvation were ready at hand and could be discovered without great toil, how could it be that it is almost universally neglected. All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare (Spinoza, 1992, 223).

In addition, whether philosophy or religion it is not easy to walk along side Spinoza as he tediously demonstrates the very marrow of human life geometrically. One must have either great urgency, great patience, or both. Walking a cold and almost barren path is one thing, arriving a similar frigid destination is another. In the end, he asks us to intellectually love God, a God who cannot love in return. As Stewart writes, "Spinoza's God is so indifferent, in fact, that one may even ask whether it is reasonable to love it" (Stewart, 2006, 179). The simple truth is, love is not found geometrically, it cannot be weighed or measured, it has no extension and yet, it is. Not only is it, but its power can move mountains. Spinoza's method may founder on this truth.

*The Tractatus or The Theological and Political Treatise*¹³

Spinoza's *Tractatus* speaks with a different voice than the *Ethics*. It contains a passion and an urgency not as clearly displayed in the *Ethics*. This observation may indicate, as Stewart suggests, that Spinoza's political program was the inspiration of his philosophy.

Spinoza's political program was aimed at both the established churches and the states who supported them. He wanted to clear away impediments to freedom and also suggest social structures that could guarantee the rational freedom of naturalism. As he writes to his correspondent Oldenburg: "I am writing a treatise on my views regarding Scripture." The reason are: 1. the prejudices of theologians; 2. the accusation that I am an atheist; 3. the freedom to philosophize. "This [freedom] I want to vindicate

¹³ Throughout this chapter the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* will be referred to as the Treatise.

completely, for here it is in every way suppressed by the excessive authority and egoism of the preachers” (Nadler, 2011, 18).

To accomplish his goals, Spinoza writes a book with twenty chapters; fifteen of which are focused on the correct approach to the understanding of Scripture, and five that discuss the political ideal of democratic republics. The fact that seventy-five percent of the *Treatise* dwells on re-examining the privileged position of the Scriptures in the hearts and minds of his contemporaries and the guardians of the Dutch Republic, or the impediments to freedom, from his perspective, clearly make this his highest priority. This can also be seen in their wealth of specificity and details that the later chapters lack.

Nonetheless, Spinoza wants to make it very clear that the ends of philosophy and religion are fundamentally different. The end of philosophy is truth, while the end or purpose of religion is pious behavior and obedience. Spinoza seeks to strengthen the republic by suggesting that the freedom to philosophize, in fact, would preserve both piety and peace. It can do so because reason is not the handmaiden of theology, but of the truth. Nor, he adds, is theology the handmaiden of philosophy. Philosophy and theology inhabit two different and unequal spheres.

Although the *Ethics* was put on hold, while he wrote the *Treatise*, these works were intended for two different audiences.¹⁴ The *Ethics* was being written for an elite group of individuals, open-minded liberals who read philosophy—neo-Aristotelians and Cartesians—and those who could be led to appreciate his metaphysical and ethical advances, while the *Treatise* was written for learned in general—thoughtful, tolerant and unprejudiced people, some reformed theologians, regents, the prudentorium, and his unorthodox free thinking friends. However, there was one rather large group that was not part of Spinoza’s intended audience—the masses. Spinoza writes concerning them:

They cannot be freed from their superstitions or their fears; they are unchanged in their obstinacy and they are not guided by reason. Indeed, I would prefer that they disregard this book completely, rather than make

¹⁴ While intended for two different audiences, nonetheless these two major works of Spinoza form a whole. The *Ethics* contains the metaphysical underpinning of the *Tractatus* or *Treatise*.

themselves a nuisance by misinterpreting it after their wont (Nadler, 2011, 25).

