

Spinoza on the Spirit of Friendship

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ABSTRACT

Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) is most often treated as a secular philosopher in the literature. But the critical-historical and textual analyses explored in this study suggest that Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* not as a secular project intended to supersede monotheism for those stoic enough to plumb its icy depths, but rather, and as is much less often assumed, as a genuinely Judeo-Christian theological discourse accounting for the changing scientific worldviews and political realities of his time. This paper draws upon scholarship documenting Spinoza's involvement with Christian sects such as the Collegiants and Quakers. After establishing the largely unappreciated importance of Spinoza's religious or theological thought, a close reading of the *Ethics* demonstrates that friendship is the theme that ties together Spinoza's ethical, theological, political, and scientific doctrines.

For Tanya

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CHAPTER 1

AN ENEMY OF RELIGION?

It is of the first importance to men to establish close relationships and to bind themselves together with such ties as may most effectively unite them into one body, and, as an absolute rule, to act in such a way as serves to strengthen friendship.

—Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics*

Some three and a half centuries of a wide-variety of interpretations of Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677) have obscured some important aspects of his philosophy. The literature has tended to portray him as a cold and secular rationalist as well as an ascetic and perhaps eccentric recluse.¹ However, Spinoza was actually intensely passionate about both religion and the nature of true friendship. Textual and biographical evidence reveal a man who continuously meditated upon Scripture as well as upon natural law. Judeo-Christian values were of primary significance to Spinoza, and in the *Ethics* he dares—using the tools of the natural philosophy of his day—to establish the foundations in natural law.

The evidence clearly shows that Spinoza was a very sociable person who was a deeply committed and caring friend. In order to understand the spirit of friendship in Spinoza's philosophy, this study examines the historical contexts and biographical details from which it was drawn and looks closely at key passages from his writings, especially the appendix and the twentieth through the fortieth propositions of Part 4 of the *Ethics*.

Spinoza's use of terms in the *Ethics* such as substance, attribute, mode, affection, essence, God's understanding Love, God's Idea, and Friendship are interpreted

¹ See, e.g.: Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Vol. 1: The Marrano of Reason* (New Jersey & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1989), 31.

consistently and coherently as philosophical terms in their historical context.² Likewise, popular aphoristic propositions and phrases from the *Ethics* have most often been treated primarily as philosophical concepts and seldom as biblical interpretations.³ Consequently, Spinoza has been treated as a philosopher in general or, more specifically, as a philosopher of mind or as a Jewish philosopher.⁴ This study questions whether the quasi-mythological aspect of these terms and phrases actually have a primarily religious function for Spinoza. Although the *Ethics* indeed represents a departure from traditional Judeo-Christian theology as generally understood at that time, and one that draws upon diverse intellectual heterodox as well as orthodox resources, the evidence presented here suggests that Spinoza wrote the *Ethics* not as a secular project intended to supersede monotheism for those stoic enough to plumb its icy depths, but rather, and as is much less often assumed, as a genuinely Judeo-Christian theological discourse accounting for the changing scientific worldviews and political realities of his time.⁵

² The first three examples (substance, attribute, and mode) are treated of most frequently in the literature. Friendship (*amicitia* or *Amicitia*) is much less frequently mentioned, despite its importance. “God’s understanding Love” is Wienpahl’s translation of *Dei Amor intellectualis* in Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza* (New York: New York University Press, 1979). Shirley’s translation of the same is “the intellectual love of God” in Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza: Complete Works* (Samuel Shirley, tr.; Michael L. Morgan, ed./intro.; Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002).

³ For a treatment of this problem as it relates, by way of example, to *E1p15*, “Everything which is, is in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God,” see Warren Montag, “‘That Hebrew Word’: Spinoza and the Concept of Shekhinah,” in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy* (Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman, eds.; Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, pp. 131-144), 137-142.

⁴ See Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman, eds., *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

⁵ For an overview of intellectual changes that came about in Europe through colonial contact and scientific developments, see Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A commerce of light* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also the Introduction by Allison P. Coudert and Taylor Corse in Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Allison P. Coudert & Taylor Corse, trs./eds.; Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiii-xv.

Committed to empirical science and the kind of reasoning available to ordinary human minds, Spinoza drew from a wide variety of sources, both scientific and experiential, to present a picture of a universe governed by a non-anthropomorphic deity whose essence is partially available to human knowledge rather than being completely inscrutable. Although Spinoza's God, as he is in himself, may not be fully comprehended by anyone other than God himself, he can nevertheless be comprehended to some extent by human beings, depending on the extent of their knowledge of modern logic, modern science, and possibly even by the history of philosophy. But this knowledge is always incomplete. The limitation is human finitude. Challenging traditional Aristotelian logic, Spinoza argued that clear and distinct knowledge of God is available to every reasonable person, even though such knowledge is always intuited by finite beings in the very midst of God's infinitely indeterminate actuality.

Spinoza counts any and all knowledge of the self-apparent laws of nature as knowledge of God. He found ample material from Scripture to support his view. Whatever in Scripture did not support this new immanent view of God, however, Spinoza dismissed as "superstitions"—explanations useful in the past, before science dominated cosmology, but now seen to be erroneous in the early modern world. Thus, Spinoza argued, hanging on to outdated superstitious views was anathema to scientifically approaching knowledge of God and living an ethical life based upon such knowledge.

In the final analysis, the theology Spinoza circumscribed in the *Ethics* goes way beyond anything previously presented in his ancient and medieval Jewish, Muslim, and Christian sources. For present purposes, it is one that relies significantly upon a notion of friendship found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Although approached with scientific rigor,

this notion was for Spinoza a divine decree. Thus, whatever else it may be, the *Ethics* stands as a project of traditional Judeo-Christian theological interpretation.

Spinoza's new theology was, of course, received with horror by many of his contemporaries. Some accused Spinoza of being the Antichrist. A tradition of tussling over truncated versions of Spinoza's *theoria* ensued. From the time Spinoza's writings began to circulate, these stunted summaries succeeded in convincing much of the general public that Spinoza's new theology was, at bottom, a form of atheism. The story of Spinoza's nihilistic pantheism and its secularizing effects continue to be recounted today in volume after volume, even though Spinoza resoundingly claims a strictly Judeo-Christian religious orientation throughout his tracts and letters. Much in the first three chapters of this study addresses this problem, a propaedeutic necessary for a close reading of the *Ethics* in the final two chapters.

One Dutch compatriot, Johannes Bredenburg (1643-1691), using the same tools of Cartesian logic employed by Spinoza, strove in vain to refute Spinoza's necessitarianism. Bredenburg found that he could not in good conscience do anything but endorse Spinoza's conclusions. For religion's sake, in a move anticipating Kant's separation of theoretical and practical reason, Bredenburg formulated a theory of "double truth" pertaining to the divine.⁶ This satisfied few. "Bredenburg's *Wiskunstige demonstratie* holds that all consequences and effects in nature are eternally necessary. Kuyper, Lemmerman, Orobio de Castro, Aubert de Versé, and countless others considered this Spinozistic and redolent of a rigid fatalism incompatible with Revelation

⁶ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 355.

and Providence.”⁷ An acrimonious debate, involving religious topics ranging from devils to Spinoza’s axiom “nothing can come from nothing” (*ex nihilo nihil fit*), ensued among the Christian Collegiants, splitting the movement in twain between the years 1685 and 1721.⁸

Fear of Spinoza was not restricted to the Netherlands. In England, the Cambridge Platonists considered Spinoza part of an unholy triumvirate of materialists along with Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and René Descartes (1596-1650). In France, Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721) referred to Spinoza as “insane, illiterate, and stupid”⁹ and recommended that he “be covered with chains and whipped with a rod.”¹⁰ In his famous *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697), Pierre Bayle labeled Spinoza “a strangely virtuous systematic atheist.”¹¹ Intent upon refuting the lack of free will and human dignity he perceived in Spinoza’s view of God, Leibniz set about constructing a rival theological system, the *Monadology*, published in 1714. And, in the late eighteenth century, Kant produced a new version of exactly what Spinoza found repugnant to

⁷ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 354.

⁸ Spinoza’s involvement with the Collegiants is discussed in Ch. 3 of this text. For an account of the fate of the sect after Spinoza, see Ch. 19 (*The Bredenburg Disputes*) in Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

⁹ April G. Shelford, *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life, 1650-1720* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 155.

¹⁰ Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 104-105.

¹¹ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, xx (my translation).

philosophy: an attempt to ground morality in the human will and in absolute categories that are outside of one's own self-interest.¹²

But Spinoza's reception in the early modern "Republic of Letters" was more than simply negative. Starting with his immediate circle of friends that included collaborators, co-religionists, and critics as well as his translators and publisher, the circulation of Spinoza's views grew to dominate much of the discourse on religion and morality well into the early nineteenth century. A hot and productive rivalry between the philosophically-minded scientist, Robert Boyle (1627-1691), and Spinoza was facilitated by Henry Oldenburg (c.1619-1677). Boyle authored *The Sceptic Chemist* and established the annual Boyle Lectures as a legacy. Boyle charged the lecturers with disproving Spinozism and thereby, as he saw it, preserving traditional Christian values. But Rosalie Colie documents how, from its inception through 1730, the divines delivering the Boyle Lectures ceded more and more territory to the enemy they were charged to disprove. "Spinoza's heterodoxy, though radical, had become sufficiently domesticated to bear the scrutiny of the orthodox, and, almost, their patronage ... Philosophy itself became orthodoxy—the weapons of metaphysics and physics used to counter deist and mechanist arguments became inseparable from [Anglican] orthodoxy itself."¹³ Boyle himself provided the most scientifically sophisticated arguments from design available during his

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (H. J. Paton, tr.; New York: Harper & Row, 1964 [1785]); Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology* (Allen W. Wood, tr./intro.; Gertrude M. Clark, tr.; Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1978); and Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason And Other Writings* (Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni, trs. and eds.; Robert Merrihew Adams, intro.; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹³ Rosalie L. Colie, "Spinoza in England, 1665-1730" (*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 107, No. 3, 1963, pp. 183-219), 210.

time, but his literalist interpretation of miracles depends upon “a physical process analogous to known natural laws” that already approaches Spinoza’s own interpretation in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, and is far removed from the spirited defense of divine intervention generally espoused by his compatriots, the Cambridge Platonists.¹⁴

Spinoza’s battle for modernist immanent theology over against traditionalist transcendent theology became far broader than a struggle between Spinoza and the official representatives of the Christian and Jewish communities of the Netherlands. Eventually the debate between religious modernism and traditionalism extended to encompass most of European civilization.

A little more than a century after Spinoza, another philosophical battle over the new theology was fought in Germany between Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), a proponent of rational theology, and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, (1743-1819), a bitter enemy of the same and who coined the term, nihilism, specifically to describe any version of it. Deeply engaged with the works of Spinoza and other rational theologians, Jacobi dedicated himself to characterizing Spinoza as an atheist in disguise and to the self-admittedly quixotic mission of rooting Spinozan influences out of German culture.¹⁵ The so-called pantheism controversy erupted over an encounter Jacobi described in detail between himself and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), a friend of Mendelssohn and respected member of German literary society. Visiting Lessing for the first time,

¹⁴ Colie, “Spinoza in England,” 200 ff. See also Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 456-457 & passim.

¹⁵ “I know what is in store for me. I stand alone against a whole host and sheep will follow sheep.” F. H. Jacobi, *Against Mendelssohn’s Accusations*, in Gérard Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations Between Lessing and Jacobi: Text with Excerpts from the Ensuing Controversy* (G. Vallée, J. B. Lawson, & C. G. Chapple, trs.; Lanham & London: University Press of America, 1988), 159.

Jacobi reported grilling his host about his views regarding Spinoza, hoping to win Lessing over to his own confessional Christian philosophy based upon a “leap of faith” (*salto mortale*).¹⁶ Lessing engaged Jacobi in a lengthy conversation about Spinoza, but declined endorsing Jacobi’s version of Christian faith. Lessing died shortly thereafter, and Jacobi accused Lessing of being an unqualified Spinozist, *ergo* an atheist. Jacobi was thus willing to tarnish Lessing’s reputation in order to use his trumped up errancy as a warning to others. A heated and public exchange of letters ensued between Jacobi and Mendelssohn. As the acrimony increased, Mendelssohn rushed out in the dead of winter to take his latest installment of the debate to press. But, as the story goes, Mendelssohn forgot his coat, got ill, and shortly thereafter died.

In the struggle to reconcile the new theology and traditional Judaism, Mendelssohn sought a middle path and was much more sympathetic to Spinoza.¹⁷ “The best minds in Germany [in the last half of the eighteenth century], Mendelssohn complained, were concerned with nothing but empirical investigations of the natural world. At the same time, a penchant for irrationalism and fanaticism was becoming all too prevalent.”¹⁸ Defending the reputation of his deceased friend, Lessing, during the pantheism controversy, Mendelssohn wrote that “a refined Spinozism ... rhymes very

¹⁶ On Jacobi’s philosophy, see B. A. Gerrish, “Faith and Existence in the Philosophy of F. H. Jacobi,” in *Witness and Existence: Essays in Honor of Schubert M. Ogden* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 106-139).

¹⁷ “Who would not be delighted to have had Spinoza as friend, no matter how great his Spinozism? And who would refuse to give Spinoza’s genius and excellent character their due?” Moses Mendelssohn, *To the Friends of Lessing*, in Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 130.

¹⁸ Allan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 69.

well with all that is practical in religion and morality” and “can easily be reconciled with Judaism.”¹⁹ Early in his career Mendelssohn wrote *Philosophic Conversations* (1755), in which Spinoza’s philosophy (but not his biblical criticism) was sympathetically critiqued.²⁰ By 1783, however, the year in which his *Jerusalem or On Religious Power and Judaism* was published, Mendelssohn was compelled to defend revealed religion over and against Spinoza-styled biblical criticism.

Mendelssohn seems to have had a difficult time accepting Spinoza’s denial of free will. Jewish faith, according Mendelssohn, “is constituted not by belief in any doctrine or opinion, but by trust in and reliance on the attributes of God.”²¹ But in Chapter 5 of the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides states: “Free Will is bestowed on every human being.”²² Endorsing, in the final analysis, Maimonides over and against Spinoza, Mendelssohn states: “Never in the world would it have occurred to me to look for the *freedom of the will* behind those transcendental terms through which Spinoza attempts to explain it only to contest it in his own way.”²³ Whatever “transcendental terms” he had in mind, as a follower of the Leibniz-Wolff school Mendelssohn could not accept Spinoza’s new theology without a fundamental reservation.

¹⁹ Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 130.

²⁰ Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn*, 137. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1987), 52.

²¹ Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 149.

²² Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (Moses Hyamson, tr./ed.; New York & Palestine: Azriel Printing Press), 86b ff.

²³ Vallée, *The Spinoza Conversations*, 142.

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was a philosopher of language, psychology, anthropology, science, and theology, a sympathetic reader of Spinoza, and a Protestant minister. Herder was an eager student of Kant who later became one of Kant's bitterest critics. The product of Herder's response to the pantheism controversy was *God, Some Conversations* (1787).

