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Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing

MOGENS LÆRKE

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The book is dedicated to my beloved Anton and Thibaud.

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A Note on Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations

As it remains customary in the English-language literature, I reference the original Latin or Dutch texts in the four-volume edition by Carl Gebhardt of 1925. Gebhardt's edition is not without its flaws—indeed, far from it—but it is (or was, at the time of writing this book) still the most currently used one, and many other editions and recent translations are keyed to its pagination. When available, I have, however, constantly consulted the new bilingual Latin-French editions from the Presses universitaires de France for verification purposes (the edition of the TTP by Fokke Akkerman, Jacqueline Lagrée, and Pierre-François Moreau; of the TP by Omero Proietti and Charles Ramond; of the TdIE by Filippo Mignini; of the KV by Michelle Beyssade Joël Ganault; of the Ethics by Fokke Akkerman, Piet Steenbakkers, and Pierre-François Moreau). As for the English rendering of Spinoza's texts, I follow Edwin Curley's generally outstanding translations, although I do frequently diverge from them. When I do, it will be indicated in the notes, often accompanied by an explanation, except when it comes to some general points that I discuss below. For all other texts, both sources and commentaries, and when nothing else is indicated, translations are mine.

Curley reproduces the generous capitalization of words used in Gebhardt's edition which reflects that of the first printed editions of Spinoza's works. However, available autographs of other texts by Spinoza, or manuscript copies made by people close to him,¹ use very little capitalization and, as Curley himself stresses, there is no good reason to think that the capitalizations in print reflect anything but the typographical practices at the original printing house of Jan Rieuwertsz.² I have therefore not followed Curley on this point but capitalized according to contemporary norms. Curley also—now moving to the other editorial extreme—adds features to the formatting of the political texts that are absent from the first printings, such as indentations, variations in font size, et al. I have not followed him on this point either. I find the additional formatting—especially indentations and variations in font size that are visually quite striking—disturbing and potentially misleading. I should insist on the word “potentially” in this context. I have no specific examples that it is misleading or how. But, as Spinoza also knew, it is difficult to defend a text against its readers who more often than not will “only interpret it perversely.”³ Who knows what people might infer from, say, a reduced font size? As in the case with capitalizations, I find it preferable to forestall the problem.

I also deviate from Curley's translations when he relies on typographical peculiarities for conveying terminological distinctions. For example, he adds a prime symbol in front of the term “power” (‘power’) whenever it translates the Latin *potestas*, as opposed to “power” without the prime symbol, which translates *potentia* and occasionally *vis*.⁴ Similarly, he gives both *cognitio* and *scientia* as “knowledge,” but adds a prime symbol for the latter term (“knowledge”). As another instance of such practices, in order to overcome the fact that the common translation of the two Latin terms *sive* and *vel* by the single term “or” obscures the fact that the first (most often) conveys an equivalence and the second an alternative, Curley adds italics to the term (or) whenever it translates *seu* or *sive*.⁵ I find these solutions a bit awkward and have everywhere suppressed the prime symbols/italics. In many cases, context makes Spinoza's meaning clear enough. When I felt that it was not the case and that it made a difference, I have provided the Latin term in brackets.

I should in that context make an additional note regarding *potentia/potestas*. From Antonio Negri's 1981 *L'Anomalia Selvaggia* onwards, a substantial Spinoza literature considers this distinction essential

1 I add this clause with the so-called Vatican Manuscript in mind, a manuscript copy of the Ethics made by Pieter van Gent for Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus in 1675, presumably from Spinoza's own manuscript. For an overview, see Moreau and Steenbakkers, “Introduction,” pp. 19–24.

2 See Curley, General Preface, C I.xiv.

3 TTP Preface, G III.14 | C II.75; Spinoza to Ostens, [February 1671], Letter 43, G IV.225 | C II.389.

4 See Curley, Glossary, C II.649–50.

5 See Curley, Glossary, C II.610–12.

for making sense of the political theories in the TTP and the TP, and of the relation between them.¹ In the English-speaking world, the reading has been adopted by Lee Rice and Stephen Barbone, Michael Hardt, and many others.² The distinction is sometimes in the commentaries rendered in English by giving *potentia* as “power” and *potestas* as “authority.” *Potentia*, the argument goes, signifies the power essential to individuals, their *conatus*, while *potestas* corresponds to a more legal authority that individuals can transfer to a sovereign power and that a sovereign power can yield over individuals. Despite all the commentary, I am unconvinced that much hinges on the distinction and I have not systematically indicated when Spinoza uses which term. I have several reasons for taking that position. First, while something like this distinction is perhaps operative in some passages,³ Spinoza does not implement it systematically or thematize it explicitly.⁴ In fact, it is not infrequent that he employs the two terms interchangeably.⁵ Second, it is not clear to me that the explanatory work done by this rationally reconstructed distinction outweighs the interpretive problems it creates.⁶ Third, as I will show in Chapter 9, the problems relating to Spinoza’s social contract theory that the analytic distinction is principally designed to overcome can be better dealt with by other means. Fourth, and finally, with regard to the English rendering of *potestas*, as I shall argue in Chapter 5, Spinoza has a rich theory of *authoritas*, and I believe the English term “authority” is best reserved for that context. Indeed, in many ways, I think we would do better to read Spinoza’s theory of political power in the context of more classic (Ciceronian and Gelasian) distinctions between *authoritas* and *potestas/potentia*.