Despite his concern regarding the masses, he seemed to have thought the *Treatise* would be welcomed by a sufficient number of the right sort of men that a climate would be prepared for the reception of the *Ethics*. However, it was not long after the publication of the *Treatise*, that Spinoza became acutely aware how he had completely miscalculated. He was genuinely surprised that his work was reviled by foe and friend alike. It should be said, however, that the topic of the role religion within the state was of interest to intellectuals, particularly in England and the Netherlands which at the time were both reasonably free states. Their very freedom led citizens in these nations to be suspicious of both church and state. It also encouraged them to read works discussing the proper relations between these two powerful institutions. Spinoza would have been aware of this interest, and it may have led to his overly optimistic assessment of the reception of the *Treatise* at the tail end of the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic.

To remove the impediments to freedom, Spinoza had to “debunk the dogmatic pillars of the religious establishment” (Nadler, 2011, 20). First, he had to successfully challenge common beliefs concerning prophecy and miracles; second, he had to reveal the superstitious basis of sectarian religion; third, he had to demonstrate that rites and ceremonies had nothing to do with true piety; and finally, he had to prove that the Bible was only a work of human literature, composed by many authors who frequently disagreed; thus, it was not written by God or by His command.

Spinoza wrote the *Treatise* over several years and published it anonymously in 1669. His printer, a man by the name of Jan Rieuwertsz, was sufficiently aware of the potential problems it could personally cause him that he chose Hamburg as the place of publication. When asked he denied printing the work.

Seventeenth century bible scholarship

Spinoza was certainly not alone in challenging the taken-for-granted views of the Bible. In fact, he was aided and abetted in his task by

developments over the two prior centuries and by several current works of biblical scholarship. When he begins to unfold his natural history of religion, he was in the company of well-known scholars. Richard H. Popkin has identified some of these developments, who made them, and their connection with Spinoza.¹⁵

One of the main criticisms that Spinoza has about the Bible is that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch. If that is true, then from his perspective it is necessary to re-evaluate how the Bible is read and interpreted. Spinoza points out that Aben Ezra (1092–1167) was the first person to call attention to that fact. Ezra pondered how Moses could have written about his own death in Deuteronomy 33. He concluded that he could not have done so, nor could he have written about events after his death. However, this does not lead him to question the authority of the Bible. He only suggested that those passages must have some special meaning.

It should be pointed out that Ezra was a recognized and important biblical commentator for both Jews and Christians. Christian exegetes found him particularly useful. Popkin discusses other scholars who found Ezra of interest, and who also accepted the fact that Moses did not author the whole of the Pentateuch. For example, the Bishop of Burgos, Pablo de Santa Maria (1351–1435). A former rabbi, the Bishop, wrote a widely read, though controversial, book *Scrutiny of the Scriptures*. The book introduces a number of Jewish commentators to Christian readers.

Among the literature of the Reformation, Andraes von Karlstadt (1486–1541) accepted the rather obvious fact that Moses did not write about his own death. Martin Luther (1483–1546) is in agreement, but he accepts the fact that Moses wrote everything prior to that. He did not believe that skepticism about this particular point would create either doubt or harm. Some argued that Joshua wrote those passages, but others realized that similar questions could be raised about the discussion of Joshua's death in the book bearing his name. Nonetheless, for many commentators, these seemed to be minor quibbles and did not call into question the authority of the Bible.

¹⁵ Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 382–407. The discussion below follows Popkin's commentary in his article.

While authorship was important because it was viewed as a guarantee of the truth of the text, up until about 1650 most commentators believed that the faithful accepted the text to be divine revelations given to Moses by God. Furthermore, it was held that God Himself guaranteed the preservation and transmission of His message to Moses (Popkin, 1996, 388).

Thoughts concerning these matters changed dramatically mid-century. Challenges were brought by intellectuals: Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1677), Samuel Fisher (1605–1665), and, of course by Baruch Spinoza. In addition, many of the small sects founded by the lower classes, took delight in rejecting the Bible for some of the same reasons that the scholars had discovered.

Hobbes paved the way with statements in the *Leviathan*, where he claims that there is insufficient evidence in the Scriptures or elsewhere to give the reader certainty regarding the authorship of many of the books of the Bible. With regard to Moses and the Pentateuch, he felt that it was clear that the books were written after Moses, but when exactly, he was not sure. Nonetheless, he took a moderate stance regarding authorship by Moses, and said, that he wrote, what it has been claimed that he did.