Herder knew that Spinoza was no crude materialist, and developed a sensualist epistemology following the contours of his predecessor's nominalist program. In Herder's own theology even speech acts (as we now call them) are treated as living organisms. This claim is made as a summary of Herder's work on language in general, and this observation about his work in particular:

[T]he word is the articulating utterance of the typified sense impressions of the understanding available to man in the same media through which they were received. The products of this utterance bear not only the imprint of their origin, that is, the uttered, but equally that of the media of their utterance, that is to say, the soul expressing itself in gestures and sounds as an image of the impressions of the eyes and ears produces in a new meta-schematism a manifold amalgam whose complexity can only be hinted at with the title [of Herder's text], '*Metaschematismus tönender Gedankenbilder*' (Metaschematism of resounding thought-images).²⁴

Herder also theorized subject-object cognition in a context of human-human and divine-human relatedness. Whereas Kant hypostasized cognitive faculties such as pure reason, Herder could, following Spinoza, account for the subject-object cognition without any such transcendental presuppositions. According to Marion Heinz and Heinrich Clairmont, Herder argues that it is "for the soul to recognize, by identifying its own image in the

²⁴ Marion Heinz and Heinrich Clairmont, "Herder's Epistemology," in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder* (Hans Adler, ed.; Wulf Koepke, tr. & ed.; Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009, pp. 43-64), 60.

sensuous, that the sensuous is an image of God just like itself.”²⁵ Herder’s approach at the time was universal in scope *and* also capable of grounding a theology through which traditional Christian vocabularies could be reclaimed and reinterpreted. This was, after all, precisely Spinoza’s project: not the destruction of religious practices but their application in promoting tolerance, goodwill, mutual help, and human knowledge in general. It is only as an *effect* of this single purpose or by a kind of default that Spinoza began a tradition of translating all known theologies and mythologies into a critical “cosmocentrism” or comparative cosmo-anthropology.²⁶

Before many of the projects growing out of Spinoza’s new theology were all but derailed in the mid-nineteenth century, another luminary of the German Enlightenment would address the problems Spinoza raised for confessional Christians and claim that, as a historic force, Christianity had already proved compatible with all the essentials of Spinoza’s cosmocentrism. Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was interested primarily in sociability, the nature and social force of religion, hermeneutics, and theology.²⁷ Studying Spinoza’s denial of free will, Schleiermacher called the chain

²⁵ Heinz & Clairmont, “Herder’s Epistemology,” 51.

²⁶ Andre Santos Campos, *Spinoza’s Revolutions in Natural Law* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 41-42. In a more negative characterization of this ongoing hermeneutical project, Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power: Spinoza and His Contemporaries* (London & New York: Verso, 1999), 3-4 asserts: “Spinoza sought not to convince his readers to abandon theology (which is not merely a set of disembodied ideas that might be accepted or rejected at will, but rather ideas immanent in a set of corporeal practices that are in certain ways inescapable), but instead to show them how to think rationally within it, in its terms, in a way that not only accepts the premises of any theology, but which even offers itself as theology’s strongest defence, thereby turning it against itself.”

²⁷ On synthesizing the knowledge of science and of religion in the footsteps of Spinoza, a project Schleiermacher called *higher realism*, see Julia A. Lamm, *The Living God: Schleiermacher’s Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

of transitive causation the “All,” because an individual’s emplacement in the chain is dependent upon all other creatures in the infinite series. Furthermore, as an explanation of the immediate physical existence of an individual, he noted an incisive and direct dependence upon the divine immanent causation, the unity of which responds retroductively to consciousness when the question, “*Whence?*,” is asked of it and which Schleiermacher therefore called the “One.”²⁸ For Schleiermacher, the feeling of creaturely dependence is absolute and this double or quasi-double dependence upon the One and All accounts for the actual phenomena of living consciousness. This feeling of absolute creaturely dependence obtained in self-consciousness is the very foundation of Schleiermacher’s version of Christian faith. Following Spinoza, Herder and Schleiermacher contributed to a naturalized Judeo-Christian theology on the one hand while demonstrating on the other that it could be used to empower, rather than diminish, a Christian worldview.

With the rise of the Left Hegelians, Spinoza’s reputation as a secular philosopher displaced his reputation as a Judeo-Christian thinker. Hegel, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and others appropriated Spinoza for their own agendas, and the study of labor, capital, and the mathematical sciences came to dominate western intellectual history after Marx.²⁹ When Spinoza’s words were later scrutinized with the methods of twentieth-century analytical

²⁸ The *Hen kai Pan* (One and All) that gained currency in the German Enlightenment is a formula expressing nonduality that can be traced back to Heraclitus, Fragment 59: “Couples are wholes and not wholes, what agrees disagrees, the concordant is discordant. From all things one and from one all things.” Lessing made use of this phrase and it is discussed in the pantheism controversy.

²⁹ Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza* (Susan M. Ruddick, tr.; Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011 [1979]).

philosophy, the conclusions of the *Ethics* were exasperatingly found wanting.³⁰ But there have been efforts, mostly under the radar screen of the more popular scholarship, to continue studying Spinoza as a religious thinker. The next chapter explores the late modern and contemporary tension between Spinoza's reception as a secular thinker and his reception as a religious thinker. As will be shown, the latter contributes to understanding his theory of friendship.

³⁰ Christopher Norris, "Spinoza and the Conflict of Interpretations," in *Spinoza Now* (Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed.). Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 3-37); and Christopher Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

CHAPTER 2

A CRISIS OF RELIGIOUS IDEAS AND SECULAR SENSIBILITIES

In “The Religious Element in Spinoza’s Philosophy” (1943), Walter Eckstein (1891-1975) explores the debate concerning Spinoza’s religious views. Eckstein addresses speculative theories and characterizations of Spinoza’s atheism and, from the opposing camp, of his saintly religiosity. Eckstein understands that the *Ethics* taken out of historical context or read through the lens of more recent philosophy will lose its religious tone and significance.³¹ Eckstein digs into the historic context in which Spinoza wrote and examines important passages from the full body of Spinoza’s works. Eckstein emplaces Spinoza in the “liberal protestant sects of his time” and identifies language common to the writings of Spinoza and his fellow Collegiants.³²

Spinoza advocated a religious attitude of love for others based upon principles of natural law over and against the half-hearted response to fear and superstition that he believed characterized traditional Jewish and Christian theology. Eckstein notes how, on the one hand, Spinoza vehemently denies God’s anthropomorphism and any attendant anthropocentric interests, while on the other hand identifying the minds of human beings as the very medium through which the divine knows and loves itself. In Eckstein’s account, the key to understanding this seeming paradox, and the one upon which Spinoza builds his religious views and ethical values, is the notion of a fixed and immutable order of nature (*fixus et immutabilis ordo naturae*). Although denying human justice to the

³¹ Walter Eckstein, “The Religious Element in Spinoza’s Philosophy” (*The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1943, pp. 153-163), 157 n 14.

³² Eckstein, “The Religious Element in Spinoza’s Philosophy,” 156-157.

divine, at the same time “Spinoza is most anxious to refute any *negative* evaluation of nature,” a point that Eckstein believes is underemphasized in the literature.³³ “The science of the Renaissance had discovered the infinity and homogeneity of the universe ... Spinoza’s aim was not to reconcile religion to science but rather to draw the metaphysical and ethical conclusions from the scientific premises.”³⁴ Eckstein argues that, for Spinoza, salvation consists of understanding and submitting to the eternal, rational, and interconnected order of which human beings are a small part. Although Spinoza denies that reality has no inherent purpose of its own, Eckstein argues that, for Spinoza, the homogeneity of the eternal world order (*aeternus ordo totius naturae*) provides humanity with necessary and sufficient grounds for ethical values and even a religious orientation.

Perplexities resulting from any study of Spinoza’s writings are understandable. The form and the content of the *Ethics* are quite unlike those of any other celebrated philosophical or theological text. Spinoza has been read as a cold rationalist, as a Jewish-secular-humanist, as an “Enlightenment” thinker, as a materialist, and as a scientist. In one way or another, many scholars have thus distorted what Spinoza actually said by forcing his words to have some historical agenda that Spinoza himself never intended. Furthermore, far fewer scholars have treated Spinoza as a Christian or even as a Judeo-Christian writer, despite his actual discourses and behavior.

³³ Eckstein, “The Religious Element in Spinoza’s Philosophy,” 160 (italics in original).

³⁴ Eckstein, “The Religious Element in Spinoza’s Philosophy,” 160, 163.

Albert Einstein (1879-1955), a self-described disciple of Spinoza who even pilgrimaged to Spinoza's home in Rijnsburg, cavalierly claimed that only "serious scientific workers" such as himself are qualified to understand the new theology of Spinoza.³⁵ Alan Donagan (1925-1991), espousing a more traditional post-Enlightenment Jewish perspective, dubiously claims that Spinoza not only clung to his Jewish identity, "but wished to communicate it to non-Jews."³⁶ Supporting this claim, Donagan states that "The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and certain of Spinoza's letters show that he was a Jew by birth and education, but had ceased to be a member of the Jewish community without subscribing, even outwardly, to any branch of Christianity ... He was, perhaps, the first European to avow the secularization of intellectual life as an ideal, and to live it."³⁷ But textual research by Steven Frankel and Richard Popkin and biographical research by Steven Nadler and others provide ground for contesting Donagan's claim regarding Spinoza's involvement with Christianity and avowed secularism. The proof text Donagan cites to support Spinoza's Jewishness is also taken out of context, and a careful reading of the original source (Letter 76) shows that where Donagan sees lauding, Spinoza is actually scorning the sentiments of Judah the Faithful

³⁵ Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It* (Alan Harris, tr.; Secaucus: Citadel Press), 28. See also Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza: The Renegade Jew Who Gave Us Modernity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2006), 61-62.

³⁶ Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (New York & London: Harvester Wheatsheaf), 10.

³⁷ Donagan, *Spinoza*, 8.

(Don Lope de Vera y Alarcon), a converso (or New Christian) who, after reverting back to Judaism, was burned at the stake in 1644.³⁸

The importance of language in the *Ethics* stems from Spinoza's treatment of the Cartesian doctrine of clear and adequate ideas (e.g. of God and singular things) and inadequate or confused ideas (often produced by misperception, memory, and imagination). Different approaches *to* this doctrine have resulted in different theories in the field. Norris approaches Spinoza as a progenitor of critical theory and theorizes error in his reading of the *Ethics* and its reception history. Norris shows how Kant, literary theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, and Althusserian Marxists all inherited and grappled with the problem of how to objectively warrant truth (or warrant objective truth) that Spinoza investigates in the *Ethics*. In the trajectory of this reception history, Norris finds that "there is no dispensing with enlightened critique – with the effort to demystify received concepts and categories – since it is only by way of such a vigilant procedure that thought can detect the hidden workings of prejudice."³⁹ The efforts of Norris and those he studies in *Spinoza & the Origins of Modern Critical Theory* demonstrate that, for human beings, the determination of truth *per se* involves an irreducible and perpetually inconclusive political element. Put another way: after Spinoza

³⁸ See Baruch Spinoza, *Spinoza: The Letters* (Samuel Shirley, tr.; Steven Barbone, Lee Rice, & Jacob Adler, intro./notes; Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 343 n. 382; or Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 950 n. 288.

³⁹ Norris, *Spinoza and the Origins of Modern Critical Theory*, 91.

philosophy became a political activity and its search for irrefutable truths was replaced (*pace* Althusser) by critical assessment of the effects rendered by its own production.⁴⁰

In Vol. 1 of *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Yirmiyahu Yovel approaches language in Spinoza by critically characterizing the Dutch theologian as “The Marrano of Reason.” Yovel amasses a wealth of evidence showing how, in response to the persecution in Spain and Portugal that included forced conversion to Christianity and the Inquisition, Spinoza’s Jewish ancestors developed a survival technique involving dual identities and dual language. With their public “masks,” these Sephardim fit into the dominant Christian culture as best they could while, in private, preserving their own customs, traditions, and, in some cases, religious practices. This resulted in multi-level communications in which a seemingly straightforward message articulated in the language of the dominant culture also conveyed a sub-text understood by other minority Marrano hearers.

From this critical historical context, Yovel theorizes that Spinoza’s texts are also written in this kind of dual language. Although Yovel’s discussion of the dual language used by the Sephardim repays reading, there are two important factors missing in his discussion of Spinoza’s texts. By focusing almost exclusively on Renaissance Spanish literature and the Sephardim experience from Spain to Portugal and the Dutch Republic, Yovel elides other important linguistic influences on Spinoza, including the standard four

⁴⁰ See: Michael Mack, “Toward an Inclusive Universalism: Spinoza’s Ethics of Sustainability,” in *Spinoza Now* (Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed.; Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 99-134); Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*; Warren Montag, “Interjecting Empty Spaces: Imagination and Interpretation in Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise*,” in *Spinoza Now* (Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed.; Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 161-177); and Norris, “Spinoza and the Conflict of Interpretations.”

varieties of traditional rabbinic commentaries (viz.: simple, allegorical, comparative, and esoteric) as well as Aristotelian and scholastic *pros hen* equivocation.⁴¹ This deficiency misleads Yovel to conclude that Spinoza uses philosophical language, like the Marrano experience in general, as “a play of masks,” reserving a core secular philosophical program for those mature enough to handle it while presenting an imaginary version of the same dressed up in religious language.⁴²

Yovel represents what had been, until only the last several decades, the majority reading of Spinoza’s intentions and use of language. Operating from the premise that Spinoza was “a loner” who “did not merely oppose” all traditions, who “was not just a reformer of revealed religions but its adamant enemy”, Yovel concludes that Spinoza’s “hidden esoteric truth, the one that leads to true salvation, is not Judaism in opposition to Christianity, but the immanent religion of reason in opposition to all historical religions.”⁴³ “All historical religions” can only be taken in a very qualified sense for Yovel’s assertion to warrant any merit, and must exclude, at minimum: the early Hebrew state, the early Christian church, and some of the underground Christian sects developing

⁴¹ For discussions of *pros hen* equivocation in Aristotle and Gersonides, hitherto unexamined in connection with Spinoza, see Heike Sefrin-Weis “Pros Hen and the Foundations of Aristotelian Metaphysics,” in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy, Volume XXIV* (John J. Cleary & Gary M. Gurtler, eds.; Leiden & Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2009); and Gersonides (Levi ben Gershon), *Gersonides’ The Wars of the Lord, treatise three: on God’s knowledge* (Norbert M. Samuelson, tr./commentary; Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1977).

⁴² Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Vol. 1: The Marrano of Reason*, 114. Also: “Equivocation, mask play, and dual language became highly valued and enjoyable artistic devices, even when no longer serving a specific practical need. This helped shape, if not the language of the Marranos, as I am tempted to call it, then at least the special *linguistic sensibilities* and gifts of the Marranos, which Spinoza inherited and brought to a new peak” (ibid., 30, italics in original).

⁴³ Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Vol. 1*, 143.

during Spinoza's time. But Yovel's motivations are most apparent at the end of *Spinoza and Other Heretics* where he celebrates the acceptance of nonreligious Jewishness.

“[T]he same kind of heresies that made Spinoza submit to a ban and be decried a renegade did not prevent Freud from being accepted and recognized as a [Jewish] brother.”⁴⁴ Spinoza's most significant legacy, in Yovel's estimation, is the secularizing effects of his supposedly heretical views.

In another account of Spinoza as an enemy of religion, Jonathan Israel celebrates the Radical Enlightenment growing out of the mid-seventeenth century. Israel traces the partial emancipation of women and other classes as well as the loss of magic and superstition from the educated populace to the early period of this movement (1650-1750). By the time Voltaire arrives on the scene in the mid-eighteenth century, Israel contends, a “decisive shift towards rationalization and secularization at every level” of society had already taken place all across Europe.⁴⁵ Israel bolsters his argument with a vast array of documented influences that went into and came out of the religion of reason promulgated by Spinoza and his friends. Published in 2001, Israel's *Radical Enlightenment* already enjoys a considerable reception in the field of Spinoza scholarship.

