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Ethical or Political Religion? On the Contradiction Between Two Models of Amended Religion in Spinoza's 'Theological-Political Treatise'



Abstract: In his 'Theological-Political Treatise' (henceforth, the 'Treatise') Spinoza carries out one of the boldest and most comprehensive attacks on traditional religion found in modern philosophy. Spinoza did not seek to destroy existing religion, but merely to re-form it in the model of an amended religion, for in his opinion, only the latter can assure the stability of society, as it alone can guide the irrational masses to adopt behavioral norms consistent with rationality. However, the basic characteristics and organizing principles of the amended religion Spinoza proposed as a substitute for existing religion, are veiled: in addition to using an esoteric style in the 'Treatise,' Spinoza devoted the bulk of the work to a poignant critique of existing religion without offering a thematic and ordered discussion of amended religion. Contrary to the common reading of the 'Treatise,' my central argument will be that in the 'Treatise' Spinoza presents, if only implicitly, two different and contradictory models of amended religion. In the first part (chapters 1–15), he presents an amended religion founded upon the reduction of the religious to the ethical, wherein obedience to God is reduced to obedience to the laws of morality. In the second part (chapters 16–20), however, he presents an amended religion founded upon the reduction of the religious to the political, wherein obedience to God is reduced to obedience to political law. My discussion will focus on the far-reaching consequences of this deep-seated contradiction between the two models of amended religion that Spinoza offers in the 'Treatise.'

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM THAT LED SPINOZA TO WRITE THE ‘THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE’¹

In the autumn of 1665, after the first draft of the *Ethics* had already been sent to his philosopher friends in Amsterdam, Spinoza decided to interrupt the writing of his magnum opus in order to deal with a problem that was troubling him. This was not an ontological or epistemological problem of the kind about which Spinoza deliberates in a large part of his work. Rather, it was an existential problem in the most basic and primary sense: how is the philosopher (in this case, Spinoza himself, who saw the liberal regime of De Witt collapsing before his eyes) to assure his own personal safety and freedom to philosophize in a society in which religion occupies a central place?²

Spinoza’s problem has plagued Western philosophy since its earliest days. During the second half of the fifth century B.C.E., Anaxagoras and Protagoras were expelled from Athens in the wake of accusations of heresy against the accepted religion; Socrates was put to death for the same reason, coupled with charges of corrupting youth.

In practice, when Plato set out to write *The Republic* (*Politeía*) he was troubled by a similar problem: how is one to establish a state that will not execute its philosophers as Athens executed Socrates? Plato’s solution was radical: in order for the state not to harm the lives and speculative freedom of philosophers, the latter must become its rulers. But Plato’s solution of the philosopher-king was subjected to a barrage of realistic contempt by Spinoza, who proposed a new solution to the old problem.³

¹ All quotations and citations of this work henceforth are taken from Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. J. Israel, trans. M. Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and appear as *Treatise*; the bracketed figures refer to the pages of Gebhardt’s standard Latin edition, *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, vol. 3 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925).

² Even if Spinoza was troubled by other problems when he set out to write the *Treatise*, the central issue he wished to confront was that of philosophical freedom. The other problems mentioned by Spinoza in letter 30, to Henry Oldenburg, are accusations of heresy by the masses and the taking root of prejudices among potential philosophers. See Benedict Spinoza, *The Letters*, trans. S. Shirley (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1995), pp. 185–186. That these issues were secondary to that of philosophical freedom for Spinoza is attested to by the fact that he himself, in presenting the purpose of the work on the title page of the *Treatise*, relates only to the matter of philosophical freedom and not to the other two problems. Moreover, only the theological-political issue, which is an offshoot of philosophical freedom, comes into play throughout the discussion in the *Treatise*, as shall be demonstrated below.

³ In the *Treatise*, Spinoza mocks the Platonic political aspirations of such medieval philosophers as Maimonides (*Treatise*, p. 114 [114]). To quote Pines: “Apparently

Spinoza considered the stability of the state to be a necessary condition for both the personal security and freedom of thought of the philosopher, and he believed that this stability could be attained only when the conflict between the institutions of religion and state was resolved. The resolution of the theological-political problem hence became Spinoza's primary commitment, and he indeed devotes an entire philosophical work to discussing the age-old conflict between religion and politics—a conflict that imposes its shadow upon philosophers and philosophy.⁴

For Spinoza, the conflict between religion and politics is a result of these realms' respective demands for supremacy. Religion claims supremacy based on the divine source of its authority, whereas the state apprehends its own supremacy as a fundamental attribute of its being: just as an object cannot be considered a chair if it is not intended for sitting, a social institution cannot be considered a political entity if it does not demand—or if it is not able to realize—supremacy.⁵

But the conflict between religion and politics is not merely conceptual. It is also, and primarily, a result of the long and convoluted relationship between the two. Hence, the resolution of the conflict between religion and politics cannot be based only on theoretical analysis but must also, and primarily, be founded upon an investigation of the concrete roots of the conflict between them. Spinoza offers such an investigation in the context of what I call, for present purposes, his genealogy of religion.

he [Spinoza] considers philosophers of this kind as megalomaniacs whose dreams of grandeur could not in the nature of things materialize; an impossibility which he evidently did not deplore. As against this, organized superstition was an indubitable reality; Spinoza was its opponent, but it aroused in him an incomparably greater interest than Platonizing political doctrines." Shlomo Pines, "Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Maimonides, and Kant," in Ora Segal, ed., *Further Studies in Philosophy, Scripta Hierosolymitana*, XX (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1968), pp. 12–13.

⁴ To a certain extent, as argued by Smith, the entire history of politics and political philosophy in the West has been concerned with attempts to resolve the theological-political problem. See Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 2. One of the first Western philosophers to undertake a philosophical critique of religion was Epicurus, who was appreciated by Spinoza in a manner uncharacteristic of our thinker. See letter 56, to Boxel, in Spinoza, *Letters*, pp. 276–279. See also Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 152–153.

⁵ Spinoza relies upon this approach when he refers to the political authority by the term *summas potestates*. See, for example, the heading of chapter 19 of *Treatise*, p. 238 [228].