Hobbes, regarding the source of authority and guarantee of the whole text, in keeping with his overall political philosophy, he gave that role to the sovereign Church of England. Spinoza, however, would not entrust the state church with that role.

Isaac La Peyrère is an intriguing figure. He was secretary to the Prince of Condé, a Calvinist from Bordeaux who possibly had Marrano roots, and a man who had both political and scholarly interests in the Bible. He believed that the coming Messiah would rule with the King of France. What brings him into Spinoza's story is a book he wrote around 1641, titled *PraeAdamitae* or PreAdamites (Men before Adam). The book was published in Amsterdam in 1655 (Popkin, 1996, 389). An interesting aside is the fact that Queen Christina of Sweden encouraged the publication of this book, and possibly paid for its printing, not long before her abdication and conversion to Catholicism.¹⁶ The book was a minor sensation, appear-

¹⁶This is interesting given the focus of this book on Emanuel Swedenborg. It is also interesting to note that Swedenborg himself addresses the question of PreAdamites in his theological writings.

ing in five Latin editions, as well as in Dutch and English. It was banned and burned, and La Peyrère was imprisoned in Belgium. Eventually he apologized to the Pope and converted to Catholicism.

What aroused such passion in his readers was the fact that he speculated about the existence of people on earth prior to Adam, his PreAdamites. He states that there is evidence that people inhabited the earth prior to Adam and his family. He wrote that such evidence exists in the Bible also. Genesis reports that Cain married. Le Peyrère wonders, who could he have married, if not a PreAdamite; thus, confirming his theory.

While this was a serious issue, even more important to La Pyrère (and inflammatory to his critics) was the question of the accuracy of the current biblical texts. After all, he says that the text(s) currently available are copies of copies of copies. He felt that the Bible was a collection of narratives that were confusing and not clearly connected. He wondered whether the existing texts are accurate, and how one might be able to get at the original. While he did not question that the Bible was the Word of God, he did wonder whether we have access to God's original message. It also occurred to La Pyrère that the Bible is not humanity's universal history but, in actual fact, was only the history of the Jews.

Despite his strange messianic views, La Pyrère was not just a fringe figure, but was widely read by important biblical scholars. He apparently lived in Amsterdam during the process of publishing his book, and was acquainted with Menasseh, the Rabbi who oversaw Spinoza's *cherem*. Spinoza owned a copy of his book and, according to Popkin, used it extensively in the *Treatise* (Popkin, 1996, 391).

While both Hobbes and La Pyrère raise questions about the authorship of Moses and the accuracy of biblical text, Samuel Fisher—a university educated English Quaker with knowledge of Hebrew—pushed the critique even farther. While he also questioned the accuracy of available Hebrew and Greek texts, he raised an even more significant question: Could a written historical document actually be the Word of God?

Fisher in his book written in 1660, *The Rustic's Alarm to the Rabbies*, worries a lot about the transmission problem (Popkin, 1996, 392). For example: Why do so many different variants of the texts exist? How can we account for the changes in the Hebrew language which in the beginning did not have vowel markings? Failing to resolve these issues, Fisher

asserts that the Bible has been transmitted by fallible people of dubious character, who may also have been corrupt and greedy. This assessment does not just concern the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, but the texts of the New Testament as well.

He also raises the very important question concerning the creation of canon. How can the books that constituted the revealed Word of God be determined, choosing some and rejecting others, unless the decision makers already independently knew the Word of God (Popkin, 1996, 393). From Fisher's perspective as a Quaker, they could know it because of the universal availability of the "inner light." This explanation would not satisfy Spinoza, who relied only on the power of reason.

According to Popkin, Spinoza may have known Fisher personally. Fisher lived in Amsterdam during 1657–1658, when he was on a journey throughout Europe to bring Quakerism to the Jews. Spinoza seems to have spent some time with the Quakers, and he may have even helped Fisher translate pamphlets (Popkin, 1996, 393). Thus, he may have learned Fisher's views prior to his publishing the book in England in 1660.