Although acknowledging Israel's important contribution, Christopher Norris claims that *Radical Enlightenment* offers only “a fairly routine treatment of Spinoza's philosophical ideas and a relative lack of concern with their specific rather than general

⁴⁴ Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics, Vol. 2: The Adventures of Immanence*, 166.

⁴⁵ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 6.

bearing on that ferment of radical ideas that his book brings so vividly to life.”⁴⁶ Norris places Israel in a tradition of commentary that focuses on Spinoza’s “underground reputation” as an “atheist, materialist, and politically subversive” thinker.⁴⁷ In his textual analyses, Israel does focus narrowly on the secularizing effects found in Spinoza’s reception history, drawing primarily upon the reactions to Spinoza made by others in the early Radical Enlightenment. For example, after a detailed account of the publication of Spinoza’s *Opera Posthuma*, wherein the *Ethics* was promulgated to the scholarly community in Latin and to the larger population in Dutch, Israel treats of significant impressions made by Catholic and Protestant churchmen. This includes, interestingly, what may be reasonably considered the first known book review of the published *Ethics*, made by one Johannes van Neercassel (d. 1686), the Vicar Apostolic of the Dutch Catholic Church. “On perusing the volume, he [Neercassel] was baffled to find, contrary to expectation, that Spinoza does not in fact propound atheism as normally understood ‘but avowedly teaches Deism’.”⁴⁸ Israel also cites a 1705 tract penned by the Dutch Reformed preacher, Johannes Aalstius (1660-1712). In his text, Aalstius claims that the “essential ideas” of Spinoza’s *Ethics* are easy for all to understand, and lists several of those notions he perceives as threatening established religious institutions and practices.⁴⁹ An early reading of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Aalstius’ claims now range from spot on to still

⁴⁶ Norris, “Spinoza and the Conflict of Interpretations,” 28.

⁴⁷ Norris, “Spinoza and the Conflict of Interpretations,” 27. For another reading of Israel’s *Radical Enlightenment*, see Montag, “Interjecting Empty Spaces,” esp. pp. 162-163.

⁴⁸ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 291.

⁴⁹ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 5, 295-296.

hotly contested to no longer generally corroborated in the field. Sticking closely to a narrative of the effects of Radical Enlightenment thought, Israel allows the reactionary commentary of many early modern critics to effectively read secularism back into Spinoza's texts.

An older irenic reading of Spinoza's place in the landscape of early modern theology is found in Rufus M. Jones' *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th & 17th Centuries*. Jones follows a trend he calls "spiritual Religion" in early Reformation history that attempted to combine mysticism, rationalism or humanism, and Reformation faith into a whole. "It was an impressive attempt, whether completely successful or not, to widen the sphere and scope of religion, to carry it into *the whole of life*, to ground it in the very nature of the human spirit, and to demonstrate that to be a man, possessed of full life and complete health, is to be religious, to be spiritual."⁵⁰ Jones contextualizes Spinoza's involvement with the Dutch Collegiants, Mennonites, Cartesians, and the English Quakers as part of a larger Christian trend focusing on inner spiritual experience and love of neighbor.

As a critical reading of the philosophical and theological content of the *Ethics*, Harry A. Wolfson's (1887-1974) *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (1934) remains an important resource in the field. Wolfson's two-volume text traces the origins and developments of Spinoza's ideas from classical Greek, Hebrew, medieval scholastic, and early modern sources. Wolfson shows how Spinoza often took the ideas of his predecessors to their logical conclusions in the more

⁵⁰ Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th & 17th Centuries* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1928), xv (italics in original).

scandalous doctrines of the *Ethics* such as the denial of free will. It is easy to see, from Wolfson's account, how the young Spinoza engaged the authors of his Jewish heritage and wrestled with their ideas about God, truth, mind, body, eternity, necessity, causation, and the other major topics found in the *Ethics*.

For Spinoza, Divine Law was precisely natural law. Wolfson identifies a "principle of the unity of nature" in the *Ethics* "which in its double aspect meant the homogeneity of the material world of which it is constituted and the uniformity of the laws by which it is dominated."⁵¹ In Wolfson's account, Spinoza commits four "daring" philosophical acts warranting the principle of the uniformity of nature: the argument that God has an attribute of extension; a denial of design and purpose in God; an understanding of a "complete inseparability" between body and soul; and a total denial of free will in human decisions. Where predecessors felt troubled by their inability to account for a break in the homogeneity of natural law that would warrant human autonomy, Spinoza found an opportunity for a new way of thinking. Wolfson documents the trends in medieval philosophy that undoubtedly influenced these movements in Spinoza's theology.

Aaron Garrett builds upon the principle of the unity of nature identified by Wolfson. In *Meaning in Spinoza's Method*, Garrett argues that a close reading of the *Ethics* can be therapeutic, bringing about a kind of defragmentation or feeling of wholeness in the reader. Garrett notes that the key to Spinoza's method is the doctrine of

⁵¹ Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (2 vols., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), Vol. 2, 331 ff. For a study of the legal and ontological implications of this theme in relation primarily to Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* and unfinished *Political Treatise*; see Santos Campos, *Spinoza's Revolutions in Natural Law*.

the individual, or “singular thing” (*res singularis*). Garrett states that Definition 7 in Part II of the *Ethics*, Spinoza’s definition of a singular thing, is “likely derived” from Thomas Hobbes’ (1588-1679) *Leviathan*, a book prominent in the mind of Spinoza and his contemporaries.⁵² The illustrated title page of *Leviathan* shows the figure of a sovereign prince wielding military and ecclesiastical power and whose body is composed of his subjects. “Hobbes maintains a difference between artificial and natural beings (for example me and Leviathan) although he views them both as singular things. An important and interesting fact about Spinoza is that he makes no such distinction. For Spinoza, the Leviathan and I are equally singular things if we are both the causes of one effect.”⁵³ Spinoza’s famous Letter 32 describes a worm (“the seventeenth-century term for a simple organism”) moving through a bloodstream, observing its world of chyle, lymph, and other blood particles much as we observe all the things moving about us in our world.⁵⁴ But, like the worm, we are unable to know the bigger whole to which we belong, at least as it is in itself, that is, as an individual thing. In Spinoza’s account, ours is a body belonging to larger and larger systems of bodies and, in turn, composed of smaller and smaller bodies. Much in the *Ethics* relates to this notion of *res singularis* and its implications. Garrett further comments on the analogy, noting that “at the end of Letter XXXII Spinoza remarks: ‘I conceive that with regard to substance each part has a

⁵² Aaron V. Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method* (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36. *Leviathan* was published in 1651.

⁵³ Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 37.

⁵⁴ Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 46. For Letter 32, see Spinoza, *The Letters*, 192; or Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 848.

closer union with its whole.’ Here Spinoza is clearly using whole in a positive sense, as well as part.’⁵⁵ No matter how absolutely infinite God may be, he shares one important characteristic with all of his creatures: that of being an individual thing. “There is something about the relation of substance to mode, as opposed to that of worm to blood, which, although apparently infinitely more inaccessible, abstract, and remote, is actually more proximate and draws out a different sense of part.”⁵⁶ A human or other being’s relationship with God is far more intimate than any other relationship between any other whole and its parts.

This special relationship is an important feature of Spinoza’s theology. Spinoza,⁵⁷ Leibniz,⁵⁸ Boyle,⁵⁹ and Conway⁶⁰ all share a commitment to the view of physical reality as comprised of “‘little bodies’ incorporated into larger wholes,”⁶¹ interacting on scales that decrease microscopically and increase macroscopically in both directions

⁵⁵ Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 48.

⁵⁶ Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 48.

⁵⁷ The *Ethics* and Letter 32.

⁵⁸ The *Monadology* (1714). See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays* (Paul Schrecker, tr./intro.; Anne Martin Schrecker, tr.; Indianapolis & New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1965).

⁵⁹ Corpuscularianism (theory of corpuscles). See Colie, “Spinoza in England.”

⁶⁰ *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1690). See Anne Conway, *The Principles*.

⁶¹ Colie, “Spinoza in England,” 200.

simultaneously to infinity.⁶² According to Justin E. H. Smith, “insofar as early modern natural philosophers sought to mark out the boundaries of mechanical physics, willy-nilly they came right up to its boundary with biology ... [Some of] these philosophers felt compelled ... to explain why the particles and billiard balls themselves have something of the animal in them, and thus must be explained in biological terms.”⁶³ For these seventeenth century philosophers, this framework was never separate from the question, *what* is (are) the most basic animating force(s) of all of these interactive processes comprising the world, and *how* did it (they) operate? Addressing this question constituted the project of physico-theology.⁶⁴ Although the competing vitalist and Spinozist solutions to the problem, along with the question itself, were eventually displaced by the mechanics of Newtonian astrophysics and other philosophical concerns, it was within this context of physico-theology that the late seventeenth and eighteenth century fight for the constitution and direction of Judeo-Christian thought took place.⁶⁵ Buried in the prolix of these philosophers are shades of signification in their arguments and terms and subtle differences of opinion regarding theodicy and similar matters perhaps tedious by today’s standards but signifying an extreme urgency at the time. Meanwhile, nineteenth and twentieth century developments in the hard sciences emerged making Newton’s mechanistic science and any epistemologies based on them, in turn, obsolete. As a

⁶² Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*, 69.

⁶³ Justin E. H. Smith, *Divine Machines: Leibniz and the Sciences of Life* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 2.

⁶⁴ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 456 ff.

⁶⁵ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 353, 542 ff, & 608.

consequence, some of the questions investigated by early modern natural philosophers are being reexamined anew as the reductivistic or positivistic philosophies of science in the English-speaking world have had to loosen their stranglehold on genuine cosmological research and traditional (or so-called alternative) ontologies.⁶⁶

In *The Radical Spinoza*, Paul Wienpahl (1916-1980) takes full account of Spinoza's treatment of the divine-human relationship in the context of mystical union or awakening. Borrowing a phrase from Buddhism for purposes of analysis, Wienpahl explains the relationship in Spinoza's metaphysics between mind and body and between substance and modes as *non-dual*. "All of Spinoza's thinking centers about the notion of unity and his life was one of atonement or at-one-ment."⁶⁷ There are whole traditions of non-dual wisdom in Asia and there are individual mystics in the western monotheistic traditions who have experienced non-duality or union with the divine.⁶⁸ According to Wienpahl, Spinoza dares to provide a rational method for attaining such unitive knowledge. Although Wienpahl classifies Spinoza as a mystic who has discovered "a way of knowing that stems from but is beyond the rational," he emphasizes that ecstasy was not Spinoza's priority, but rather living an ethical life.⁶⁹ And, since Spinoza draws

⁶⁶ An abundance of such studies now abound. For an evenhanded introduction, see Stuart Kauffman, *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

⁶⁷ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 54.

⁶⁸ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 119.

⁶⁹ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 151. Cf Alain Badiou, "What Is a Proof in Spinoza's Ethics?," in *Spinoza Now* (Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed.; Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 39-49) 39-40; and Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 125-132.

his materials from monotheistic theology, largely of the Jewish variety, Wienpahl also submits that Spinoza's God is "the God of his fathers."⁷⁰

If the *Ethics* is a demanding text, Wienpahl's is likewise a demanding commentary. Close study of the *Ethics*, according to Wienpahl, should lead the reader to experience singular things in the most natural and straightforward way possible. Based on this method, Spinoza's new theology is a way of *knowing*, which in Hebrew, English, and other languages, comes from the same root as the word, *loving*.⁷¹

Wienpahl notes that what often hinders unitive knowledge, according to Spinoza, is memory and imagination. This includes not only religious images such as anthropomorphic deities but also imaginary linguistic entities that Wienpahl traces back to Aristotle. "The superstition that often surrounds religion and the fact that this [unitive] way of knowing is affective as well as cognitive have tended to render it obscure as a way of knowing. Sp[inoza]'s rational account of it reduces this obscurity... Feeling oneness is also thinking it."⁷² Intimately bound to Aristotle's notions of substances and the attributes or properties that adhere to them, Wienpahl claims that the grammatical subject-predicate form has come to dominate western language and thought. The result, in this account, has been a kind of hoodwinking of speakers into believing that they are talking about a sticky thing-ness (substances) where in actuality there is only a collection of absolutely unique activities (modes or measures of a single infinite substance,

⁷⁰ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 57.

⁷¹ *Jadah*, in Hebrew. Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 118.

⁷² Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 120, 151. Throughout his text, Wienpahl refers to Spinoza as "Sp" and "BdS."

according to Spinoza). In Wienpahl's study of Spinoza, what prevents unitive knowledge are all the false identities inextricably bound to the linguistic data produced and consumed by the imagination, even (or especially) the religious imagination.⁷³

Here we find Spinoza's point of departure from traditional mind-body duality. "So-called 'mind' and 'body' are one and the same thing looked at in different ways. A human being is not two things, but one with different attributes."⁷⁴ And that one thing that is a finite human being is not self-established or substantial.⁷⁵ Because of language, in Wienpahl's reading of the *Ethics*, we may experience individual things *as* separable mental or physical entities (what Spinoza calls beings of imagination), but unitive knowledge can only begin and be sustained in the immediate nominal experience of individual things themselves.⁷⁶ *Human Freedom*, Chapter 9 of *The Radical Spinoza*, is Wienpahl's reading of Part V of the *Ethics*. Here, Wienpahl shows how Spinoza develops his doctrines of immortality and blessedness from the unitive knowledge of individual things.

If clarity of knowledge or perception "that comes with a true idea of unity, that is, with union" is the subject of the *Ethics*, as Wienpahl contends, then what does this have

⁷³ See esp. Chs. 4 (*The Notion of Unity*) & 6 (*Egolessness*) in Wienpahl's *The Radical Spinoza*.

⁷⁴ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 67.

⁷⁵ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 68 ff.

⁷⁶ On beings of imagination, see Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 177. On further distinctions between universal notions, common notions, beings of reason, and the dictates of reason in Spinoza's epistemology, see Wienpahl's discussion of "the four modes of perceiving or knowing," p. 110 ff.

to do with monotheism?⁷⁷ If traditional Judeo-Christian monotheism is understood, as indeed it was by the vast majority of Spinoza's contemporaries, as having to do primarily with God's revelation to Moses, the death and resurrection of Christ, and the imagery of John's *Revelation*, then the short answer is: nothing. But if monotheism is understood as a doctrine asserting the existence of a single divine being, then Spinoza's *Ethics* cannot be so easily ignored, as the more theologically-minded of Spinoza's contemporaries well knew.

At the beginning and throughout the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza dismisses literal readings of such Biblical imagery as superstition that is dangerously incompatible with the scientific worldview and political pressures prevalent at the time. Yet, as he also argues in the same text, "philosophy rests on the basis of universally valid axioms, and must be constructed by studying Nature alone, whereas faith is based on history and language, and must be derived only from Scripture and revelation."⁷⁸ Since the exclusive object of faith, in his account, is piety and obedience to Divine Law, Spinoza actually insists that a familiarity with the revelatory imagery of the Bible is necessary to the cultivation of personal and national morality.