2. SPINOZA'S GENEALOGY OF RELIGION

At the beginning of his introduction to the *Treatise*, Spinoza presents a kind of genealogy of religion,⁶ in which he seeks to uncover the psycho-philosophical roots of the religious phenomenon by means of a four-stage model reflecting the human attempt to achieve stability.

1. *The Feeling of Instability Confronting Nature*

In the first stage of the genealogy, Spinoza portrays man's oscillation between fear and hope as an expression of his existential situation.⁷ This oscillation is a consequence of man's ignorance of the causality that dominates nature, which prevents man from harnessing nature to his own ends and imbues him with a feeling of instability and fear that intensifies in proportion to his false expectations from nature. As we shall see, most of man's attempts to free himself from this feeling of instability end in its exacerbation.

2. *Oscillation Between Superstitions*

In the second stage, Spinoza states that the existential fear described in the first stage creates, maintains, and cultivates superstition, which is no more than a network of imaginary causality that man imposes upon nature in order to attain a feeling of security and dispel his fears. According to Spinoza, "everyone is naturally prone to superstition";⁸ hence, an examination of superstition is essential for the understanding of human nature. In practice, since the *Treatise* is devoted to exploring human nature through an understanding of the superstitions that men hold, one might say that in the *Treatise* Spinoza proposes a philosophy of superstition.

The non-philosopher cannot live without superstition, which derives from the very nature of man and his situation in the world as a limited creature who attempts to transcend his limitations. The more human beings fail in their attempts to achieve their goals, the more they are overcome by fear. The greater the fear that leads to superstition, the greater the falsehood involved in the superstition—that is to say, the greater its distance from reason. This distance from reason breeds a variety of

⁶ *Treatise*, pp. 3–8 [5–9].

⁷ *Treatise*, pp. 3–5 [5–6].

⁸ *Treatise*, p. 5 [6] (translation slightly modified). This statement is problematic with regard to the philosopher. Even if he does not always live a philosophical life, the philosopher does not revert to superstition, but is only drawn by his affects. See *Ethics* VP20S, in Benedict Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. E. Curley, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 605–606.

superstitions at whose basis lies the claim of the existence of a God who acts toward human beings in accordance with a fixed lawfulness of reward and punishment. In other words, according to the *Treatise*, superstition is none other than the fabrication of a concept of God intended to provide human beings with the feeling of stability for which they long.⁹

This feeling of stability derives from recognition of the fixed lawfulness that governs God's relation to human beings, and it includes two factors that present human beings with a clear accounting of "the rules of the game and its limitations." The first of these is the ability to maneuver (for example: in order to free oneself of A or to attain B, one needs to do C), while the second is the recognition of limitations (for example: it is impossible to attain D and E simultaneously).

To live under the shadow of superstition means to enjoy a certain kind of stability. However, being a creation of human illusion and as such inherently false, superstition ultimately disappoints those who attach themselves to it. In the hope of improving their situation, the masses exchange a superstition that has disappointed for a new one that will disappoint in the future—and so the cycle continues. In this way, the feeling of instability returns: fear of nature is replaced by the feeling of fear arising from the illusion imposed by man upon nature. The person who flees from the fear imposed upon him by nature into the bosom of superstition is ultimately filled with an even greater fear.

3. *The Establishment of Religion*

Spinoza presents the establishment of religion as a result of man's attempt to extract himself from the vacillation among the various superstitions described in the previous stage of the genealogy. The following passage, in my opinion, encapsulates Spinoza's entire understanding of religion as given in the *Treatise*:

...it is easy for people to be captivated by a superstition (*superstitio*), but difficult to ensure that they remain loyal to it.... Such instability of mind has been the cause of many riots and ferocious wars... "nothing governs the multitude as effectively as superstition" (Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander*, 4.10). Hence, people are easily led, under pretense of religion, sometimes to adore their kings as gods and at other times to curse them and detest them as the universal scourge of mankind. To cope with this difficulty, a great deal of effort has been devoted to adorning religion (*religio*),

⁹ By contrast, from the viewpoint of the *Ethics*, one would say that superstition is a distortion of the true concept of God. And indeed, the appendix of the first part of the *Ethics* is devoted to an analysis of the falsehood involved in the popular concept of God.

whether true or false, with pomp and ceremony, so that everyone would find it more impressive than anything else and observe it zealously with the highest degree of fidelity.¹⁰

The emotional instability and inner conflict characteristic of the stage of vacillation among various superstitions (stage 2) eventually extends beyond itself into the political realm. The masses, gripped with fear and incited by corrupt manipulators, construct political entities and destroy them. To suppress this instability in the public realm, which is no more than an externalization of instability in the private realm, fixed cults and rituals, designed to be impressed upon the soul of the masses, are created for the superstitions. It is important to note here that Spinoza draws a clear and principled distinction between superstition (*superstitio*) and religion (*religio*). The former challenges the stability of society, while the latter is directed toward assuring that stability.

4. *The Deterioration of Religion into Superstition*

In the concluding stage of the genealogy, Spinoza portrays the relapse of religion into superstition,¹¹ which culminates in religion's losing its capability of assuring social stability. Though the motif of relapse is explicitly medieval,¹² Spinoza uses it not in order to provide a historical rendering of the human condition,¹³ but rather to advance his own conception of religion as a political project, by presenting his conception as the primary and original understanding of religion.¹⁴

Spinoza attributes religion's inability to assure the stability of society—that is, the loss of its essential nature—to the institutionalization of

¹⁰ *Treatise*, p. 5 [6–7].

¹¹ *Treatise*, pp. 7–8 [8–9].

¹² Maimonides also represents idolatry as the result of degeneration. See *Mishneh Torah*, “Science,” Laws of Idolatry 1. For a discussion, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. N. Goldblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 42–45.

¹³ On Spinoza's reservations regarding the philosophy of history, see Joseph Ben Shlomo, “Reply to Professor Hampshire,” in N. Rotenstreich and N. Schneider, eds., *Spinoza—His Thought and Work: Entretiens in Jerusalem, 6–9 September 1977* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1983), p. 145. On the significance of historical criticism of Scripture in the *Treatise* and the relationship between it and Spinoza's conception of history in the *Ethics*, see Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism*, pp. 57–58.