The Socinians and the rationalists provide the final intellectual threads to Spinoza's position that he spells out in the *Treatise*. Spinoza was familiar with these views due to his friendship with Lodewijk Meyer (1629–1681) and his participation in Collegiant circles and gatherings. Jonathan Israel, in his book, *The Dutch Republic, Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806*, makes an interesting observation about these gatherings:

At Amsterdam, it proved impossible to halt the flow of Socinian publications for long . . . Collegiant meetings in large groups, or "colleges", revived in the early 1660s. In 1661, the Amsterdam Reformed consistory complained to the vroedschap of the "exorbitance of the Socinian gatherings, in which Quakers and Boreelists mingled, such that one hundred, one hundred fifty, and sometimes even greater numbers attended them". What was at issue here was not the existence of the Collegiant groups, as such, but that there was no longer sufficient pressure to compel them to meet only in small groups, in private homes (Israel, 1996, 911–912).

The Socinians followed the teachings of Faustus Socinus (1539–1604) who found no support for the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible, and who also insisted on a literal and rational reading of it. In 1666, Spinoza's friend, Meijer, who was also associated with the Collegiants, had published a book anonymously in which he espoused the view that reason was the appropriate guide to the interpretation of Scripture. It was called *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*. His work caused outrage and was initially attributed to Spinoza. In fact in 1673, Jan Rieuwertsz, published it together with the *Treatise*, perhaps as a ruse to elude the censors (Nadler, 2011, 228). In any case it was not until after Meijer's death in 1681, that friends revealed that he was the author of *Philosophy, Interpreter of Scripture*.

Spinoza's own view of scripture

Spinoza takes advantage of the work of all the scholars that preceded him, he critiques them and develop his own radical view. He believed that the Scriptures that are judged sacred and holy by the established religions due to their Divine origin and message are, in fact, only historic literature, crafted by fallible men in order to secure order and ensure the obedience of common, ordinary men. They were written at a particular time and place, by particular men and can only be assessed by examining them within their own historical framework.

As Spinoza asserts, "I hold that the method of interpreting Scripture is not different from the method of interpreting Nature, and is in fact in accord with it." He continues, we need "no other principles or data for the interpretation of Scripture and study of its contents except those that can be gathered only from Scripture itself and the historical study of Scripture" (TTP vii. 141) (Popkin, 1996, 396). This marks a significant shift from his predecessors. Spinoza's literalism and contextualization led to a completely secular reading of the Bible and places Scripture completely within the bounds of human history (Popkin, 1996, 396). While certainly radical, even this view in Spinoza has some precedent in the fledging anthropol-

ogy of religion developing in the seventeenth century.¹⁷ Spinoza does, however, go further. He argues that:

1. The prophets had no special knowledge, because there is no knowledge different from reason and experience. Thus, they only possessed more vivid imaginations than common folk. What the prophets or other biblical scribe write is not clear and self-evident in the way that, say, Euclid's *Elements* is. To understand the *Elements*, one does not need to know Euclid's biography, his language, or his historical conditions. In sum, to understand it, does not require any contextual knowledge whatsoever (Popkin, 1996, 398). Spinoza, and by extension, his metaphysics, are committed to all true knowledge being geometrical in form. Unlike geometry, "Scripture does not provide definitions of the things of which it speaks" (TTP, vii. 142).
2. The Hebrews were not a people chosen by God. They were not intellectually or morally superior to others, but only a people favored by good social organization and political good fortune. While their nation persisted for some time, it is now gone and their "election" was only conditional and temporary.
3. Rites and rituals, may help structure the life of a people, but their practice is not evidence of virtue and adherence to them does not secure blessings. In the case of the Jews (but also for customs and practices of other religions), the 613 precepts of the Torah were instituted by Moses only for practical purposes—to control the behavior of the people and preserve society.
4. Miracles are impossible, because "nothing happens in nature that does not follow from her laws" (TTP vi). In the Scriptures they are presented in order to move uneducated people to adoration and devotion. Given Spinoza's metaphysical doctrine in which there is only one substance "*Deus sive Natura*" there are only rational principles of action, and since there is no distinction between God and Nature, there can be no miracles, only superstition in the face of the inexplicable.