As Wienpahl summarizes: In the *Theological-Political Treatise* "we see that this [the *Ethics*, Part 5, Proposition 41] was the teaching of the Old Testament, though it came in the form of commands. In the New [Testament] the teaching was not altered. It was

⁷⁷ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 154.

⁷⁸ *TPT*, Ch. 14 (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 519). Cf Elwes' translation in Baruch Spinoza, *Benedict de Spinoza: A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise* (R. H. M. Elwes, tr.; New York: Dover Publications, 1951), 189: "philosophy is based on axioms which must be sought from nature alone: faith is based on history and language, and must be sought for only in Scripture and revelation."

simply given a new basis in Love. . . . All the talk of God [in the *Ethics*], then, is to help us in understanding this other [unitive] way of knowing.”⁷⁹ Spinoza heartily endorses the images and stories of the Bible insofar as they support the kind of justice and charity cried out for by the prophets and the loving way of life championed by Christ.⁸⁰ In (especially) Parts 4 and 5 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza “demonstrates” these same values *more geometrico*.

In an appendix to *The Radical Spinoza*, Wienpahl provides his own close translation of the definitions, axioms, postulates, and propositions of the *Ethics*. His translation and their notes and the linguistic analyses and commentaries in his text emphasize Spinoza’s use of verbs in his philosophical language, a Latin informed by Hebrew. For example, Wienpahl translates Proposition 8 in Part I of the *Ethics* as: “Every substance necessarily is infinitely,” rather than, by way of comparison, Shirley’s more popular translation, “Every substance is necessarily infinite.” To read Spinoza correctly, Wienpahl insists, nouns (especially the philosophical terms) in the *Ethics* must be read as adjectives, and finite individual things (“affections of a substance,” or “modes”) read as modifications of verbs. Wherever “adjectives are used to modify ‘God,’ ‘Being,’ or ‘Nature,’ they should be changed to adverbs.”⁸¹ Most importantly, the word, “is,” rather than functioning as a copula connecting predicates to subjects in the definitions, propositions, and proofs, should in every proposition be read as an active verb in accord

⁷⁹ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 152, 154.

⁸⁰ See, esp., Ch. 14 (*Definitions of Faith*) in the *Theological-Political Treatise*.

⁸¹ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 71.

with Spinoza's special philosophical use of the word, *Being*.⁸² "Linguistically speaking, all [that is experienced in the resultant unitive knowing] becomes adjectival or adverbial."⁸³ Even for Spinoza, for whom language was a main methodological issue, exercising the beings of imagination from any linguistic expression of an individual thing, including God, is difficult in ordinary experience and virtually impossible for the masses because of the very nature of identity embedded in western languages.⁸⁴ "The Aristotelian view" and concomitant grammatical structures posit "that reality is the static and unchanging beneath the changing appearances."⁸⁵ Spinoza's philosophical weapons for overcoming this duality are linguistic, and approaching the *Ethics* thusly armed, Wienpahl advises, will help a reader deconstruct old habits of thinking and come to a clearer and more distinct way of apprehending individual things, including God.

Wienpahl argues that the result of this exercise is properly a religious one, in Spinoza's sense of the term religion, i.e.: living according to an intuitive knowledge of Divine Law or God's Idea. "The dictates of reason are familiar. They are the moral precepts taught in the great religions. In the early Hebrew and the Christian religions their

⁸² Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 9, 67-71.

⁸³ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 70. See also p. 151: "Nouns must be turned into adjectives."

⁸⁴ See Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, esp. 106 ff. Heidi Ravven, "Spinoza's Rupture with Tradition—His Hints of a Jewish Modernity," in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy* (Heidi M. Ravven & Lenn E. Goodman, eds.; Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 187-223), 188 notes that because of this problem, in the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza demonstrates "the rational control and management of the imagination as vital in the institution and maintenance of a free democratic society." Because unitive knowledge is difficult, Spinoza argued that codified approximations of it are necessary to religious instruction and legal frameworks. This is the "political" concern of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, and Santos Campos, *Spinoza's Revolutions in Natural Law*, among many other texts, also investigate this issue in detail.

⁸⁵ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 70.

justification lay in faith and revelation ... In the ETHIC their justification lies in understanding or knowing them intuitively. This ... consists in having clear and distinct, or true ideas of them; *which also means living them*. True ideas are Affections or ways of behaving.”⁸⁶ As Wienpahl makes evident, to the extent that the philosophical terms found in the *Ethics* may entail a theory of monotheism, they are properly understood as involving a constant and revolutionary movement away from the beings of imagination Spinoza attributed to words and other representations and towards a living, unitive knowledge of that which such imaginary identities represent. In Wienpahl's account, this rule applies to the *Ethics* itself, as well as to Scripture.

As Wienpahl demonstrates, Spinoza's scientific intuition (*scientia intuitiva*) is a form of unitive or mystical religious experience. And, as Steven Frankel argues, Spinoza's new theology is based upon the principles of tolerance and democracy drawn out of Jesus' "philosophy" in the *Theological-Political Treatise*.⁸⁷ The notion that Spinoza eviscerates these religious principles and Judeo-Christian values in some esoteric sub-text anywhere in his work is, at best, contentious. Incredibly, however, Harry Wolfson does contend that the "true nature" of Spinoza's work was better understood by others than by Spinoza himself, and that others were able to see through Spinoza's piety to the dead god of his new theology.⁸⁸ In a likewise cynical but somewhat more nuanced passage, Yovel discusses "the special position of the subject which Hegel was right to

⁸⁶ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 135-136 (italics in original).

⁸⁷ Steven Frankel, "The Invention of Liberal Theology: Spinoza's Theological-Political Analysis of Moses and Jesus" (*The Review of Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2001, pp. 287-315).

⁸⁸ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 2, 347-348.

stress against Spinoza,” and asks: “How can the (Spinozistic) principle of immanence be ‘subjectivized’ without losing its strict natural character and without falling back upon teleology and disguised theology?”⁸⁹ On the first point, regarding God’s “natural character,” it is far from certain that the pure affirmation Spinoza posits as substance can be read anywhere as a pure objectivity.⁹⁰ If anything, being indeterminate, it is pre-conscious (pre-subject/pre-object), pre-physical, etc. On the second point, it seems equally uncertain that Spinoza recommends avoiding “teleology” and “theology” at all. Recognizing the nominal, hence immanent, character of *telos* is, arguably, Spinoza’s only recommendation.⁹¹

Against the grain of much traditional Spinoza scholarship, summarized here in the sentiments of Wolfson and Yovel, the assumption that Spinoza’s *Ethics* is an attempt to displace traditional religion altogether is problematized in this study. Despite its ponderous intellectual magnitude and eager reception by despisers of Jewish and Christian religiosity, Spinoza intended the *Ethics* as a bulwark for what he understood as the lifeblood of all true religiosity: seeking unitive knowledge of the divine and living according to simple and sure principles such as friendship.

⁸⁹ Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, Vol. 2, 77.

⁹⁰ *E1d6expl.*: “that however, which is absolutely infinitely, whatever expresses being, & involves no negation pertains to its being” (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 180).

⁹¹ See Propositions 16, 18, 20, 29, & 33 in Part 1 of the *Ethics*.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP IN SPINOZA'S LIFE

He [Jesus] answered, ‘ “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.” That is the greatest commandment. It comes first. The second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” Everything in the Law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments.’

— Matthew 22:37-40 (NEB)⁹²

The master of the Beth Jacob synagogue where Spinoza attended school was Rabbi Saul Morteira.⁹³ Current sources indicate that Morteira was a stern Ashkenazic from Germany, and he was well aware of contemporary intellectual currents such as Christianized kabbalah that were mixing and merging in new and unpredictable ways all over Europe. Morteira was determined to keep such distortions of Orthodox Judaism out of his *halakhic* domain, but he could not prevent his students from imagining what all the commotion was about outside of the domain.

In 1649, at age seventeen, when their older brother, Isaac, died, “Bento” and surviving brother, Gabriel, were called upon to help their father, Michael, run a troubled family mercantile in the Amsterdam Bourse. The bourse was a stock exchange in the original sense: a port, warehouses, and marketplace. The family firm was called “Bento y Gabriel de Spinoza.”⁹⁴ It was here that Spinoza began forging friendships with minorities

⁹² See *TPT* Ch. 12: “That the Divine law has ... come down to us uncorrupted, is an assertion which admits of no dispute. For from the Bible itself we learn, without the smallest difficulty or ambiguity, that its cardinal precept is: To love God above all things, and one’s neighbour as one’s self ... for this is the corner-stone of religion” (Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* [Elwes, tr.], 172; c.f. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 508-509). See also: the “Affirmative Precepts” in Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, 5a ff; Nadler, 107 & 280; and Yovel, Vol. 2, 14 ff.

⁹³ Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza*, 143 ff; Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 25 ff.

⁹⁴ The family name is listed in various legal documents and texts as “Espinoza,” “de Spinoza,” “d’Spinoza,” and “Despinoza.” See, e.g.: Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 40, 87, 399; and Wienpahl, *The Radical*

and other outcasts of the larger community of Amsterdam: Spanish immigrant Sephardic Jews like himself and their ethnic *converso* relations, and members of Christian sects such as the Collegiants, Mennonites, and Quakers.⁹⁵

An importer of “fancy vegetables”, raisins, sugar, and other goods, Spinoza paid attention to all of the details not only of his business transactions, but also of the *quality* of everything with which, and the behavior of everyone with whom, he interacted.⁹⁶ Whatever their beliefs or professed moral bearings, Spinoza noted that people really only act through self-interest, and that the seeking of one’s own advantage is trebled in numbers, as the English and Moorish pirates who brought the Spinoza family business to ruin demonstrated. But far from bewailing selfishness, Spinoza made it the starting point of his ethics, metaphysics, theology, and political science. Thomas Hobbes famously claimed that the natural state of humanity is a war of all against all and that people artificially (i.e., against their naturally bellicose reasoning) band together to construct a stable commonwealth protected by a powerful sovereign to whom they submit much of their natural rights, that is, their right to struggle against one another. In contrast, Spinoza

Spinoza, 36. The firm’s name is translated as “Bento and Gabriel Spinoza” in Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 27.

⁹⁵ A *converso* was a Jew who converted (or whose family converted) to Christianity in order to avoid persecution. St. John of the Cross was a *converso*, and his analyses of Old Testament passages in *Dark Night of the Soul* (i.e. Chapter XII: 3, a commentary on Exodus 3:5) not only attest to his heritage but can be read in political terms, similar to Spinoza, insofar as they instruct readers to negotiate the proper familiarities and distances in the cultivation of friendships; see Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* (E. Allison Peers, tr./ed./intro., from critical edition by P. Silverio de Santa Teresa; Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1959), 78.

⁹⁶ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 36; Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 25-27; Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 65; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 166-167 also lists olive oil, wine, figs, and almonds.

claimed that because human beings find friendships rationally advantageous to their survival and thus suited to their best interest, they organically form social bonds that remain very much within the context of the natural order of things.⁹⁷ For Hobbes, persons move away from nature and diminish their power when entering into a social contract.⁹⁸ For Spinoza, persons move closer to divine perfection and increase their power to the extent that they conform to the sovereignty of the state in which they live.⁹⁹

Ending when Spinoza was sixteen years old, the notoriously cruel Thirty Years War (1618-1648) had just taken eight million lives in Europe, a ratio of deaths to total population exceeding that in the twentieth century caused by both world wars.¹⁰⁰ The Thirty Year War began as a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics and ended as a political conflict between fiefdoms vying for power. Through his observations of wars, persecutions, political events, and other human behavior, Spinoza came to regard jealousy (*zelotypia*) as anathema to friendship, a barrier to the knowledge of God, and the very source of human cruelty. Spinoza observed how, at various individual and institutional levels, jealousy involved self-pity, disenchantment, self-abuse, rigidity from the pulpit and in the classroom, and finally lashing out at others, persecution, and censorship.

⁹⁷ Santos Campos, *Spinoza's Revolutions in Natural Law*, 53 ff.

⁹⁸ See Michael Morgan's Introduction to the *Tractatus Politicus* in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 677.

⁹⁹ In Ch. 2, §§16-17 of the *Tractatus Politicus*, Spinoza defines sovereignty as "the communal right... defined by the power of a people," and identifies three types of sovereignty: democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy; see Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 687.

¹⁰⁰ Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 39.

There was no freedom of the press in early modern Europe, and anyone who wanted to print anything in Amsterdam had to get permission from the consistory of the Reformed Church or else print anonymously underground and hope that they did not get caught. An early anonymous tract that Spinoza had written, *The Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* (c. 1662), had been circulating around Holland and not only influenced the worldview of his generation, but it also played a role in the demise of his friends, the brothers Adriaan and Johannes (Jan) Koerbagh.¹⁰¹ Influenced by Spinoza, Adriaan had illegally published two texts of his own, *A Garden of All Kinds of Loveliness Without Sorrow* (1668) and *A Light Shining in Dark Places* (1669). Not being able to find Adriaan, the Dutch authorities first arrested his brother Jan. With a hefty bounty, Adriaan was eventually located and died in Rasphuis Prison within a year. Jan was released, but died three years later. Not paranoid, but certainly wishing to avoid a similar fate, Spinoza's signet ring motto was *CAUTE* (Caution!), and he worked closely with his translators, Pieter Balling and Jarig Jellesz, and with his publisher, Jan Rieuwertsz, to stop translating or printing a work if he felt it would get him arrested.¹⁰² Spinoza cultivated a close-knit, even political, community of people who shared his aims and ideas, all centered around tolerance, kindness to others, and free speech.

The love felt between these friends is best documented in a letter Spinoza wrote to Pieter Balling on July 20, 1664. Author of *The Light Upon the Candlestick*, Balling was a Mennonite who worked very closely with Spinoza on theological projects. Balling traded

¹⁰¹ Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 98-99.

¹⁰² Michael Morgan's Introduction to the *Theological-Political Treatise* in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 384.

with Spanish companies at the bourse, and may have conversed with Spinoza in Spanish.¹⁰³ Balling's Latin to Dutch translation of Spinoza's *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*¹⁰⁴ was published by Rieuwertsz in 1664. In June of that same year, Balling's son was taken by the plague. In the only surviving letter of their correspondence, Spinoza writes to Balling:

Dear friend,

Your last letter, written, if I am not mistaken, on the 26th of last month, has reached me safely. It caused me no little sorrow and anxiety, though that has much diminished when I reflect on the good sense and strength of character which enable you to scorn the adversities of fortune, or what is thought of as such, at the very time when they are assailing you with their strongest weapons. Still, my anxiety increases day by day, and I therefore beg and beseech you not to regard it as burdensome to write me without stint.

...

[A] father so loves his son that he and his beloved son are, as it were, one and the same. And since ... there must necessarily exist in Thought an idea of the affections of the essence of the son and what follows therefrom, and the father by reason of his union with his son is a part of the said son, the soul of the father must likewise participate in the ideal essence of his son, and in its affections and what follows therefrom...¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Introduction by Barbone, Rice, & Adler in Spinoza, *The Letters*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Including Spinoza's own "Metaphysical Thoughts" (*Cogita Metaphysica*) as an appendix and an introduction by Lodewijk Meyer. The full title of this text, originally published in Latin in 1663, and the only text published under Spinoza's name during his life, is: *René Descartes' Principles of Philosophy, Parts I and II, Demonstrated According to the Geometric Method by Benedict de Spinoza of Amsterdam*. See: Baruch Spinoza & Lodewijk Meyer, *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy and Metaphysical Thoughts, Followed by Lodewijk Meyer, Inaugural Dissertation on Matter (1660)* (Samuel Shirley, tr.; Steven Barbone & Lee Rice, intro./notes; Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998); and Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 108-212. See also Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 205 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Letter 17: Spinoza, *The Letters*, 125-127; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 802-804.