¹⁴ Regarding this matter, Spinoza follows not only Maimonides, as shown by Pines (“Spinoza's *Tractatus*,” pp. 8–13), but also Hobbes, as argued by Halbertal. See Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 138. For a comparison between Spinoza's political theology in the *Treatise* and that of Hobbes in *Leviathan*, see Menachem Lorberbaum, “Making Space for Leviathan: On Hobbes' Political Theory,” *Hebraic Political Studies* 2:1 (Winter 2007), pp. 80–84.

religion as an independent entity. Religious corruption is only the tip of the iceberg. Since the essence of religion lies in its stabilizing the political realm, it is by nature a dependent entity. The moment religion becomes independently institutionalized and demands its own sphere within the political realm, it begins to relapse into superstition.¹⁵

The establishment of religion as an independent entity transforms it from a stabilizing factor in society to a destabilizing one. The religious establishment challenges the stability of society on two levels. The first of these is the wedge driven at the moment of institutionalization between the religious establishment and all other realms, primarily the political and the philosophical, and the tension between these newly created rivals. The second is the multi-level conflict within the religious establishment itself, which is transformed—as a result of the tremendous power channeled into it and the personal struggles that ensue—into a perpetual focus of instability.

3. SPINOZA'S DEFINITION OF RELIGION AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN EXISTING RELIGION AND AMENDED RELIGION

Spinoza does not define religion in the *Treatise*, but, from his genealogy of religion as presented in the previous section, one may derive the following definition: Religion is nothing but a false belief, a superstition, distorting the real concept of God for the purpose of achieving social stability.¹⁶ The core of religion is thus the creation, preservation, and cultivation of stability, which is also the ultimate goal of politics.¹⁷ Religion,

¹⁵ On the establishment of religion as an autonomous entity and its encroachment upon the political sphere in the ancient Hebrew state, Spinoza writes that “as a result, religion degenerated into fatal superstition...” (*Treatise*, p. 231 [222]). It is important to note here as well the principled distinction drawn by Spinoza between superstition and religion.

¹⁶ The project of amending existing religion led Spinoza to adopt a more limited definition of religion in the *Treatise* than that presented in the *Ethics*: “whatever we desire and do of which we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God or insofar as we know (*cognosco*) God, I relate to Religion (*religio*) (*Porro quicquid cupimus, et agimus, cujus causa sumus, quatenus Dei habemus ideam, sive quatenus Deum cognoscimus, ad Religionem refero*)” (*Ethics* IV37S1, in Spinoza, *Collected Works*, p. 565). While the definition of religion in the *Ethics* relates to all three kinds of knowledge, that of the *Treatise* is limited to the first kind of knowledge alone. This is so because in the *Treatise* Spinoza focuses upon correcting the damage caused to society, and not the cognitive damage caused by existing religion, which is located on the first level of cognition alone. Indeed, within the framework of the definition of religion adopted by Spinoza in the *Treatise*, not every activity based upon cognition of God on the first level is understood as religion, but only those actions intended to stabilize society.

¹⁷ Nietzsche's critique of both religious and political stasis indicates that he concurred with this statement. But whereas Nietzsche sought to suppress this stasis, Spinoza

according to the *Treatise*, is thus distinct from superstition, not by dint of the truth of its concept of God, but only by virtue of its ability to stabilize society.

Spinoza perceives the relationship between religion and politics as one of mutual dependence; in his opinion, neither religion nor politics is able to exist autonomously. On the one hand, as the masses require false beliefs (which by their nature are not stable), religion, whose purpose is to bring the masses to adhere to a single superstition for a length of time, is necessary to stabilize the state. A political project without religion is doomed to failure. On the other hand, it follows from the definition of religion that an autonomous or independent religion is a contradiction in terms, as any religion that is not dependent upon the creation of stability in the political sphere degenerates and reverts to superstition.

The definition of religion as a political project thus serves as the Archimedean point for all of Spinoza's discussions of religion in the *Treatise*. The following are the main points that emerge from this definition:

1. The establishment of religion is a political act, given that religion is founded in order to assure political stability.

2. Religion is understood as a means, not as an end in itself. The ultimate purpose of religion is to be found outside itself, in the political realm. Hence religion is to be considered an instrument, and as such it should be judged on the basis of its ability to fulfill the function for which it was intended.

3. While the cost of establishing and maintaining religion may be great, religion cannot be allowed to exist at the expense of social stability, as this is its ultimate purpose.

It is important to note that Spinoza's definition of religion relates to an ideal, not to an actual state of affairs. What we generally think of as religion is, to Spinoza, nothing more than a *mélange* of superstitions, as it is not aimed at the stability of society. I propose turning, at this point, to the distinction between existing religion and amended religion.

Existing Religion: By this term I refer to that religious model against which Spinoza directs his criticism. It is not a model specific to any historical situation; it does not refer specifically to the religion that existed in seventeenth-century Holland any more than it relates to religion as it exists today. The term "existing religion" refers to religion as counterpoised to the state, thereby challenging the stability of society. I use the adjective "existing" because Spinoza's point of departure in the *Treatise* is

wished to strengthen it. See on this Ran Sigad, *Studies in Existentialism* (Tel Aviv: Mosad Bialik, 1975), p. 57 [Hebrew].

that existing religion is an improper form of religion that requires amending. Without the assumption that existing religion is imperfect because it threatens the stability of society, Spinoza's project in the *Treatise* of correcting or amending religion becomes obsolete.

Amended Religion: By this term I refer to that model of religion intended to assure the stability of society. According to Spinoza, the establishment of amended religion solves the theological-political conflict. Notwithstanding that Spinoza himself uses the term "universal religion" (*religio catholica*),¹⁸ I prefer the term "amended religion" because of the dual meaning of this term: amended religion is religion that has been both changed or revised and corrected or improved after having been corrupted. In the *Treatise*, Spinoza wishes to amend religion in both senses.