¹⁷Popkin suggest the work of Gerard Vossius of Leiden and Amsterdam, particularly his 1641 *Origins of Gentile Theology*.

5. All of these objections to Scripture identified by Spinoza involve contextualization. These objections could be overcome in a manner compatible with traditional orthodoxy, if the Bible was divinely inspired. However, Spinoza challenges that fundamental, basic assumption. He writes, “those who look to a supernatural light to understand the meaning of the prophets and the apostles are sadly in need of natural light, and so, I can hardly think that such men possess a divine supernatural gift” (TTP vii. 155). And with that, with its claim to otherness a topic of derision, the Bible sinks to the level of a simple morality tale. It can be summed up for Spinoza by the golden rule, which he claims, after all or essentially, is only a rational truth.

From his study and the application of his method, it is clear that Spinoza uses only the natural light of reason in his investigation, and therefore he can only discover what can be seen in natural light. This then allows him to claim that anyone endowed with reason, thus truly anyone, has what it takes (at least in principle) to understand Scripture’s most important messages. This is so, because “when properly interpreted, the universal message conveyed by Scripture is a simple moral one: ‘To know and love God, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself’” (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>). As Nadler continues, “this is the real word of God and the foundation of true piety, and it lies uncorrupted, in a faulty, tampered, and corrupt text” (Nadler, 2001, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/>). And as Popkin relates, “[the moral law] is the only universally binding law, because it is rationally derived rather than historically accepted” (Popkin, 1996, 400).

While Spinoza suggests that one can find this message in Scripture, he hastens to add that one does not need to be familiar with Scripture at all to understand this universal truth or be blessed by knowing it, since this message can be obtained through our rational faculty alone. The caveat is however, that most people find it difficult to exercise it. Thus Scripture, because it speaks in a merely human fashion, is useful for common people, who are incapable of understanding higher things. It is not the words that are useful, but the moral meaning, because in that meaning is the divinity of Scripture. Scripture, thus, can be thought of as useful, but unnecessary,

for “any book can be called divine, as long as the message is the proper one, and it is effective in conveying it” (Nadler, 2011, 141).

An interesting aspect of the *Treatise* is Spinoza’s discussion of Christ. Popkin sees Spinoza’s discussion of Christ as a rejoinder to Adam Boreel (1603–1667), the leader of the Amsterdam Collegiants. Boreel began a book in the late 1650s titled, *Jesus Christ Legislator of the Human Race* in an effort to save Christianity from an anonymously written attack that it, like the other prophetic religions, was merely the product of an impostor seeking power. While not immediately published, Spinoza would be aware of its thesis, because of his membership in the Collegiants (Popkin, 1996, 400).

Regarding Christ, Spinoza in chapter iv of the *Treatise* writes: “Christ was not so much the prophet as the mouthpiece of God. It is through the mind of Christ. . . that God made revelations to mankind. . . Christ was sent to teach not only the Jews but the entire human race. . . God revealed himself to Christ, or to Christ’s mind directly. . . Christ perceived truly and adequately the things revealed to him, so if he ever proclaimed laws it was because of people’s ignorance and obstinacy” (Popkin, 1996, 401).

Popkin suggests that here Spinoza is presenting Christ in a manner similar to that of the Dutch Socinians, and that he offers a similar Christology. Christ is not like Moses or the prophets, he has a different relationship to God, but he does not partake of divine substance or features. As Spinoza wrote to his friend, Oldenburg, “he was willing to accept the historical account in the Gospels, except for the Resurrection” (Popkin, 1996, 402). Oldenburg replied to him, “that tears up Christianity by its roots” (Popkin, 1996, 402).