The mixture of tender emotions and philosophical reflection in Spinoza's letter to Baling is a précis of the rigor and sensitivity evident throughout Spinoza's writings.¹⁰⁶

With the assistance of friends Spinoza was able to write tracts and letters to others in Holland and abroad with a certain measure of security and to thus participate in the European intellectual scene. Spinoza also enjoyed a thriving social life at home, and the modest spaces in which he resided frequently took on the atmosphere of an early modern salon. A French doctor and early biographer of Spinoza, Jean-Maximilian Lucas (1646-1697), writes that Spinoza's

conversation had such an air of geniality and his comparisons were so just that he made everybody fall in unconsciously with his views. He was persuasive although he did not affect polished or elegant diction. He made himself so intelligible, and his discourse was so full of good sense, that none listened to him without deriving satisfaction. These fine talents attracted to him all reasonable people, and whatever time it may have been one always found him in an even and agreeable humor ... He had a great and penetrating mind and every complacent disposition. He had a wit so well seasoned that the most gentle and the most severe found very peculiar charms in it.¹⁰⁷

Until Spinoza felt that a given interlocutor was growing hostile or until such a time that he and another were talking past each other (which he referred to as an inability to agree on first principles) Spinoza exercised a kindly patience unknown to many. Spinoza could get over his personal annoyances about a speaker or author and seize upon his interlocutor's own ideas in such a way as to build up his own demonstrations for and

¹⁰⁶ Baling heard groaning from his son that he took as an omen prior to his son's death. Spinoza addresses Baling's concern in detail in the letter; see Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 212-213. Baling also died in the plague.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 196.

about his rational and friendship-based philosophy.¹⁰⁸ As a rule by which he lived, Spinoza was most eager to associate with anyone who could look past their own ideological prejudice and connect with him as a fellow seeker of the highest good.¹⁰⁹

By the time his brother, Gabriel, could no longer live with him because of his excommunication, Spinoza may have already taken up residence in the home of his Latin teacher, Franciscus van den Enden (1602-1674).¹¹⁰ Evidence suggests that Spinoza met Van den Enden through his friends at the bourse, and likely became a tutor himself in the Van den Enden household in the late 1650s. Spinoza “would have been exposed to an impressive range of important texts, ideas, and personalities” in Van den Enden’s school.¹¹¹ Although Spinoza always self-identified as a monotheist, associating with Van den Enden did not help many early commentators receive the “new theology” as anything but atheism in disguise. Expelled from the Jesuit order at age nineteen, Van den Enden boldly campaigned to do away with all monarchy and institutional religion. A radical egalitarian, freethinker, expert linguist, Cartesian scholar, and proponent of educational reform, including the education of females, Van den Enden—still a firebrand at age 72—

¹⁰⁸ This was a skill Spinoza gleaned in part from Gersonides. See Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 92-93; and the correspondence in Letters 67 & 76 in Spinoza, *The Letters*, 303-312 & 340-344; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 921-929 & 947-951.

¹⁰⁹ The “highest good” is the philosophical goal Spinoza promotes at the beginning of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*; see Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 4. See also Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 126.

¹¹⁰ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 106 & 119. Gabriel moved to the West Indies a decade later.

¹¹¹ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 107.

was hanged in France for plotting to replace the monarchy with his version of a democratic republican government.¹¹²

The Van den Enden home bustled with activity. Spinoza and his classmates learned Greek and Latin in part by composing, orating, and even performing classical plays for the Amsterdam public. Spinoza was undoubtedly familiar with Van den Enden's neo-Latin play, *Philedonius* (1657), and may have even acted in it.¹¹³ Filled with religious themes and images, this play makes subtle use of language and is yet to be studied in connection with Spinoza's theology. Nadler further notes that Van den Enden's *Free Political Propositions and Considerations of State* (1665) contains the same Gospel passage (Matthew 22:37-40) Spinoza would make fundamental to his system five years later in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. "Van den Enden insisted that religious belief was a personal matter, not to be dictated by any organization or authority. True piety consisted only in the love of God and of one's neighbors; that—in a phrase remarkably similar to how Spinoza puts it in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*—is 'the whole sum of the Law and the Prophets.'"¹¹⁴ Spinoza's religious views, and Van den Enden's influences on them, are properly understood in the context of the horrors of war, corruption, inequality, and intolerance that both were attempting to address in their treatments of Scriptural meaning.

¹¹² Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 106.

¹¹³ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 109-110. See also <http://users.telenet.be/fvde/index.htm?Works3>

¹¹⁴ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 107.

Spinoza ground lenses for reading glasses, telescopes, and microscopes for himself and his friends, and as a trade. Avid naturalists, he and his friends observed insects, stars, and everything else they could find through these lenses, noting their observations in the language of mathematics, new methods of which had to be invented on occasion in order to accommodate their discoveries. Spinoza found that no matter how far down he looked into small things, and no matter how far he looked into the night sky, whatever he encountered could be described in perfect detail as a commotion of mathematical ratios, pushing and pulling each other around, speeding up, slowing down, gathering together in equipoise, containing each other in different proportions, releasing each other and reforming.¹¹⁵ Spinoza saw all of this activity following a certain equilibrating order which he conceived of variously as God's decree, the Divine Law, the Word of God,¹¹⁶ or "natura naturans."¹¹⁷ As Nadler explains:

There are, Spinoza insists, two sides of Nature. First, there is the active, productive aspect of the universe—God and his attributes, from which all else follows. This is what Spinoza...calls *Natura naturans*, "naturing Nature." Strictly speaking, this is identical with God. The other aspect of the universe is that which is produced and sustained by the active aspect, *Natura naturata*, "natured Nature."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ On the significance of the terms, *πάθος*, *commotiones*, *affectus*, *passio*, and *qualitas* in Descartes and Spinoza, see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 2, 193-195.

¹¹⁶ See *TPT*, Ch. 12 in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 506: "We have next to consider what is to be rightly understood by the phrase 'dabar Jehovah' (the Word of the Lord). 'Dabar' means word, speech, command and thing" ("debar" in Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* [Elwes, tr.], 169).

¹¹⁷ See: *TPT*, Ch. 12, *On the Sacredness of Scripture* in Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (Elwes, tr.), 165-174; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 503-509; and E1p29 & 31 in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 234-235.

¹¹⁸ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 231.

In human interactions, Spinoza realized, the divine equilibrating force took on the form of friendship, and all of the love, tenderness, pain, and pleasure that goes along with it. Even more, as Spinoza would expound in the *Ethics*, friendship was the most effective way to conceive of the equilibrating force not only in the political and social spheres, but also in the *imperium* of nature at large. Friendship is, as the *Ethics* concludes, God's very own understanding of Love.

The new theology Spinoza developed out of his understanding of Cartesian philosophy and his own empirical observations galvanized his Collegiant friends. Spinoza knew Hebrew, Dutch, Latin, Spanish, and the new language of analytical geometry that had just been invented by Descartes. He knew these five languages well enough to think in and between them, and also knew a smattering of Greek, French, Italian, and German. So whenever Spinoza was studying nature or talking with friends, he could speak and think about things in many different ways, and to a greater effect in the formation of friendships, than most people he encountered could even possibly imagine. Spinoza's associates and rivals hungered to learn more about his methods.¹¹⁹

But Spinoza's deepest insights about the divine nature of friendship actually came from his study of the Bible. That the best interests of others are rationally linked with one's own best interests is an understanding Spinoza gleaned from the words of the prophets and Christ. Not understanding this traditional Judeo-Christian element of Spinoza's synthesis, the *Ethics* has proved something of a novelty, but mostly a dry and

¹¹⁹ When Spinoza died, Leibniz "could scarcely conceal his impatience to lay hands on Spinoza's writings." See Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 218. See also Letter 8 in Spinoza, *The Letters*, 87; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 778.

obscure one in the extreme to many readers, and accounts for a long history of misinterpretation.

What Spinoza hoped to accomplish through his work was to remove his passive or self-defeating emotions. Such negative emotions stifled those in the world around him. He observed that the dysfunction aroused by envy and jealousy especially prevented people from working and living together as friends.

According to Spinoza, the binary directional nature of social bonding constitutes the actual truth value of every idea “insofar as it is an idea.”¹²⁰ Our feelings towards other beings may fluctuate, but only in the binary *direction* of liking or disliking them, i.e., desiring to approach or escape their presence. A key insight of the *Ethics* is that this scheme can be seen analogically at work in the ratios of motion and rest comprising every kind of physical and mental process and individual thing.

Spinoza studied Descartes’ writings with Van den Enden and attended lectures on Descartes at the University of Leiden. Spinoza attended Collegiant meetings “perhaps as early as late 1654.”¹²¹ Adam Boreel (1603-1665) was a founder of the Amsterdam Collegium (est. 1645), also known as the Borellists, a branch of Collegiants interested in integrating Cartesian philosophy into their version of spiritual Christianity.¹²² Lifelong

¹²⁰ See E2p49s in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 273-274. Spinoza’s affirmation/negation binary and the principle of plenitude (*ex nihilo nihil fit*) are interrelated features of his positive theology; see E1d6expl. in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 217; Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 180. See also Donagan, *Spinoza*, 77 ff.

¹²¹ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 141. In any case, Spinoza had at least begun cultivating social contact with the Collegiants prior to his excommunication in 1656.

¹²² Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 117 ff. Collegiants were sometimes called Rynsburgers (*ibid.*, 114). Boreel may have met Spinoza through Menasseh ben Israel; see Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 140. For a concise summary of Spinoza’s influence on the Collegiants that downplays his involvement with Christianity, cf Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic*, 68.

friends from the business community that Spinoza made during this time who also attended Boreel's college include Pieter (or Peter) Balling, Jarig Jelles, Jan Rieuwertsz (all Mennonites), and Simon Joosten de Vries.

Mennonites, or Dutch Anabaptists, frequently participated in Collegiant meetings.¹²³ Jones notes that the Mennonite preacher, doctor, and national leader of the Dutch Collegiant movement, Galenus Abrahams (or Abrahamsz, 1622-1706), met with George Fox (1624-1691), the founder of the English Quakers, on three occasions that included a large religious convention in Amsterdam.¹²⁴ “In spirit they were very near together, and with a little more insight on both sides the two movements might have joined into one single stream. For many years afterwards the common people, not given to nice distinctions, called the annual gathering of the Collegiants at Rynsburg ‘the meeting of the Quakers.’”¹²⁵ Also known as the Enthusiasts and the Children of Light, the Quakers call their sect the Religious Society of Friends, a name that happens to accord with Spinoza's project. Much like the Quakers, the Collegiants “encouraged the custom of silent waiting in their gatherings as a preparation for ‘openings.’”¹²⁶ Openings are spontaneous utterances of Scriptural passages or similar testimonials to “the Word of God.” The Collegiants “proved from the fourteenth chapter of I Corinthians that free prophecy is the highest form of ministry ... They felt that prayer accompanied by *tears*

¹²³ The sect gets its name from the influential reformer, Menno Simons (1496-1561).

¹²⁴ The leaders met once in 1677 and twice in 1684.

¹²⁵ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 123.

¹²⁶ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 117.

was true prayer, ‘moved’ from above. They, however, were persons of scholarship and refinement, and not tumultuous or strongly emotional, but, on the contrary, they highly valued dignity and propriety of behavior.”¹²⁷ The Collegiant and Quaker custom of waiting on the Word of God is also emblematic of waiting for the return of a visible apostolic Church.¹²⁸ And Spinoza, having something of a zest for the role of ambassador, was indeed in contact with the Quaker mission, perhaps with the goal of further harmonizing both sects and hastening the realization of their common goals.¹²⁹ Although Spinoza evidently never attended Quaker meetings, he did register an intention to do so with the missionary, William Ames (d. 1662). Ames was probably introduced to Spinoza by Peter Serrarius, also a member of Boreel’s Collegiants.¹³⁰ But Ames was arrested and deported before the Quaker meeting that Spinoza agreed to attend took place.¹³¹

With the Quakers as a whole, Serrarius shared a strong millenarian sensibility. Anticipating an imminent messianic age, mid-seventeenth century millenarian Christians

¹²⁷ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 117 (italics in original).

¹²⁸ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 113.

¹²⁹ In addition to reaching out to the Quaker mission in his early life, Spinoza also met with French officials who had just invaded much of the Netherlands in 1672. It is not clear whether this was an officially sanctioned mission (unlikely), was planned with other republicans in a play for power, or was conducted solely out of Spinoza’s own interests in salvaging the crumbling Dutch state. See Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 314-319.

¹³⁰ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 160.

¹³¹ Baruch Spinoza (attributed), *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication? The Hebrew Translation of Margaret Fell’s A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews, wherever they are scattered up and down the Face of the Earth* (Richard H. Popkin & Michael A. Singer, eds./intro.; Assen/Maastricht, The Netherlands & Wolfeboro, NH: Van Gorcum, 1987), 1-5; Richard H. Popkin, “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam” (*Quaker History*, Vol. 73, No. 1, 1984, pp. 14-28), 14-19.

were convinced that Jews would soon convert to Christianity en masse as a fulfillment of prophecy. The Quakers composed pamphlets encouraging Jews to convert, one entitled *For Manasseh-Ben-Israel; the Call of the Jews out of Babylon, which is good tidings to the meek, liberty to the captives, and of opening of the prison doors*, and another *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham among the Jews, wherever they are scattered up and down upon the Face of the Earth*. Both tracts were written in English in by the Quaker leader, Margaret Fell (who later married George Fox). The first, published in English in 1656, was a letter to Spinoza's teacher, Menasseh ben Israel, when he traveled to England on a failed mission to secure legal passage of Jews back into that country.¹³² Ames translated Fell's letter to Menasseh ben Israel into Dutch, and in Amsterdam secured the services of a "a Jew...that by the Jews is Cast out (as he himself and others sayeth) because he owneth no other teacher but the light." Said cast out Jew translated the document into Hebrew. Fell later directed John Stubbs to translate *A Loving Salutation* (first printed in English in 1657) into Dutch and Hebrew. Stubbs had converted Samuel Fisher (1605-1665), a graduate of Oxford who knew Greek and Hebrew, whose *The Letter of Samuel Fisher to the Jews* is appended to Fell's *A Loving Salutation*. Due probably to his extremely active proselytizing, Fisher did not find time to translate the pamphlets into Hebrew himself. On their way to convert the pope in Italy and the sultan in Turkey, Stubbs and Fisher stopped in Amsterdam to convert the Jewish population. Mission reports from the time indicate that the same Dutch Jew who had translated the letter to Menasseh ben Israel was now translating *A Loving Salutation*.

¹³² Popkin's Introduction in Spinoza, *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?*, 4; Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers," 18.