4. THE PROBLEM OF AMENDED RELIGION IN THE 'TREATISE'

Despite the fact that the question "What is amended religion?" is pivotal for the *Treatise*, it is not at all clear how Spinoza proposes to resolve it within the work. This lack of clarity stems primarily from two factors:

1. The esoteric style of the *Treatise*, in the framework of which self-contradiction and statements for form's sake are incorporated, makes it difficult even for the most critical and alert reader to follow Spinoza's solution to the theological-political problem.¹⁹

2. With the exception of chapter 14, in which Spinoza discusses the principles of faith of amended religion, there is no systematic, thematic discussion of amended religion offered in the *Treatise*. Spinoza does not directly explain the means by which it is to be established, the manner in which it justifies itself to the masses, who its inspiring role models may be and what their attributes are, which excellence (*virtus*) it aims to cultivate, or other matters that ought to be the focus of any project that claims to introduce changes, not to mention improvements, in an existing religion.

Rather than presenting a well-articulated solution to the theological-political problem,²⁰ then, Spinoza devotes the major part of the *Treatise*

¹⁸ See, for example, *Treatise*, pp. 9 [10], 241 [231].

¹⁹ A particular focus upon Spinoza's esoteric style of writing in the *Treatise* and the difficulties this presents to the reader may be found in the chapter on Spinoza in Leo Strauss' classic work, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. See Strauss, *Persecution*, pp. 142–201. See also Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism*, pp. 38–44; Menachem Lorberbaum, "Spinoza's Theological-Political Problem," *Hebraic Political Studies* 1:2 (Winter 2006), pp. 203–223; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 128–152.

²⁰ The *Treatise* and the *Ethics* are diametrically opposed in terms of writing style. Unlike the esoteric style of the *Treatise*, in the *Ethics* Spinoza presents his philosophy

to a critique of revealed religion in general and of Judaism in particular.²¹ This focus upon existing religion, presented as faulty—valid as it may be—raises a poignant question: does Spinoza go beyond identifying the problem to present a solution? Does he, in addition to harsh criticism of existing religion, in fact propose an alternative program for amended religion? To argue that he does not implies that in the *Treatise* (notwithstanding its being a book concluded and even published by Spinoza in his lifetime) he raised a serious question that affected his and other philosophers' personal security and freedom to philosophize, without even attempting to propose a solution. As if this absurd conclusion were not sufficient to confute the claim that Spinoza does not, in the *Treatise*, offer an alternative to existing religion, one might add the following: the danger in which Spinoza—a cautious man whose seal spelled “Beware!” (*caute*)—placed himself in publishing the *Theological-Political Treatise*, given the theological-political climate in contemporary Holland, strongly suggests that he was convinced that the work he published was not “merely theoretical or the kind of speculation that can never be useful,”²² but rather a work that offered a practical and effective solution to the theological-political problem.²³

(at least *prima facie*) using the geometrical model, committed to transparency and lucidity. Thus, in practice, in the *Treatise* and the *Ethics* Spinoza is revealed as a master both of clarity and rigor and of equivocation and dual language. See Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, p. 141. See also Ran Sigad's discussion of the misleading writing style of the *Ethics* in his *Philo-Sofia: On the Only Truth* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1983), pp. 56–57 [Hebrew], and in his *Truth as Tragedy: Nietzsche, Spinoza, Kierkegaard, and Marcus Aurelius* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1990), pp. 124–130 [Hebrew].

²¹ In the Jewish context, there were those who accused Spinoza of anti-Semitism due to his strident religious critique of Judaism. See, for example, Hermann Cohen, “Spinoza über Staat und Religion, Judentum und Christentum,” in B. Strauß, ed., *Jüdische Schriften* (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1924), vol. 3, pp. 290–372; Julius Guttmann, *Religion and Science* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1955), p. 223 [Hebrew]. According to Cohen, Spinoza, notwithstanding his self-representation as a man of reason, was completely dominated by his emotions. Spinoza—thus Cohen argues—wished to take revenge upon the rabbis of the Amsterdam community due to his excommunication. Toward this end, he used his great erudition in Scripture to present a distorted, if not an anti-Semitic, picture of the Jewish religion. On Hermann Cohen's critique of Spinoza, see Franz Nauen, “Hermann Cohen's Perception of Spinoza: A Re-appraisal,” *AJS Review* 4 (1979), pp. 111–124. With regard to Spinoza's harsh style in the *Treatise*, directed against both religion in general and Judaism in particular, it is worth noting that Hobbes, after reading the *Treatise*, said to John Aubrey that “He [Hobbes] durst not write so boldly.” See John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, vol. 1, ed. A. Clarke (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 357.

²² *Treatise*, p. 247 [237]. Although Spinoza attempts to dispel there the suspicion that chapter 19 is “merely theoretical,” he clearly attempts to ensure that the *Treatise* as a whole will not belong to this category.

²³ On Spinoza's awareness of the danger entailed in publishing the *Treatise* and the steps he needed to take in order to protect himself and the publisher, Rieuwertsz, see Steve Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999),

The problem of amended religion in the *Treatise* is created, therefore, by a confrontation between the two claims that have been presented thus far: on the one hand, it is clear that Spinoza conceived of the *Treatise* as a work that includes a solution to the ills of the existing religion through establishing an *amended* religion; on the other hand, what that *amended* religion may be is not at all clear.

5. THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE REDUCTION OF THE RELIGIOUS TO THE ETHICAL AND THE REDUCTION OF THE RELIGIOUS TO THE POLITICAL

It is possible to partially dispel some of the ambiguity that characterizes Spinoza's way of dealing with the ills of existing religion if one takes into account that considerable parts of his solution are embedded in discussions aimed at invalidating the authority of revealed religions.²⁴ Hence, one must read Spinoza's critique of existing religion carefully and extract from it, in the way that photographs are developed from negatives, the contours of his amended religion. In other words, given that Spinoza's negative critique of existing religion is interwoven with his positive alternative, a careful reading of the former may help to overcome the difficulties posed by the lack of clarity in the latter.

The attempt to clarify Spinoza's overall argument in the *Treatise* using this exegetical method leads us to the following conclusion regarding the structure of the *Treatise*: from the viewpoint of the project of amending religion, the *Treatise* may be divided into two distinct sections, representing two different and even contradictory models of amended religion.

1. In the first part of the *Treatise* (chapters 1–15), Spinoza presents an amended religion that is founded on reduction of the religious to the ethical, wherein obedience to God is reduced to obedience to the laws of morality.