What Spinoza did that is different from his contemporaries was, in effect, more radical; it was to claim that “only in respect to religion—i.e. in respect to the universal divine law—that the Scriptures can be properly be called the Word of God.” According to Popkin, “the rest is historical, to be understood in terms of human causes. . . In separating the Message—the Word of God, the Divine Law, and the historical Scriptures—Spinoza made the documents themselves of interest only in human terms and to be explained in human terms” (Popkin, 1996, 403). This is the way in which he diverged even from the radicals.

Thus, “Spinoza totally secularized the Bible as a historical document.

He could do this because he had a radically different metaphysics, more radical than even his most radical contemporaries, a metaphysics for the world without any supernatural dimension. . . . What he said as a historical scholar was interpreted in terms of his historical stance, and became the new Enlightened way of seeing the religious world as a human creation” (Popkin, 1996, 403).

Baruch Spinoza—legacy

Though indebted to Descartes and his rationalism, the focus of Spinoza’s project was to undermine and intellectually destroy the dualism proposed by Descartes, both philosophically and religiously. From Spinoza’s point of view, Dualism, the idea of two independent substances, like mind and matter, was the source of human bondage, for the individual and for human civic society. For the individual, anything associated with “will” or “choice” seems tainted with dualism, and needs to be combated. The passions, as defined by Spinoza, are associated with “will” and “choice” and lure men to become passively ensnared by desire and inadequate thinking. Thus, they lead men away from their inner *conatus* to self-actualization through the acquisition of knowledge and the development of understanding. Collectively, dualism, in the hands of the established churches, elevates otherness or the supernatural found in the Sacred Scriptures, its laws and commandments, and marshals the forces of repression against true freedom of expression. To overcome this, the supernatural origins of Scripture must be revealed to be incorrect.

To achieve his goal of nullifying dualism, Spinoza wrote two books; his *Theological-Political Treatise* (1669), and his *Ethics* (1677). The *Treatise* sought to free civil society from the dead-hand of Scripture; and the *Ethics* sought to free the individual from the passions. The *Treatise* was written for the educated: reformed theologians, regents, and free thinkers. The *Ethics* was written with a more limited audience in mind—open-minded readers of philosophy. Both these works require critical assessment.

Both works give evidence of a radical departure from Christian Scholasticism and the more traditional strains of early modern philosophy (Cartesianism). The *Treatise* debunks biblical traditionalism and super-

naturalism in order to free society from the thrall of religious prejudices and to open the way for a rational approach and understanding of the golden rule. The *Ethics* rejects the concept of a supernatural personal God, who is Creator and Redeemer, in favor of an impersonal substance, "*Deus sive Natura*" that is uncreate, eternal, and without end or purpose. Such a God knows only rationality, can be understood only rationally, and require only a rational response. He is one in substance containing endless attributes, but significantly with only two evident in this world—extension and thought.¹⁸

Spinoza's philosophy radically alters the categories through which Western individuals have traditionally known the world. The concepts of God, human, mind, emotion, ethics are bent to his purposes. In the hands of Baruch, whose name means "blessed," salvation is to be found in the "intellectual love of God"—a cold rational realization of our active principle or "conatus" achieving precisely its inner determined form.

If we take Spinoza at his word, that he pursued philosophy in order to find the "right way of life," when we explore its breadth and depth we find that human life is reduced to a geometrical method, rational but not really living. Human relations are reduced to rational formulas. In Spinoza's right way of life there is no room for love, while we are enjoined by him to express an "intellectual love of God." But he tells us in the *Ethics* that "*Deus sive Natura*" is incapable of loving in return, despite the fact that the essence of love is reciprocity. So, Spinoza's "intellectual love of God" is, in reality, a form of self-love—a knowledge and understanding of the actualizations of our "conatus." This leads to a sense of self-satisfaction, well-being, and blessedness.

Although Spinoza defines thought and extension as attributes of one substance, it appears that he mistook the rationality of extension for the rationality of the whole. He reduces the human to a triangle or a circle. As he writes, "I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, or bodies" (Spinoza, 1992, 103).