The last half of the 1650s finds Spinoza caught up in the religious politics of Amsterdam.¹³³ The Quaker mission had run into problems. Taking full advantage of the millenarian fervor prevalent at the time, James Nayler, a Quaker leader, proclaimed himself Jesus Christ. Although he was arrested, Nayler effectively split the Quakers into two camps. Ann Cargill, a zealous Naylerite, went to Holland and began disrupting Quaker meetings. Boreel and Serrarius scorned the Quaker turmoil, and probably influenced Spinoza to distance himself from them by 1658.¹³⁴

By that time, however, a fruitful exchange of ideas and spiritual influence had already begun between Spinoza, Fisher, the Collegiants, and the Quakers. “Spinoza spent three years (1660-1663) in the quiet village of Rynsburg, living in close and intimate contact with his Collegiant friends.”¹³⁵ At some point in 1661/62, Pieter Balling visited Rijnsburg and took some of the text from Spinoza’s unfinished *Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding* back to Amsterdam.

Soon after, *The Light Upon the Candlestick* appeared in Dutch in 1662. Published by Rieuwertsz, this text lists the Quaker, William Ames, as the author. However, whether to throw off the censors or out of “characteristic Collegiant modesty,”¹³⁶ scholars now agree that it was Balling who penned the Dutch version, Boreel who translated it into Latin, and a Quaker, Benjamin Furly, who translated it into English. Rieuwertsz

¹³³ From roughly the time Spinoza was excommunicated until he moved to Rijnsburg in 1660.

¹³⁴ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 162.

¹³⁵ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 128.

¹³⁶ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 123.

published a second Dutch edition posthumously in 1684 under Balling's name.¹³⁷

Drawing material directly from Spinoza's work, perhaps even as a contribution and not merely an influence, Popkin notes that "Balling's pamphlet was considered important enough as a statement of the philosophical foundation of Quakerism" to be included in William Sewel's *History of the Quakers*.¹³⁸

In turn, Collegiant and Quaker influence on Spinoza is evident in his texts. Richard Popkin discusses Spinoza's frequent use of "Quaker terminology about spirit, light and inward knowledge."¹³⁹ Popkin also notes that "a very great number of the same points" in Samuel Fisher's *The Rustick's Alarum to the Rabbies* (1660) are found especially in the seventh through twelfth chapters of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), "often with the same examples about the history of the Scriptural texts, the loss of the originals, the transcription problems, the problem of Hebrew vowels, the

¹³⁷ Introduction by Barbone, Rice, & Adler in Spinoza, *The Letters*, 15.

¹³⁸ Popkin's introduction in Spinoza, *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?*, 12-13; Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers," 27. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 131 states: "This Light—the first Principle of all Religion—is also called in this little Book by many other names. It is 'the living Word,' 'the Truth of God,' 'the Light of Truth'; it is 'Christ'; it is the 'Spirit.'" Examples of the mutual influence between Spinoza, the Quakers, and Collegiants found in Pieter Balling, *The Light Upon the Candlestick* (Millboro: Quaker Universalist Fellowship, 2005 [1662]) include: "*The Light* (then we say) *is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man...that he cannot possibly doubt*" (14); "*natural light*" (15); "*The Light is also the first Principle of Religion*" (16); "there's no effect without a cause" (ibid.); "And this cause must have in it whatsoever the effect produced hath in it" (17); "*The letters, the words are not the Scriptures, but the mind alone is the Scripture, and this meaning can never be truly and justly hit, but by those alone that stand in the same Light, out of which the Scriptures proceeded*" (21).

¹³⁹ Popkin's introduction in Spinoza, *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?*, 13; Popkin, "Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers," 27. As a proof text, Popkin cites the seventh of the Seven Articles of Faith in Chapter 14 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the paragraph following it explaining what God may be (see Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* [Elwes, tr.], 187; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 518). See also Spinoza's lengthy discussion in the *TPT*, Ch. 1, concerning the meaning of spirit (*ruagh* or *ru'ah*) in the Bible (Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* [Elwes, tr.], 19ff; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 399 ff).

human factors involved in present copies, etc.”¹⁴⁰ The general approach to biblical criticism is also the same in both Fisher and Spinoza. Both affirm that Scripture is bound to human history, from the beginning of the Hebrew nation to the present, and that the true “Word of God, on the other hand, is independent of any and all human attempts to write it down.”¹⁴¹ Regarding this matter, in Chapter 12 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza states: “Furthermore, if, according to the saying of the Apostle in 2 Cor. iii. 3, they possessed ‘the Epistle of Christ, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshy tables of the heart,’ let them cease to worship the letter, and be so anxious concerning it.”¹⁴² For Fisher, Spinoza, and the sects in which they moved, the Spirit of God and Christ was alive, realized in neighborly love and not in the veneration of letters. “This Light—the first Principle of all Religion,” understood in its proper historical context, is a religion-affirming *idea vera* from which all other ideas follow for Spinoza as well as his fellow spiritual Christians.¹⁴³

In Voorburg in 1665, Spinoza again became involved in Christian politics, this time erupting over a ministerial vacancy in a local Reformed church. A Collegiant (who sometimes rented a room to Spinoza), Daniel Tydeman, was on the replacement

¹⁴⁰ Popkin’s introduction in Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication?*, 9, 10 (see pp. 9-11); Popkin, “Spinoza’s Relations with the Quakers,” 23-25. The term, “Rabbies,” here refers to all teachers and scholars.

¹⁴¹ Popkin’s introduction in Spinoza, *Spinoza’s Earliest Publication?*, 9.

¹⁴² Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* (Elwes, tr.), 168-169. Spinoza again states this sentiment, which is also of prime importance to Fisher and the Quakers, at the beginning of the *TPT*, Ch. 18.

¹⁴³ Jones, *Spiritual Reformers*, 131.

committee, but other committee members (two local bishops, one retired) passed over Tydeman's choice in favor of a more orthodox candidate, and forwarded their petition to the authorities in Delft. Tydeman, Spinoza, and other liberal Christians constructed an alternative petition that failed, not surprisingly, but not before contributing to Spinoza's reputation as a negative influence in the community at large.¹⁴⁴

In his final residence, a room rented in the Hague from the Van der Spyck family, Spinoza held a "Lutheran preacher, a man named Cordes, in high esteem, going to hear him preach on occasion."¹⁴⁵ Spinoza frequently discussed the content of the local Lutheran sermons with the Van de Spyck family, even, it is reported, up until the evening before his death.¹⁴⁶ He also affirmed to Mrs. Van de Spyck that if she practiced peace and piety she would be saved by her Christian faith, and encouraged the Van de Spyck children to go to church.¹⁴⁷

Yet, despite all of the biographic evidence, many commentators still have a problem believing Spinoza could have been a "practicing" Christian. Whatever "practicing" means, even Nadler finds the notion of Spinoza doing it "very hard to believe."¹⁴⁸ But without understanding that Spinoza's new theology is based upon the

¹⁴⁴ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 245-246.

¹⁴⁵ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 290.

¹⁴⁶ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 349. This was reported by Johannes Colerus (1647-1707), who was Cordes' replacement in the pulpit and, along with J. M. Lucas, an early Spinoza biographer. Although very much opposed to Spinoza's philosophy, Colerus provides an impartial account of Van de Spyck's rather fond recollections of his tenant.

¹⁴⁷ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 290.

¹⁴⁸ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 290.

blend of Cartesian philosophy and Judeo-Christian religiosity particular to the Borellist Collegiants, a full assessment of the *Ethics* is not possible, nor is the principle tying together his entire project apparent.

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE *ETHICS*

Note: In this chapter, sections of Spinoza's *Ethics* are cited in italics and interspersed with my commentary. Parenthetical references Spinoza makes to other sections of the *Ethics* are elided, as are Latin particles Wienpahl inserts for clarification in his translation, found in the appendix to *The Radical Spinoza*. The ampersands Wienpahl uses in conformity with Spinoza's original manuscripts are retained. Wienpahl's translation is somewhat favored for definitions, axioms, and propositions. Shirley's translation (Spinoza, *Complete Works*) is used for proofs, corollaries, and scholia.

In the appendix to Part 4 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza states that he here gathers the seventy-three proofs of Part 4 “under their main headings,” in effect laying out thirty-two rules for “the right way of living” arranged so as to “be seen at one view.”¹⁴⁹ The twelfth rule in the appendix reads: “It is of the first importance to men to establish close relationships and to bind themselves together with such ties as may most effectively unite them into one body, and, as an absolute rule, to act in such a way as serves to strengthen friendship.”¹⁵⁰ Those who comply with this rule, as Spinoza expounds throughout Part 4, live according to the dictates of reason (*ex dictu rationis*). In Part 4, Proposition 37, Scholium 2, Spinoza acknowledges Hobbes when he states that “in order that men may live in harmony and help one another, it is necessary for them to give up their natural right and to create a feeling of mutual confidence that they will refrain from any action that may be harmful to another,” but only under fear of punishment. The development of such “States” and their “Citizens” is a matter of civil law and justice, a theme to which Spinoza provided a detailed account in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. The topic of

¹⁴⁹ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 358 ff

¹⁵⁰ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 359.

the *Ethics*, however, is not such civil law, but rather natural law or “the order of the whole of Nature.” At this more cosmic or metaphysical level, Spinoza finds that: “Nothing can be more in harmony with the nature of anything than other individuals of the same species, and so there is nothing more advantageous to man for preserving his own being and enjoying a rational life than a man who is guided by reason.”¹⁵¹ Since a human being must be at once a part of nature and part of some civic body or another, Spinoza finds that persons with common self-interested natures living together will strengthen each other’s abilities and fulfill each other’s natural self-interests through genuine friendships, while those striving to live in harmony with others unlike themselves will be forced to live in a most unnatural manner and to merely get along as best and as legally as is possible.¹⁵² In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza argues that Divine Law was established in the early Hebrew state by way of imagination and superstition. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza seeks to exposit what he regards as the very same Divine Law from a perspective informed by empirical observation and the “natural light of reason,” that is, according to a worldview informed by the early modern sciences in which he participated.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Ninth rule in the appendix to Part 4, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 359.

¹⁵² Seventh rule in the appendix to Part 4, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 359.

¹⁵³ *TPT*, Ch. 4 (*Of the Divine Law*), in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 429. See also p. 428: “This, then, is the sum of our supreme good and blessedness, to wit, the knowledge and love of God. So the means required to achieve this end of all human action—that is, God insofar as his idea exists in us—may be termed God’s commands, for they are ordained for us by God himself, as it were, insofar as he exists in our minds. So the rules for living a life that has regard to this end can fitly be called the Divine Law. An enquiry as to what these means are, and what are the rules of conduct required for this end, and how there follow therefrom the fundamental principles of the good commonwealth and social organization, belongs to a general treatise on Ethics.”

The “idea of God” (*Dei ideam*) is an important double entendre running throughout the *Ethics*. In the proof to Part 1, Proposition 21, Spinoza demonstrates that the idea of God held in a finite (e.g., human) mind is necessarily dependent upon the attribute of Thought belonging to God himself.¹⁵⁴ In this proof, Spinoza seeks to establish “the idea of God in Thought” as a kind of meeting ground for divine-human and human-human relatedness. This is crucial since, per Part 1 (especially by the Definitions,¹⁵⁵ the scholium to Proposition 11,¹⁵⁶ Proposition 20,¹⁵⁷ Proposition 34,¹⁵⁸ and the first paragraph of the Appendix¹⁵⁹), God, on an infinite scale, is a self-caused substance that “is by nature prior to its affections” just as, on a finite scale, the selfish endeavor to persist in one’s being (*conatus*) for an individual thing (*res singularis*) is the virtue prior to any and all other (i.e. more sociable) virtues it may possess, and also the single virtue it shares with all other individual things, including God himself. Thus, as the metaphysics of the *Ethics* ranges over its five parts, it descends, so to speak, from God (Part 1) to the human mind (Part 2) to the emotions (Part 3) to the dynamic tension between the

¹⁵⁴ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 230-231.

¹⁵⁵ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 217; Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 180-183.

¹⁵⁶ “For since the ability to exist is power, it follows that the greater the degree of reality that belongs to the nature of a thing, the greater amount of energy it has for existence. So an absolutely infinite Entity or God will have from himself absolutely infinite power to exist, and therefore exists absolutely” (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 223).

¹⁵⁷ “God’s existence and his essence are one and the same” (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 230); “God’s existing and his being are one & the same” (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 186).

¹⁵⁸ “God’s power is his very essence” (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 238); “God’s potency is his being itself” (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 190).

¹⁵⁹ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 238.

emotions and the reason (Part 4) where at last the intellect recovers its purity in the idea of God and begins its ascent back to the eternal perspective, to union with the divine and blessedness (Part 5). In Part 5 Spinoza recommends

that in arranging our thoughts and images we should always concentrate on that which is good in every single thing so that in so doing we may be determined to act always from the emotion of pleasure...*The mind can bring it about that all of the affections of the body—i.e. images of things—be related to the idea of God.* There is no affection of the body of which the mind cannot form a clear and distinct conception, and so the mind can bring it about that they should all be related to the idea of God.¹⁶⁰

Thus, the idea of God is the pivot upon which Spinoza's ethics and theory of blessedness revolve. On this head Spinoza concludes:

Hence it follows that God, insofar as he loves himself, loves mankind, and, consequently, that the love of God toward men and the mind's intellectual love toward God are one and the same. From this we clearly understand in what our salvation or blessedness or freedom consists, namely, in the constant and eternal love toward God, that is, in God's love toward men. This love or blessedness is called glory in the Holy Scriptures, and rightly so. For whether this love be related to God or to the mind, it can properly be called spiritual contentment, which in reality cannot be distinguished from glory.¹⁶¹

In Spinoza's account, as more and more people bond together in social harmony, or in the spirit of friendship, the more they will come to resemble the idea or image of God.

Ethics 4, Proposition 20 *The more each endeavors, & is able to seek what is useful to him, that is, to conserve his be-ing, the more he is endowed with virtue; & on the contrary in so far as each neglects what is useful to him, that is, to conserve his be-ing, he is to that extent impotent.*¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ From *E5p10* scholium (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 369) and *E5p14*, incl. proof (ibid., 371). Wienpahl's version of *E5p14* reads "A mind can effect it, that all the Body's affections, or things' images are related to God's idea" (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 248).

¹⁶¹ From *E5p36* corollary and scholium (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 378).

¹⁶² Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 234.

This proposition elaborates a key notion upon which Spinoza's ethical theory is constructed, namely self-interest. God's self-love, the ultimate expression of self-interest, is reflected in different degrees in every individual thing. Human self-interest is, of course, the foundation upon which Hobbes built his philosophy. It is a notion which, as a realist, Spinoza could hardly refute. But Spinoza takes the premise in a much different direction.

Ethics 4, Proposition 26, Proof *The conatus to preserve itself is nothing but the essence of a thing, which, insofar as it exists as such, is conceived as having a force to persist in existing and to do those things that necessarily follow from its given nature. But the essence of reason is nothing other than our mind insofar as it clearly and distinctly understands. Therefore, whatever we endeavor according to reason is nothing else but to understand. Again, since this conatus of the mind, wherewith the mind, insofar as it exercises reason, endeavors to preserve its own being is nothing else but a conatus to understand, this conatus to understand is therefore the primary and only basis of virtue, and it is not for some further purpose that we endeavor to understand things. On the contrary, the mind, insofar as it exercises reason, cannot conceive any good for itself except what is conducive to understanding.*¹⁶³

In Spinoza's account, each and every individual thing (*res singularis*), whether a stone, an animal body, or a nation, seeks to persist in its own being (*conatus*). In Part 4, Proposition 22, Spinoza identifies this seeking to persist in one's own being not only as a virtue but as the prius of all other virtues. In Proposition 24 Spinoza identifies the seeking of one's own advantage "under the guidance" (Shirley) or "according to the conduct" (Wienpahl) of reason (*ex dictu rationis*) as conforming to virtue. In practice and effect,

¹⁶³ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 334.

then, all virtue according to Spinoza “is nothing other than to act, to live, [and] to conserve one’s being (these three signify the same).”¹⁶⁴ In its seeking an understanding of God, the mind considered under the attribute of Thought (established in Part 2, Proposition 1) is found by Spinoza to be an ultimate expression of primal self-advantage-seeking or self-preserving virtue.