2. In the second part of the *Treatise* (chapters 16–20), Spinoza presents an amended religion that is founded on reduction of the religious to the

pp. 269–270. But even though the *Treatise* was published anonymously, Spinoza was unable to conceal his identity as its author. See Nadler, *Spinoza*, p. 292. On anonymity as a democratic protocol in Spinoza's thought, see Julie E. Cooper, "Freedom of Speech and Philosophical Citizenship in Spinoza's 'Theologico-Political Treatise,'" *Law, Culture, and the Humanities* 2:1 (2006), pp. 91–114.

²⁴ For, as demonstrated by Lorberbaum: "The agenda of the *TTP* [*Theological-Political Treatise*] is hence twofold: it seeks to destroy, to the extent possible, the theological foundations of institutionalized religion, and concomitantly to salvage a significant kernel that would enable the channeling of the elements of existing historical religions for the purposes of the sovereign." Lorberbaum, "Spinoza's Theological-Political Problem," p. 207.

political, wherein obedience to God is reduced to obedience to political law.

In the *Treatise*, then, Spinoza presents two mutually exclusive models of amended religion, if only by implication, further involving himself in a series of deep contradictions regarding his project of amending religion. The central contradiction between the two parts of the *Treatise* (from which derive all the other contradictions enumerated below) lies in the definition of the key concept of amended religion: namely, obedience to God. In the first fifteen chapters of the *Treatise*, Spinoza firmly states that the only point of contact between man and God, upon which obedience to God is based, is ethical activity, for it is only in this realm that man stands alone, without mediation, before God.²⁵ Spinoza's basic premise in the first part is that contrary to metaphysical knowledge, which is limited to a handful of philosophers, knowledge of ethical law is a gift common to all people.²⁶ The laws of ethics are the word of God engraved on each and every person's heart, in that they are based on basic human intuition.²⁷ The non-mediated nature of obedience to God that characterizes Spinoza's position in the first part of the *Treatise* is completely negated in the second part. There, Spinoza places the political realm between the individual and God, stating explicitly that "no one can rightly cultivate piety or obey God, without obeying all edicts of the sovereign authority."²⁸

The change in *form* of "obedience to God"—in other words, switching from a direct relationship between man and God with no intermediary to a relationship requiring the mediation of the political authority—is accompanied by a change in *content*, too. Obedience to God, which in the first part of the *Treatise* was identified only with "love of [one's] neighbor,"²⁹ is identified in the second part with blind obedience to the political

²⁵ Testimony as to the religious significance of the non-mediated situation of the individual facing God may be found in Spinoza's interpretation of the verse that he chose as a motto for the *Treatise*: "By this we know that we abide in him and he abides in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit" (I John 4:13). "[H]ence he concludes... that anyone who has love truly has the spirit of God. He even concludes, because no one has seen God, that no one recognizes God or is aware of him other than through love of his neighbor, and hence that the only attribute of God that anyone can know is this love, so far as we share in it" (*Treatise*, p. 181 [176]). Further on in the *Treatise*, Spinoza pushes this position to further extremes when he argues that "the [Holy] Spirit is in truth simply the mental peace which arises in the mind from good actions" (*Treatise*, p. 193 [188]). Here Spinoza approaches an identification of God with moral activity as such.

²⁶ *Treatise*, p. 174 [168].

²⁷ *Treatise*, p. 167 [162].

²⁸ *Treatise*, p. 243 [233].

²⁹ *Treatise*, p. 181 [176].

authority.³⁰ In the second part of the *Treatise*, Spinoza demands in no uncertain terms that orders issued by the political authority be obeyed even when these orders are blatantly unethical,³¹ to the extent that one who fails to do so unconditionally is accused of desecrating religion (*impium*).³²

This contradiction between the two definitions of the term “obedience to God,” which serves as a pivotal term for Spinoza’s amended religion, entails five additional contradictions. Each of these contradictions—and, all the more so, all of them taken together—will be shown to indicate that Spinoza proposes two mutually exclusive models of amended religion in the *Treatise*.

1. *Contradiction in the concept of the biblical prophet.* In the transition from the first to the second part of the *Treatise*, Spinoza changes the valuation amended religion seeks to cultivate among its faithful in relation to the biblical prophet. In the first part of the *Treatise*, in the course of reducing the religious to the ethical, Spinoza grants the prophet the robes of an ethical hero, despite denying him the philosopher’s cap.³³ As such, Spinoza presents the biblical prophet as the role model of amended religion. In contrast, in reducing the religious to the political, when his interest is to ensure absolute obedience to the political authority, Spinoza derides the biblical prophets, who “antagonized rather than reformed people by means of liberty which they usurped to admonish, scold, and rebuke.”³⁴ And when Spinoza discusses the opposition the biblical prophet posed to the king as such, that is, as one who holds in his hands political power, he denounces the position of the prophet and prefers to adopt the viewpoint of the king. Thus, the prophets, who were presented in the first part of the *Treatise* as the dependable representatives of grace, honesty, and goodness, are presented in the second part as a group of capricious, troublesome rebels who harm rather than benefit both religion and state.³⁵

³⁰ “We are obliged to carry out absolutely all the commands of the sovereign power,” argues Spinoza, “however absurd they may be” (*Treatise*, p. 200 [194]).

³¹ *Treatise*, p. 200 [193–194].

³² *Treatise*, p. 253 [242].

³³ In the first part of the *Treatise*, Spinoza states of the prophets that “they taught nothing out of the ordinary about the divine attributes, but rather had thoroughly commonplace conceptions of God” (*Treatise*, p. 35 [37]). Nonetheless, he notes that “the minds of the prophets were directed exclusively to what is right and good” (*Treatise*, p. 29 [31]). “...they are so highly praised and commended... not for the sublimity and excellence of their intellects but for their piety and constancy” (*Treatise*, p. 35 [37]).

³⁴ *Treatise*, p. 232 [223] (translation slightly modified).

³⁵ In the first part of the *Treatise*, see pp. 29–30, 35 [31–32, 37]. In the second part of the *Treatise*, see pp. 228–229, 232, 234–235 [219–220, 223–224, 226].