While we know that Spinoza was a controversial figure throughout his lifetime, and long afterward—he was a heretic and an atheist whose

¹⁸Spinoza for all intents and purposes, is primarily interested in redefining human nature, and in order to do so, he must also redefine God and nature.

work was scandalous—nonetheless for many, then as now, his views are persuasive and attractive. Given their ascetic quality, one might wonder, why? The answer lies, I think, more in what he rejected than in what he actually offered. He rejected a personal God, the supernatural, dualism, a privileged human role, traditional concepts of good and evil, divine purpose, divine love, divine commandments, eternal reward and punishment, divinely authorized Sacred Scripture. In fact, he rejected all the essentials of the Judeo-Christian tradition. In Spinoza, in one fell-swoop they are gone.

What remains is smaller, quieter, much less grandiose, and so much more rational and doable. We no longer have to worry about sin or evil; we can luxuriate in our self-actualization that of course self-evidently takes others into account. Our good is their good; and we need not reflect or ponder on the great issues, because the true path is clear, achieved through the natural light of reason. Spinoza's rational method appears to give us what we all seem to long for, greater control. That such control could be used to do great evil seems outside the realm of possibility with this naturalistic stance. And yet, the systematic doing of evil haunts the modern world, and many traditionally Godless "democratic" regimes.

Spinoza's doctrine designed for an elite has become democratized; and just as Spinoza was not sanguine about the masses misunderstanding his *Treatise*, one can only wonder what he might think of his *Ethics* being practiced by those who are unaware of the very difficult journey it entails. To recapitulate, as he wrote, at the end of the *Ethics*:

For if salvation were ready to hand and could be discovered without great toil, how could it be that is almost universally neglected. All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare (Spinoza, 1992, 223).

No doubt these words are as true now, as they were then. Thus, an unintended consequence of embracing Spinoza is the glib acceptance of what his vision means.

While many have said that Spinoza brought us modernity, it might be more accurate, even within Spinoza's own philosophy, to say that the unraveling of the untenable elements of the Judeo-Christian world view, as seen in the works of the biblical scholars and philosophers that pre-

ceded Spinoza, brought us both Spinoza and conditions conducive to modernity.¹⁹

More particularly, just as Spinoza's *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy* is witness to an intellectual connection between Descartes and Spinoza, so the meeting between Leibniz and Spinoza in The Hague in November of 1676 creates a similar important intellectual link. According to notes Leibniz wrote after they met several times, perhaps between the 18th and 21st, they discussed Descartes, as well as Spinoza's unpublished *Ethics*, and Leibniz's *Ontology* (Look, 2007, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz/>). Descartes' modern philosophy was a jumping-off point for the subsequent system of both men, but there can be no doubt, as they discussed Descartes, that they found little about which they agreed. As Stewart writes,

Leibniz's chief aim in undermining Cartesian physics, it should be remembered, was to make room for a principle of activity which he identified with mind. Spinoza never showed a lack of enthusiasm in criticizing Descartes, but his aim in doing so was ultimately to destroy the very idea of mind that Leibniz implicitly hoped to defend (Stewart, 2011, 197).

Yet it is interesting to note that Stewart and others often play with the idea that Leibniz was a closet Spinozist (Stewart, 2011, 278, 280-293; Jolley, 2005, 8).

Before moving on, I would like to say that several problems remain with regard to Spinoza's world view. I will mention two. The first has to do with human purpose. I fail to understand how human beings, who are modes of the one substance that contains no purpose, themselves have purpose, intentions, goals etc. Where do they come from? The second, and equally important one, is the issue of human freedom. So many of Spinoza's scholars praise his call to freedom in civil discourse found in the *Treatise*. But given Spinoza's deterministic philosophy, and his own definition of freedom (which is first to understand one's own inner *conatus*, and then to become it), I fail to find anything in the *Treatise* that resembles our more

¹⁹ I will return to this topic later in this chapter.

primitive or old-fashioned concept of freedom, which, on the surface, at least, he appears to be calling for. *Natura* is clearly determined and plainly indifferent. Power, not freedom reigns there. Virtues such as toleration and the golden rule are certainly not found there, and if human beings have them, what is their origin? And if they are so different from the rest of nature, why are they not special?

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