Ethics 4, Proposition 28 *A Mind’s highest good is God’s knowledge, & a Mind’s highest virtue is to cognize God.*¹⁶⁵

In the proof to this proposition, Spinoza claims that God, “an absolutely infinite being, and one without whom nothing can be or be conceived,”¹⁶⁶ is the penultimate object of the mind’s understanding. Spinoza claims: that the mind is only active when understanding; that only when understanding can the mind “be said without qualification to act from virtue,”¹⁶⁷ and that God is the most beneficial object that can be understood by a mind. From these premises Spinoza concludes that “the highest virtue of the mind is to understand or to know God.”¹⁶⁸ In Proposition 26 Spinoza defines understanding as “Whatever we endeavor according to reason.”¹⁶⁹ In the proof to Proposition 27, Spinoza

¹⁶⁴ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 234.

¹⁶⁵ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

¹⁶⁶ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 334.

¹⁶⁷ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 334.

¹⁶⁸ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 334.

¹⁶⁹ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 333; Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 234.

further explores understanding as an unfolding of conatal virtue, claiming that “the mind possesses no certainty save insofar as it exercises reason.”¹⁷⁰ Because the mind, in this account, is only active when seeking understanding, it is attracted only to those things that improve its power, because only those things are self-beneficial. In fact, according to Spinoza, the only “certain” criterion by which a mind judges other things to be good or evil is “that which really conduces to understanding, or which can impede our understanding.”¹⁷¹ The importance of the mental virtue of understanding God in Proposition 28 will again come into play in Proposition 35.

Ethics 4, Proposition 29 *Any singular thing whatever, whose nature is entirely diverse from ours, can neither help, nor coerce our potency for acting, & absolutely no thing can be good, or ill for us, unless it has something common with us.*¹⁷²

Here, again, Spinoza discusses singular things, stating that any singular thing whatever (*res quaecunque singularis*) must have something in common with us, for example, scale or, even more importantly, contemporaneous existence, in order for it to be able to interact with or affect us. Singular things from the past such as cultural artefacts or accounts of particular people documented through various media can in different ways affect our lives now, but a particular person or even a small tribe of whom no record exists who lived in the past are “singular things” which can have no positive or

¹⁷⁰ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 334.

¹⁷¹ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

¹⁷² Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

negative effect on our understanding and therefore cannot affect our behavior for better or worse. Those things that do have a commonality with us, and most especially those things that share with us a contemporaneous existence, can affect us and cause us to act. Such singular things necessarily attract or repel us, and thus we act towards them with either a friendly or unfriendly regard.

Since God exists and human beings exist,¹⁷³ Proposition 29 also affirms that God “has something in common with us.” Since God has infinite power,¹⁷⁴ nothing else can “coerce our potency for acting” or be as good for us as God.

Ethics 4, Proposition 31 *In so far as some thing agrees with our nature, to that extent it is necessarily good.*¹⁷⁵

In the corollary to this proposition, Spinoza establishes the idea that things are more advantageous to us the more they agree with our own nature, that is, with our own self-interest. In Propositions 32-34, Spinoza argues that passive (i.e., non-rational or inconstant) emotions cause disagreements between the natures of individuals.

Ethics 4, Proposition 35 *In so far as human beings live according to the conduct of reason, to that extent only do they always necessarily agree (in) nature.*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Proof to *E1p28*: “nothing exists but substance and its modes” (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 233). Also: *E1a1*, *E1p7*, 15 & 20.

¹⁷⁴ Part 1, see esp. Prop. 9 & Appendix.

¹⁷⁵ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

¹⁷⁶ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

For Spinoza, human beings are necessarily in agreement with one another when they live *ex dictu rationis*. Spinoza draws several consequences from this proposition. In Corollary 1, he states: “There is no individual thing in the universe more advantageous to man than a man who lives by the guidance of reason.”¹⁷⁷ In Corollary 2 he adds: “It is when every man is most devoted to seeking his own advantage that men are of most advantage to one another.”¹⁷⁸ And in the scholium he cites a “common saying: ‘Man is a God to man’,” but laments that jealousy and mutual dislike plague the general disposition of most human beings.

On the balance, however, Spinoza finds that the “mutual help” of social life is a good thing for human beings. In the fourteenth rule in the appendix to Part 4, Spinoza reiterates: “So although men for the most part allow lust to govern all their actions, the advantages that follow from living in their society far exceed the disadvantages.

Therefore it is better to endure their injuries with patience, and to apply oneself to such measures as promote harmony and friendship.”¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, in Proposition 35 of Part 4, Spinoza begins developing the idea that a human knowledge or understanding of God is best sought through community with others, and that such community is a part—actually the most important part for human beings—of God’s infinite understanding of

¹⁷⁷ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 337.

¹⁷⁸ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 338.

¹⁷⁹ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 360.

Love, a notion that, as has already been noted, Spinoza more fully expounds towards the end of the Ethics.

Ethics 4, Proposition 36 *The highest good of those, who follow virtue continuously, is common to all, and all can be equally joyful (in) it.*¹⁸⁰

In Proposition 36 Spinoza finds that people who follow their self-interest through to its logical conclusion produce a highest good (*summum bonum*), a knowledge of God through the dictates of reason that embraces all of humanity, a knowledge that theoretically can be enjoyed by all without being diminished.¹⁸¹

Ethics 4, Proposition 37 *A good, for which each who follows virtue continuously has an appetite for himself, he will desire for the rest of human beings, & the more, as he will have greater God's knowledge.*¹⁸²

Taking this next logical step, Spinoza identifies a kind of intellectual *amor insatiabilis*. The more a person knows God, the more that person wants to share that knowledge of God with others. In the first scholium to Proposition 37, Spinoza makes this *summum bonum* explicit:

Whatever we desire to do, whereof we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, that is, insofar as we know God, I refer to Religion [*religio*]...Again, the desire to establish friendship with others, a desire that characterizes the man who lives by the guidance of reason, I call Sense of Honor [*honestas*]; and I use the

¹⁸⁰ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

¹⁸¹ See Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 125.

¹⁸² Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 236.

term “honorable” for what is praised by men who live by the guidance of reason, and “base” for what is opposed to the establishing of friendship.¹⁸³

According to the proof to Part 4, Proposition 73, there are three things that are synonymous: seeking self-advantage under the guidance of reason; living freely; and the desire “to take account of the life and the good of the community.”¹⁸⁴ In the scholium to Part 3, Proposition 59, Spinoza states “By means of *Generosity*...I understand a *Desire by which each solely according to reason’s dictate endeavors to help the remaining human beings, & join them to him in friendship.*”¹⁸⁵ In the proof to Proposition 71, Spinoza states “Only free men are truly advantageous to one another and united by the closest bond of friendship, and are equally motivated by love in endeavoring to benefit one another.”¹⁸⁶ Friendship, in the *Ethics*, is thus the bond between free people, those who have joined reason to the primal urge for self-preservation; it is the very content of the idea of God insofar as God’s idea concerns human beings.

Free people are friends to humanity and have some important distinguishing characteristics, according to Spinoza. These include: cheerfulness;¹⁸⁷ an ability to answer the unfriendliness of others with “Love, or Generosity”¹⁸⁸ to the extent possible, i.e., as

¹⁸³ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 339-340, brackets in original.

¹⁸⁴ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 357.

¹⁸⁵ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 125-126 (italics in original).

¹⁸⁶ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 356

¹⁸⁷ E4p42.

¹⁸⁸ E4p46 (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 240). Shirley translates *generositas* as “nobility” rather than “generosity.”

far as such returns of kindness do not bring harm to oneself or others;¹⁸⁹ a concomitant wisdom in choosing when to stand ground and when to retreat;¹⁹⁰ and the ability to make sacrifices in the present for a greater future outcome.¹⁹¹ In summary, “The strong-minded man hates nobody, is angry with nobody, envies nobody, is indignant with nobody, despises nobody, and is no way prone to pride.”¹⁹² Thus for Spinoza, in the idea of God, all strong and free individual have these characteristics in common the more they come to know God.

Ethics 4, Proposition 40 *Things which conduce to human beings’ common Society, or which effect it, that human beings live in concord, are useful; those on the contrary ill, which induce discord into a Civic Body.*¹⁹³

Why does this short Proposition, with an equally succinct proof, follow a much longer proposition (Proposition 39) about the proportions of “motion-and-rest” of the human body? In the appendix to Part 4, Spinoza states that the proofs in this part of the work are “scattered so as to meet the convenience of logical deduction one from another.”¹⁹⁴ This suggests a logical progression between the propositions in question, in

¹⁸⁹ E3p29s.

¹⁹⁰ E4p69, incl. proof, corollary, & scholium. This proposition is very much in line with Spinoza’s motto: *CAUTE*.

¹⁹¹ E4p66, incl. corollary.

¹⁹² E4p73s, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 357.

¹⁹³ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 238.

¹⁹⁴ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 358.

which notions about the civic body may be inferred from notions about the human body. The analogy is indeed clear, and in the context of the early modern “bodies within bodies” cosmography that Spinoza, Boyle, Conway, and Leibniz helped construct, relevant to Spinoza’s theory of friendship.

In the proof to Part 4, Proposition 39, Spinoza defines the constitution of the form of a human body as consisting “in this, that its parts communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed proportion.”¹⁹⁵ In a healthy human body, this fixed ratio of motion-and-rest (*motûs, & quietis ratio*) conserves itself and (per Proposition 38) allows a person to interact with more and more of her environment, thereby increasing her power and virtue. Anything that disturbs a body’s ratio of motion and rest to the extent of negatively impacting its ability to interact with its environment brings about deleterious health effects and “is, therefore, bad.”¹⁹⁶ The essential ingredient in Propositions 38 and 39, i.e. the interactive property of physical proportions of motion-and-rest, adumbrate what is known in contemporary science as kinesthetic intelligence. Three closely related consequences follow from this premise.

First, Spinoza’s deduction of Proposition 40 (on the civic body) from Proposition 39 (on the human body) becomes more fully apparent.¹⁹⁷ In fact, the maintenance of motion and rest “communicated” by the parts of the human body are, in the analogous civic body, communicated by way of relational patterns, the stability of which Spinoza

¹⁹⁵ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 342.

¹⁹⁶ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 342.

¹⁹⁷ This analogy can also be deduced from the twelfth rule in the appendix to Part 4 (discussed at the top of this chapter).

has identified as friendship. That friendships in civic bodies actually involve verbal, textual, gestural, and other performative communication also helps make clear this analogy between human body and civic body. Where communication in either a human or civic body is most harmonious or friendly, it is most stable, and endures for the longest possible period of time.

Second, stable ratios of motion and rest can be recorded in a thriving human body, i.e. by way of genetic semiosis, or, likewise, in a thriving civic body by way of legal and spiritual traditions.¹⁹⁸ Thus, by Spinoza's account, the interactive ratios of motion and rest of mythical and historic figures, spiritual teachers, and other exemplars can resonate throughout the customs and practices of civic bodies and the human bodies that comprise them.

Thirdly, in the context of the notions of Divine (or natural) Law and the idea of God, there are no indications in Spinoza's writings that nature places a limit upon the endurance of a given ratio of motion-and-rest of an individual thing or upon that thing's physical Extension or ability to interact with its environment. Indeed, quite the contrary, the theories of blessedness¹⁹⁹ and of immortality²⁰⁰ found in the *Ethics* entail both

¹⁹⁸ Although empirical evidence of genetic encoding/decoding was not available until long after Spinoza's time, Joel Friedman argues that, as the essence defining a person's individuality, it is anticipated in Spinoza's theory of fixed ratios of motion and rest. See Joel Friedman, "How the Finite Follows from the Infinite in Spinoza's Metaphysical System" (*Synthese*, Vol. 69, No. 3, 1986, pp. 371-407), 388.

¹⁹⁹ See, esp.: E1p9, "To the extent that each thing has more of reality, or be-ing, plural attributes appertain to it" (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 184); "The more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes it has" (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 221). See also the last eight propositions of Part 5. It should also be noted here that, per Part 2, Definition 6, "perfection" and "reality" signify the same thing for Spinoza.

²⁰⁰ See, e.g., E5p23p (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 374) regarding an eternal "something, which pertains to the essence of [the human] mind" and survives the death of the body, i.e., the idea of God, or the infinite Love wherewith God loves himself and of which our concrete friendships are a part.

interspecies communication and divine-human relatedness. The most recent trend in Spinoza scholarship has picked up on this in the context of “biopolitics”²⁰¹ and, *pace* Mack, a kind of teleological autoimmunity that can (through history and current events) be observed taking place in civic bodies. “From the perspective of self-interest, the defensive reaction of warlike behavior is not an option; rather friendship truly instantiates the dictates of self-preservation (*conatus*).”²⁰² Pain in a body, dissent in a group, wars, natural disasters, and the like all herald recalibrations of equilibria in adjacent individuals and scales. When Dutch and other European powers suddenly found themselves part of a much larger world, Spinoza’s ethical project called for an account of the value of friendship in human affairs. The theories of blessedness and of immortality in Spinoza’s work and the commentaries that draw upon it suggest that, when able to move past envy and jealousy, the human soul is able to enjoy an undying union with the divine by way of seeking communion in friendship with all other be-ings.

Again, towards the end of the *Ethics*, Spinoza reiterates the importance of religion to society and the repayment of human ugliness with kindness:

Ethics, Part 5, Proposition 41 *Even if we did not know that our mind is eternal, we should still regard as being of prime importance piety and religion and, to sum up completely, everything which in Part IV we showed to be related to courage and nobility.*²⁰³

²⁰¹ See Antonio Negri, “Power and Ontology between Spinoza and Heidegger,” in *Spinoza Now* (Dimitris Vardoulakis, ed.; Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 307-319). See also Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power*; and Kristen Renwick Monroe, Adam Martin, and Priyaka Ghosh, “Politics and an Innate Moral Sense: Scientific Evidence for an Old Theory?” (*Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 3, 2009, pp. 614-634), 630 n 7 & 631 n 29.

²⁰² Mack, “Toward an Inclusive Universalism,” 120-121.

²⁰³ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 381.

In this reading of the *Ethics*, contentment is not a Stoic abandonment for Spinoza, but rather a highly active involvement in one's community of friends.²⁰⁴ "For blessedness is nothing other than that self-contentment that arises from the intuitive knowledge of God."²⁰⁵ According to Spinoza, we cannot have any knowledge of particular things ("ideas from which" the human mind "perceives itself, its own body, and external bodies") without first having "*an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God.*"²⁰⁶ In Spinoza's account, the adequate knowledge of all individual things thus begins with God and trickles down, as it were, through cosmic bodies, civic bodies, and families,²⁰⁷ through human bodies and even deeper into their constituent parts and other smaller bodies. Bonds of friendship, of every conceivable degree and combination, hold all of these individuals together.²⁰⁸ Thus bonded throughout all eternity, the bodies of all these individual things comprise the idea of God, the *idea vera* from which Spinoza's ethical system departs and to which it returns.