2. *Contradiction in the nature of the role models posed by amended religion and the kind of excellence that amended religion wishes to cultivate among its faithful.* In the first part of the *Treatise*, Spinoza places Jesus, as religious-ethical reformer, at the head of his amended religion, and aims to cultivate the ethical qualities among the faithful.³⁶ Conversely, in the second part, Spinoza prefers citizens who display an exceptional propensity to obey those in office, whose exemplary figure is the Roman military leader Torquatus, who slew his son with a blow of an axe for violating army orders.³⁷ The blatant contradiction between a religion whose role model is a military leader and a religion whose role model is a moral reformer is exacerbated in light of the fact that the soldiers of the Roman Empire crucified Jesus.

3. *Contradiction in the role assigned to the ecclesiastics.* In the course of reducing religion to the *ethical*, Spinoza positions ecclesiastics as teachers of morality who derive moral lessons from Holy Scripture for the common people.³⁸ In the course of reducing the religious to the *political*, however, Spinoza turns ecclesiastics into state officials who “teach the people piety by the authority of the sovereign powers and adapt it by their rulings to the public interest.”³⁹ Clearly, the additions “by the authority

³⁶ See, for example, *Treatise*, pp. 19, 63–64, 69–70 [20–21, 64–65, 70–71].

³⁷ *Treatise*, pp. 242–243 [232]. Titus Manlius Torquatus (fourth century B.C.E.) was celebrated in the Roman tradition as an outstanding example of a military hero; he received the epithet “Torquatus” after he succeeded in tearing a necklace (*torques*) from the neck of a large Celtic soldier. In the *Treatise*, Spinoza alludes to an event that occurred in 340 B.C.E. in which his son, a Roman military officer, decided, in explicit opposition to the command of his father the consul—the supreme commander of the military—to set out on an attack against the enemy. In response, Torquatus executed him with an axe. Cicero, in his book *On Moral Ends*, places in the mouth of the representative of the Epicurean school, Lucius Manlius Torquatus, praise for the act of his ancestor, Titus Manlius Torquatus. The latter is depicted there as one who “preferred the principle of obedience to those that bore the burden of office over the natural emotion of love for one’s own son, and one who was bringing pain upon himself as a consequence of the need to preserve the authority of his military command... providing for the security of his fellow citizens, and thereby—as he was well aware—for his own” (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, I.35, trans. R. Woolf [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], p. 15). This praise is consistent with the manner in which Spinoza chose to present Torquatus in the second part of the *Treatise*.

³⁸ In Spinoza’s view, given that the masses lack the necessary abilities for rational cognition—“great caution and perspicacity and supreme mental discipline” (*Treatise*, p. 76 [77])—the Holy Scriptures, which were written for an entire nation, and thereafter for humanity as a whole, needed to provide examples rather than theoretical explanations of ethical truths. However, the stories alone are not sufficient, for the common people “get more pleasure from stories and from strange and unexpected events than from the actual doctrine of the histories. This is why, in addition to reading the histories, they also need pastors or church ministers to explain these to them, owing to the weakness of their understanding” (*Treatise*, p. 78 [79]).

³⁹ *Treatise*, p. 247 [236].

of the sovereign powers” and “[adapted] by their rulings”⁴⁰ completely change the designation of ecclesiastics, turning them from independent critics of the political authority into its agents and messengers.

4. *Contradiction in granting the right to interpret the foundations of faith.* In the first part of the *Treatise*, Spinoza asserts that everyone has the right to interpret the foundations of faith as he wishes.⁴¹ In the second part, however, he asserts that the right to interpret the foundations of faith is granted to the sovereign only.⁴² Spinoza is consistent in the two parts of the *Treatise* only in his assertion that the right to interpret the foundations of faith should be taken away from the various ecclesiastics.⁴³

5. *Contradiction in the definition of justice.* In the course of the reduction of the religious to the *ethical*, Spinoza defines justice as “a constant and perpetual will to assign to each man his due.”⁴⁴ In the course of the reduction of the religious to the *political*, however, Spinoza defines justice as “a fixed intention to assign to each person what belongs to [him] in

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Treatise*, pp. 183–184 [178–179]. While Spinoza quite clearly states the seven principles of amended religion (see there, pp. 182–183 [177–178]), he rejects a dogmatic position toward their interpretation and understanding in which such matters are simply accepted as fiat. Moreover, according to Spinoza, the existence of different interpretations of the principles of faith is not merely optional; rather, each person has an obligation to adapt the principles of faith to his own worldview. The principles of amended religion are not as such either true or false; rather, they allow, with a deliberateness that finds expression in their vague and noncommittal formulation, both a false interpretation that suits the comprehension of the masses, as well as a true explanation matching that of the philosopher. Pines sees in the principles of faith of the *Treatise* a new beginning for philosophy of religion. In his words: “As far as I know, he [Spinoza] was chronologically the first philosopher who affirmed on doctrinal grounds that the dogmas which he propounded and recommended, but in no way considered as supra-rational, do not and should not fall under the jurisdiction of theoretical reason” (Pines, “Spinoza’s *Tractatus*,” p. 35).

⁴² *Treatise*, p. 238 [228]. Spinoza argues that in ancient times, in order to gain full recognition of their rule, kings customarily “tried to persuade their people they were descended from the immortal gods” (*Treatise*, p. 211 [204]). However, in our day, it is “only where men become wholly barbarous (*prorsus barbari*) that they allow themselves to be so openly deceived” (*Treatise*, p. 212 [205]). Hence, political rulers are today forced to use more sophisticated and less coarse versions of this argument. But the common denominator of them all is an interpretation of the principles of faith in such a manner as to allow obedience to God to be identified with obedience to the sovereign, and the reward (or punishment) of those citizens who obey (or do not obey) the authorities with divine reward (or punishment).

⁴³ See, for example, *Treatise*, pp. 178, 238–239 [173, 228–229].

⁴⁴ *Treatise*, p. 59 [59]: “*Justitia enim, ut communiter definitur, est constans et perpetua voluntas jus suum cuique tribuendi.*” See also letter 23, to Blijenbergh, in Spinoza, *Collected Works*, p. 389.

accordance with civil law.”⁴⁵ It is impossible to ignore the blatant grafting on of the “accordance with civil law,” which renders the definition of justice in the second part of the *Treatise* completely different from the definition of justice in the first part. Whereas in the first part, justice is defined strictly according to *ethical* standards, in the second part it is defined strictly according to *political* standards.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Spinoza contradicts himself in his response to the pivotal question of the *Treatise*, “What is amended religion?” In the first part of the *Treatise* (chapters 1–15), he presents an amended religion that is founded on reduction of the religious to the ethical, wherein obedience to God is reduced to obedience to the laws of morality. In the second part of the *Treatise* (chapters 16–20), however, Spinoza presents an amended religion that is founded on reduction of the religious to the political, wherein obedience to God is reduced to obedience to political law.

True, Spinoza’s esoteric manner of writing in the *Treatise* in fact requires that it be read with particular care. Ironically, however, the more carefully one reads the *Treatise*, the more apparent and striking the contradiction becomes. A careful reading of the *Treatise* exposes a significant number of offshoots of this deep contradiction, with far-reaching implications for the image of Spinoza’s amended religion, beginning with their respective understandings of biblical prophecy, the nature of their role models and the meaning of religious excellence, through the intended function of religious functionaries and the right to interpret the principles of faith, and ending with the definition of justice within the framework of amended religion.

After one has completed reading the *Treatise* in its entirety, a thick cloud seems to rest over the image of amended religion. Yet it is precisely on that point, more than on any other, that the *Treatise* seems to cry out for clarification. Where Spinoza provides no such clarification we are left to our own devices. Not only does Spinoza fail to explain to us the meaning of the contradiction inherent in the heart of the *Treatise*, but there is not a single, solid textual indication that he was himself aware of the existence of such a contradiction. We are confronted by a thunderous silence on Spinoza’s part.

At the same time it is difficult to assume that Spinoza—the sophisticated author of the *Treatise* who wrote this work in many layers and

⁴⁵ *Treatise*, p. 203 [196]: “*Justitia est animi constantia tribuendi unicuique, quod ei ex jure civili competit.*”

who knew, on the basis of different esoteric considerations, how to place deliberate contradictions within the work—was unaware of the glaring contradictions between its two parts. And, assuming he was indeed aware of such contradictions, it is difficult to imagine that this implies that Spinoza was simply vacillating between two alternative models of amended religion. The *Treatise*, as noted earlier, is a complete work that Spinoza published notwithstanding the dangers involved.

Moreover, even if Spinoza placed within the *Treatise* various passages that were written during different periods and in different contexts (the earliest of which was evidently the lost apologia written close to his excommunication in 1656),⁴⁶ his tendency was to re-work and incorporate these passages within the framework of a new and consistent work.⁴⁷

The problem of amended religion thus presents itself to us once again, this time in a more disturbing form. For it is now clear to us that Spinoza (1) was aware of the contradiction between the first part and the second part of the *Treatise*, (2) deliberately refrains from revealing to us the resolution of this contradiction, and (3) understood the *Treatise*, including its built-in contradictions, as a work that incorporated a solution to the problem of amended religion.

It is beyond the framework of the present discussion to suggest a possible exegetical solution to the contradiction between the two models of amended religion proposed by Spinoza.⁴⁸ My purpose here was only to demonstrate that any analysis of Spinoza's project of amending religion

⁴⁶ Nadler, *Spinoza*, pp. 247–249. See also Asa Kasher and Shlomo Biderman, “Why Was Baruch de Spinoza Excommunicated?” in D.S. Katz and J.I. Israel, eds., *Skeptics, Millenarians, and Jews* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), pp. 111–113; and especially Fokke Akkerman's introduction to the Latin-French edition of the *Treatise: Traité Théologico-Politique. Texte établi par F. Akkerman. Traductions et notes par J. Lagrée et P-F. Moreau.* (*Spinoza. Oeuvres III*; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), pp. 4–10.

⁴⁷ Akkerman, introduction to *Traité Théologico-Politique*, p. 8.

⁴⁸ For a possible exegetical solution connecting the meaning of this contradiction with the principled metaphysical status of logical contradiction in Spinoza's system, see Yuval Jobani, “Spinoza's Emendation of Religion: On the Status of Contradiction in the Concept of God” (Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 2008), pp. 104–126 [Hebrew]; “The Political Theology of the Ancient Hebrew State According to Spinoza,” *Zmanim: A Historical Quarterly* 103 (Summer 2008), pp. 62–72 [Hebrew]. There, relying on Spinoza's rigorous and meticulous analysis of the ancient Hebrew state, I attempt to demonstrate how the contradiction between the reduction of the religious to the ethical and the reduction of the religious to the political does not destroy the concept of God in the first kind of knowledge but rather serves to construct it: for the practical effect of this theoretical contradiction simultaneously ensures both religion's obligation to the political authority and the political authority's obligation to the laws of morality. By means of this contradiction, Spinoza's amended religion stabilizes society and, by doing so, completely fulfills its role in the first kind of knowledge.

as given in the *Treatise* must confront, in one way or another, this deep contradiction.

The conclusion we have arrived at is opposed to the conventional reading of the *Treatise*, which does not identify this contradiction at all. Within the framework of the accepted reading of the *Treatise*, it is customary to obscure the model of ethical religion proposed by Spinoza in the first part of the *Treatise*, and to assert, on the basis of the second part alone, that his amended religion is no more than religion seen as an auxiliary means of fulfilling the aims of the political authority. For that reason, the widespread exegetical tendency is to criticize Spinoza for glorifying the sovereignty and supremacy of the state and failing to restrain it or place any checks upon it. According to these arguments, and to the displeasure of those exegetes who share in this reading, Spinoza provides justification for every government as such, even one that is tyrannical.⁴⁹

Moreover, our conclusion, according to which Spinoza's project of amending religion in the *Treatise* is based upon a contradiction, is opposed not only to the accepted interpretation of the *Treatise*, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the principled consistency that is