²⁰⁴ E4p52.

²⁰⁵ Fourth rule in the appendix to Part 4, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 358.

²⁰⁶ E2p47, incl. proof (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 271). See also E2p45-46.

²⁰⁷ On parent-child relations, see the thirteenth rule in the appendix to Part 4 (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 359-360); on marriage see the twentieth rule (*ibid.*, 360).

²⁰⁸ It is only with an understanding of a convivial, even celebratory intersubjectivity that the notoriously difficult E1p16 ("From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinite things in infinite ways," Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 227), Spinoza's denial of free will in human beings and in God, and his doctrine of infinite attributes make proper sense. These doctrines are meant to be understood in the moment, to be intuited directly. To contemplate these doctrines apart from the context of friendship, blessedness, and ethical conduct leads to paradoxes.

CHAPTER 5

SPINOZA'S NEW THEOLOGY: AN INTERPRETATION

N.B. In Prop. 35 [of the *Ethics*, Part III] “Friendship” is the name of an Affection by reason of its capital letter. BdS nowhere discusses friendship as an Affection. In Descartes’ *The Passions of the Soul* it is a passion. Later in the ETHIC “*Amicitia*” is not capitalized. This may be an unfinished aspect of the ETHIC.

—Paul Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*²⁰⁹

As literary devices, the philosophical terms in the *Ethics* such as substance, attributes, modes, etc. have a partly mythological character; a fact about which Spinoza was not unaware. However, if the yarn Spinoza spins with these terms has, at bottom, an irreducible fictional element that puts it in a category with all other forms of storytelling, Spinoza also has the distinction of presenting his story as a scientific theory. In the form of a natural theology, the *Ethics* thus heralds at once the productive nature of science and the demonstrability of enduring religious values.

As a traditional Abrahamic monotheistic theologian, Spinoza affirms the supreme and divine nature of Love.²¹⁰ Love of God and love of fellow human beings are, for him, distinct but not different kinds of love. But as an early modern logician, epistemologist, ontologist, and natural scientist, Spinoza also argues that friendship is the yardstick of social homeostasis, or that friendship is the measure of all individual things. These

²⁰⁹ P. 220. On friendship in the *Ethics*, Wienpahl also notes: “There is an example in the text of the word *amicitia* which only apparently loses its root in ‘love’ (*amo*) when it comes into English as ‘friendship.’ Because of this I was not unhappy when I found that Sp’s *libertas* (freedom) could not go into English as ‘liberty’ because there is no corresponding adjective (*liber* in Latin) in English. The word had to become ‘freedom’ because of ‘free,’ which in turn comes from a root meaning ‘love.’ Still, the root of *libertas* is *lib* which gave BdS *libido* (urge) and *Libido* by which he refers to ‘Desire, & Love in mingling bodies’ (Def. 48, P. III). *Lib* also gives Latin *libet* which means ‘it pleases’” (ibid., 175).

²¹⁰ Spinoza did not invent the idea that the forces of nature are forms of divine love. So-called naturalization of the divine had already been long established by medieval theologians. On such “natural love,” see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 2, 197 & 201.

approaches taken together led Spinoza to conclude that friendship marks the point of contact or the tipping point where eternal indeterminate substance, “the infinite love wherewith God loves himself,” expresses itself *as* the determined affections of temporal relationships. The moral of Spinoza’s story is: *Friendship is the measure of Love*.

In this context, the *self-equilibrating individual* emerges as the hero of the story. For Spinoza, the various roles of the self-equilibrating individual *as if* constituting Nature, being understood as God, substance, etc. depend entirely upon its functioning as a recursively self-referential definition. Following the Aristotelian tradition, Spinoza treats the definition of a thing as the rational, intellectual, or otherwise explicative equivalent of its essence. Following al-Ghazali, Abraham ibn Daud, and Maimonides, God’s essence is inconceivable and unidirectionally causal. Hence, no *true* definition of God is possible.²¹¹ But the definition of God in the *Ethics*, being an idea of or placeholder for God’s true definition or essence—that is, an idea of an Idea—is still clearer and more adequate an idea than any other, in Spinoza’s account, and precisely the one upon which all other of his definitions, proofs, and other ontological assertions depend.²¹² “To argue that infinite things have the most perfect definitions is extremely radical, it implies that

²¹¹ Spinoza takes negative theology as read, and so it is assumed in *E1a2*, the presupposition of God’s supremacy, “That, which cannot be conceived by means of another, is bound to be conceived by means of itself” (Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 182). See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 1, 76. On a true definition, according to Spinoza, see Letter 9 (Spinoza, *The Letters*, 91-94; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 781-783).

²¹² This theme is treated throughout the *Ethics*, including many of the propositions of Part 2. *E1p1*, the very first proposition of the *Ethics*, reads, “Substance is by nature prior to its affections” (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 218). See also: *E2d4* & expl. (ibid., 244); and Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 1, 76-78, 308 n. 2 & Vol. 2, 37-40.

the essential definitions of infinite beings are fully rationally accessible.”²¹³ Yet this is precisely what Spinoza claimed.

Spinoza dared take such a bold step because he intended his explication of God in the *Ethics* as a rational counterpart for a true knowledge of God. The rational account rests upon Spinoza’s second kind of knowledge, reason; “Logical proofs are the eyes of the mind.”²¹⁴ But a true knowledge of God depends on Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge, scientific intuition, which entails a direct encounter with and understanding of God’s perfection. It does not matter that we do not know God’s essence as only God himself can know it, according to Spinoza, because we know what his essence is to every being other than himself, i.e., to every creature. The equilibrating individual, a friend to humanity, as a circumscribed topic comes alive as the hero in Spinoza’s story, the essential first principle from which all else follows.²¹⁵ The *Ethics* is Spinoza’s instruction manual for the intuition of this first principle, and its five parts he demonstrates that the knowledge of friendship is the knowledge of God.

According to Spinoza, God attends to the causal order and connection of all that ever has and ever will transpire as one single and unchanging equilibrium. In the

²¹³ Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method*, 157. See pp. 144-180 for a detailed analysis of Spinoza’s theory of definition.

²¹⁴ E5p23s, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 374.

²¹⁵ This methodology has been described variously in the literature. Goldstein calls it the “Presumption of Reason” (see Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza*, esp. pp. 48-49, 57-60, & 64). See also: Badiou, “What is a Proof in Spinoza’s *Ethics*?” 40; and Norris, *Spinoza and the Origin of Modern Critical Theory*, 74 & passim. Knowledge gained from devoted study of the *Ethics* is not mere facticity; throughout *Meaning in Spinoza’s Method* Garrett describes it as “Spinozistic therapy,” and in *The Radical Spinoza* (pp. 68-71 & passim) Wienpahl agrees that it brings about a positive change in the reader’s conventional perspective. Goldstein and other commentators concur.

correspondence with Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza gives us a window into this notion. Although Spinoza and Oldenburg were friends, their countries were embroiled in constant maritime hostilities and violent colonial competition, complex politics, and mass hysteria. The chaos threatened the lives and freedom of both of these philosophers to such a degree that, during one particularly uncertain period, Oldenburg spent two months in the Tower of London. Amidst these strained English-Dutch relations of the mid-1660s, Spinoza wrote to Oldenburg:

For I do not think it right to laugh at nature, and far less to grieve over it, reflecting that men, like all else, are only a part of nature, and that I do not know how each part of nature harmonises with the whole, and how it coheres with other parts. And I realize that it is merely through such lack of understanding that certain features of nature—which I thus perceived only partly and in a fragmentary way, and which are not in keeping with our philosophical attitude of mind—once seemed to me vain, disordered, and absurd. But now I let everyone go his own way. Those who wish can by all means die for their own good, as long as I am allowed to live for truth.²¹⁶

Seeing the nondual character of all things in nature as at once semi-equilibrated singular things and bodies-within-bodies, Spinoza believed that whatever appeared *to us* locally, in our room or on our planet, *as* “vain, disordered, and absurd” was, regardless of such appearance, necessary to the functioning of other scales of organic activity beyond our purview.

Aware of the equilibria in (and between) organisms, Spinoza noted their purest form in the bodies of children at play, and their nature in general which he described as cheerfulness (*hilaritas*).²¹⁷ “Cheerfulness is pleasure which, insofar as it is related to the

²¹⁶ Letter 30, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 844.

²¹⁷ See the scholium to *E3p32* in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 295. Schleiermacher draws a Spinozistic theory of sociability out of this notion of play. Schleiermacher’s resulting text (published in 1799) represents the culmination of his period prior to *On Religion*. See Peter Foley, *Friedrich*

body, consists in this, that all parts of the body are affected equally; that is, the body's power of activity is increased or assisted in such a way that all parts maintain the same proportion of motion-and-rest toward one another."²¹⁸ An individual (*res singularis*) for Spinoza was any persisting ratio of motion-and-rest, in which the parts of that individual communicated with one another in order to maintain equilibrium, or a continuing cheerful existence.²¹⁹ Not only a person but also a loving couple or group of good friends thus constitute an equilibrated individual for Spinoza. According to his definition, other examples of cheerful individuals that would have been available to Spinoza's personal experience include: the tireless activity of a bee hive, the *shalom bayis* of a Jewish home, the shared feeling of the Holy Spirit in a Christian congregation, and the peace and prosperity of a strong sovereign state.

Since the Cartesian plenum, as understood by Spinoza and his colleagues, is the system of nature as a whole in a constant-state equilibrium, an ultimate cheerfulness must logically follow from it, of which the cheerfulness of the equilibria of all other

Schleirmacher's Essay on a Theory of Sociable Behavior (1799): A Contextual Interpretation (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006). Cf a similar aesthetic theory drawn from Spinoza's notion of play in Lee C. Rice, "Spinoza's Relativistic Aesthetics" (*Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 58ste Jaarg., Nr. 3, 1996, pp. 476-489).

²¹⁸ E4p42p, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 343.

²¹⁹ From E2d7: "If several individual things concur in one act in such a way as to be all together the simultaneous cause of one effect, I consider them all, in that respect, as one individual" (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 244). See also E2p13 (known as the "Physical Treatise," *ibid.*, 251-255); Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 52-53 & 192; and David R. Lachterman, "Laying Down the Law: The Theological-Political Matrix of Spinoza's Physics," in *Leo Strauss's Thought: Toward a Critical Engagement* (Alan Udoff, ed.; Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991, pp. 123-153), 128-130 & *passim*.

individuals are a measure.²²⁰ How the translation of equilibria from the infinite individual to finite individuals takes place is found in Part I, Definition 5 (the definition of *modes*): “By means of *mode* I understand affections of a substance, or that, which is in another, by means of which also it is conceived.”²²¹ From the assumed eternal perspective, this “in another” where affections are conceived is God’s Idea (of himself), wherein the human-human relationships occur. A human idea of this Idea is a point of contact with the divine; it constitutes the divine-human relationship (from the side of a human), and, for Spinoza, discharges the need for faith in an unknowable God.²²² According to Spinoza the affections of substance occur at once: (a) in the human mind, embedded as it is in the infinite regress of transitive causes (all other individuals); and (b) in the mind of God whose affections immediately and immanently translate an eternal steady-state Affection (some kind of infinite and indeterminate cheerfulness²²³) into a full range of possible

²²⁰ See Spinoza on “Descartes’s account of equilibrium of change in a field” in *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, Propositions 32-37 (Spinoza, *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, 81-86; Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 170-173) and Lodewijk Meyer’s *Inaugural Philosophical Dissertation on Matter, and Its Affections: Motion and Rest*, esp. pp. 144 (Introduction by Barbone & Rice) & 149-150 (§§ 9-10) in Spinoza, *The Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*. See also: the scholium to the 7th lemma of E2p13 (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 254-255); the preface to E3 (ibid., 277-278); and the Cogita Metaphysica, Chs. 11 (ibid., 208) & 7 (ibid., 200), where Spinoza states: “Our division [of God’s occasionalist concurrence], however, is as follows. There are some of God’s attributes that explicate his essence in action, whereas others, unconcerned with action, set forth the manner of his existing. Of the latter kind are unity, eternity, necessity, etc.: of the former kind are understanding, will, life, omnipotence, etc. This division is quite clear and straightforward and includes all God’s attributes ... Finally, if we look to the whole of Nature by analogy, we can consider it a single entity, and consequently the idea of God, or his decree concerning *Natura naturata*, will be only one.” On Joy (*Laetitia*) and cheerfulness or Hilarity (*Hilaritas*), see Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 238 N.B.

²²¹ Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 180. On the subtle shift in Spinoza from God as Exemplar in the *TPT* to substance and its affections in the *Ethics*, see also pp. 135-136.

²²² Wienpahl, *The Radical Spinoza*, 153-154.

²²³ On God’s infinite joy or pleasure, see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, Vol. 2, 283 ff.

emotions, the uniqueness of each one of which is crafted, so to speak, to match whatever is the case in an embodied experience. The self-loving bond between God and his Idea and the bond between every creature with every other creature is thus the same bond seen from two different perspectives.

The scholium to Proposition 29 of Part III defines the quality of a kind character, according to Spinoza: “This conatus to do, and also to avoid doing, something simply in order to please men...is called Kindliness [*humanitas*].”²²⁴ It is through kindness that the love of neighbor as self and the union with God in his Image occur.²²⁵ For Spinoza, to mentally experience our kindness towards others exclusively *as* God’s grace is the only self-caused activity available to human beings and constitutes what he calls “spiritual contentment” as well as “glory” in the scriptural sense.²²⁶ This only free mental decision on the part of humans has the power to “keep our lusts in check,”²²⁷ meaning that we do not experience kindness as coming from our big generous hearts, making us worthy of some reward, but instead as coming from God’s Idea alone, where all interactive causation and God’s existence-causation meet. In God’s Idea, reasoned Spinoza, kindness spontaneously arises in our relations with others and not, as we imagine, from our own volition.

²²⁴ Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 293.

²²⁵ For a commentary on *generositas* and the divine nature of intuitional love in Spinoza, see Lee C. Rice, “Love of God in Spinoza,” in *Jewish Themes in Spinoza’s Philosophy* (Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman, eds.; Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002, pp. 93-106), 99-103.

²²⁶ E5p36s, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 378-379.

²²⁷ E5p42, in Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 382.

Seeking understanding, this affection can become stronger, and an individual can grow closer in friendship to God through her relationships with other creatures.²²⁸ But the feeling of affirmation or negation itself continues to spontaneously arise in given relationships of its own accord, as the affections of a sole substance. And when examined, according to Spinoza, attraction and repulsion, the affirmation and negation related to the physicality of emotions, are found to be spontaneous and necessary rather than a product of free will.²²⁹ Whether in God or in human beings, free will is redundant to Spinoza, and he dismisses it from his philosophy.²³⁰ In this account, which historically has been counterintuitive to many, our friendships and even our own *humanitas* are gifts of God's grace to be received in piety, with joy and with thanks. Doing so, Spinoza assures, leads to a happy and ethical life.

²²⁸ This is the meaning of *E1p9*: "The more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes it has" (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 221). See also Goldstein, *Betraying Spinoza*, 181.

²²⁹ See appendix to *E1*: God "is one alone ... is and acts solely from the necessity of his own nature ... [and] is the free cause of all things" (Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 238).

²³⁰ *E1p21* to the end of Part 1.

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