⁴⁹ Yovel presents this critique as follows: "Such a program has its dangers. Spinoza leaves too vague the difference between educating and manipulating the multitude; he gives far too little thought to the need for checks and balances that would disperse the concentrated power of the state without compromising its authority or dividing its sovereignty. More generally, he pays little heed to the danger of a despotism of reason, a concept that Spinoza must have deemed incoherent, but which historical experience has since validated and to which Spinoza's theory is not sufficiently immune" (Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, p. 135). A similar position likewise appears in Smith (*Spinoza, Liberalism*, pp. 197–198). Edwin Curley, who sharpens this critique by focusing upon the reduction of the right to power in the *Treatise*, summarizes one of his studies of Spinoza's political philosophy with the following statement: "That the notion of natural right (not coextensive with power) disappears in Spinoza seems to me still to be a defect in his political philosophy, sympathetic though I may be to the arguments which lead to that result" (Edwin Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," in Don Garrett, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], p. 335). This position was shared by Motzkin, who states in reference to Spinoza that "No one has declared with greater freedom or clarity that justice (i.e., rights) and power are the same: 'Whoever is violent is the victor'" (Aryeh Leo Motzkin, "A Note on Natural Right, Nature, and Reason in Spinoza," *Iyyun* 28 [1978], p. 73 [Hebrew]). A more radical formulation of this critique may be found in Evyatar Levin, who concludes his paper on obedience to law in the *Treatise* with the following words: "A brief twenty years after the publication of *Leviathan* by Hobbes, Spinoza links the authority of the legislator to a 'social covenant with the grace of God.' Unlike Hobbes, he does not permit under any circumstances an act which is inconsistent with it. Shaking off the absolute rule of the Church comes about at the price of absolute subjugation to the supreme secular authority, to the ruler and the state: to the law as it is. Spinoza generated, alongside the 'ability,' the obligation to absolute obedience. Everything is forbidden, unless it is permitted by law, including rebellion, protest, and criticism—all this, as opposed to the true goal of Spinoza, as defined on the title page of the *Treatise*" (Evyatar Levin, "A Note on Obedience to Law According to Spinoza's *Theological–Political Treatise*," *Iyyun* 28 [1978], p. 296 [Hebrew]).

generally attributed to his philosophical system. For Spinoza's choice in presenting his philosophy in the *Ethics* according to the Euclidean model instills in the reader the impression that he is facing a strictly consistent philosophy that necessarily follows from itself.⁵⁰

However, the tendency to attribute consistency to Spinoza's philosophy is common not only among readers of the *Ethics* but also among readers of the *Treatise*. This is because Spinoza's adoption in the *Treatise* of a method of writing whose object is to obscure—involving calculated contradictions and numerous statements for form's sake—reinforces in the reader, albeit from an altogether different angle, the instinct of consistent reading. In the atmosphere of concealment that reigns in the *Treatise*, the reader's tendency is to view the contradictions he comes across as nothing more than precautionary measures that the author employs in order to protect himself.

And indeed, the conventional reading of the *Treatise* adopts as a basic premise the assumption that all contradictions that issue from the work belong to its rhetorical façade, which allows Spinoza to veil his logically consistent alternative to theology's concept of God.⁵¹

However, this assumption, too, cannot be accepted so long as it is not based on the text itself. Even if Spinoza's writing is indeed intentionally obscure and, as such, adopts the style of contradiction, we have no *a priori* guarantee that his concealed standpoint is not itself founded upon contradiction.

Moreover, this assumption—and this is the main point I have attempted to prove here—is refuted by the *Treatise* itself. Thus, whatever embarrassment the contradictions that issue from our study may cause us, we must not blame our obtuseness, out of an unshakable belief in the rigorous consistency immanent in the canonical text laid before us. For then we

⁵⁰ Readers as early as Spinoza's correspondents have been guided by the instinct of consistent reading of his texts. One of those correspondents, Blijenbergh, has left us an apt formulation of this instinct, for although he pinpoints a logical contradiction in Spinoza's philosophical stance, Blijenbergh writes to him, "I fear that here I must not properly understand your meaning, for your conceptions seem to me too penetrating for you to commit such a grave error" (letter 20, in Spinoza, *Collected Works*, p. 367). Oldenburg also, in a similar spirit, writes to Spinoza, "I approve very much of your geometric style of proof, but at the same time I blame my own obtuseness that I do not follow so easily the things you teach so exactly" (letter 3, in Spinoza, *Collected Works*, p. 168).

⁵¹ Even Strauss, who focused particularly on the contradictions within the *Treatise*, did not see in them anything more than a means of concealing Spinoza's consistent and un-contradictory position. See Strauss, *Persecution*, pp. 142–201. Strauss passed on this convention to the exegetes who came in his wake, such as Pines, "Spinoza's *Tractatus*," and Aviezer Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy: Models of Unity, Division, Collision, and Subordination* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and Israel Democracy Institute, 2002), p. 143 ff.

would be consecrating Spinoza's text, while subjugating, like the theologians of whom Spinoza disapproves, "reason, the greatest gift and the divine light, to the dead letters [*mortuis literis*]."52 For indeed, no philosopher in the history of philosophy has exceeded Spinoza in denouncing the consecration of texts, canonical though they may be.

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⁵² *Treatise*, p. 188 [182], slightly re-phrased. This is the language used by Spinoza in opposing Rabbi Jehudah Al-Fakhar, who states that reason "should be subordinate to Scripture and indeed wholly subjected to it" (*Treatise*, p. 187 [181]). The expression "dead letters" (*mortuis literis*) is explicitly Pauline, and represents Judaism as being subject to the "letter that kills" (*littera enim occidit*; II Corinthians 3:6). See Meir Seidler, "Benedictus de Spinoza: The Shaper of European Enlightenment's Image of Judaism," *Daat* 54 (2004), p. 31 n. 13 and also p. 35 [Hebrew]. Moreover, in my opinion, by using the expression "dead letters," Spinoza relates to the fact that the Jewish Torah scrolls are written without vocalization. In his Latin book of Hebrew grammar, after explaining to his readers that in the Hebrew language vowels are indicated not by means of letters but by means of diacritical markings, Spinoza notes: "Among the Hebrews vowels are called 'souls of letters,' and letters without vowels are 'bodies without souls' (*corpora sine anima*)" (B. Spinoza, *Hebrew Grammar*, in Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. S. Shirley [Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2002], p. 588). For a discussion of possible kabbalistic sources for Spinoza's statement in this context, see Menachem Lorberbaum, "The Republic in Hebrew: On the Hebrew Translation of the Political Terminology of Spinoza," *Iyyun* 53 (2004), pp. 202–204 [Hebrew].