Curley has put every effort into finding ways of consistently translating single terms, but it is obviously not possible to always render a single Latin term by a single English translation, or vice versa. I have often been struck by the stylistic and philosophical superiority of his solutions when confronted with such choices. In some cases, however, they obscure what I think are central conceptual connections. It is, for example, the case when he occasionally translates *dogma* by “maxim” rather than, as elsewhere, “doctrine,” or sometimes translates the verb *amplecti* by “to accept” rather than, as he most often does, “to embrace.” At other times, an identical translation of several terms can invite confusion, for example when the term “authority” translates *authoritas* but also sometimes the intractable term *imperium*. Finally, in some cases, Curley’s translations suggest conceptual distinctions that may or may not be implied but that in any case are not discernible via Spinoza’s own terminology, as for example when, in the TP, he translates the single Latin term *templum* alternately by “house of worship” or “temple,” or, in the TTP, he gives the single Latin term *plebs* sometimes by “ordinary people” and sometimes by “mob.” Often I have not found better alternatives and let Curley’s choices stand, but I have found it worthwhile to point them out. Generally, addressing such issues of translation has been important for this study where the consideration of lexical fields, their internal

1 Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, pp. xxii, 10, 62–63, 69, 72, 112, 140, 190–2, 202, 206, 209, 214–15, 226, 229; Negri, *Spinoza for Our Time*, pp. 69–82.

2 Barbone, “Power in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*”; Rice and Barbone, “Introduction,” p. 17; Hardt, “Translator’s Foreword,” pp. xi–xii.

3 A suggestive example highlighted by Negri (see *The Savage Anomaly*, pp. 62–63) can be found at E2p3s, G II.87|C II.449: “By God’s power [*Dei potentiam*] ordinary people understand God’s free will and his right over all things which are, things which on that account are commonly considered to be contingent. For they say that God has the power of destroying all things [*potestatem omnia destruendi*] and reducing them to nothing. Further, they very often compare God’s power with the power of kings [*Dei potentiam ... cum potentia regum ... comparant*]. But we have refuted this.” If Spinoza was systematic about it, however, we would expect *potestas regum* rather than *potentia regum* in the last phrase.

4 In order to argue that Spinoza posits the distinction systematically, Negri mostly relies on E1p34 (“God’s power [*Dei potentia*] is his essence itself”) and E1p35 (“Whatever we conceive to be in God’s power [*Dei potestate*], necessarily exists”). However, his argument why we should extract a distinction from the juxtaposition of these two propositions (rather than the contrary) relies on a reading of Spinoza by Martial Gueroult which is decidedly less firm in making it. According to Gueroult, Spinoza “introduces the new concept of *potestas*, and a distinction between this concept and *potentia*. But he immediately proceeds to reduce this distinction and this new concept to nothing” (see Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, pp. 191–2; Gueroult, *Spinoza I: Dieu*, pp. 387–9, here p. 387). In any case, quite a lot of extrapolation and mediation via other commentary is required to argue that Spinoza explicitly thematizes the distinction. I do, however, recognize that something like the distinction proposed by Negri is perhaps operative in the way that Spinoza relates the “sovereign power” (*summa potestas*) to the “power of the multitude” (*potentia multitudinis*) in the TP. On this point, see the conclusion of Chapter 5.

5 For a decisive example, see the preface to the TTP, where Spinoza explains how everyone “transfers his power [*potestatem*] to defend himself” (G III.11|C II.74). However, in TTP XVI, we learn that they “transfe[r] to the sovereign power all their power [*potentiam*] to defend themselves” (G III.193|C II.287). For the Ethics, see for example E5p29d and E5p42d. See also Curley’s glossary at C I.561.

6 See Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Philosophy*, sect. 3.6.

constitution within Spinoza's texts, and their external connections to other, contemporary texts play a decisive role. It should, however, be stressed that my own choices of translation—whether they diverge from Curley or not—are often motivated by this text- and term-oriented methodology that other readers of Spinoza might not find palatable. It also explains why I so frequently indicate in brackets the original terms employed by both Spinoza and other philosophers.

I also need to take note of a few additional terms that pose problems and that call for some comments, regardless of whether I have deviated from Curley's choice of translation or not.

Curley translates Spinoza's key virtue *charitas* as "loving-kindness." I have everywhere changed it to "charity," which is also the choice of the first English translation of the TTP of 1689, usually attributed to the English Deist, Charles Blount.¹ Curley takes his cue from the fact that, in a particular passage in TTP XIII, *charitas* translates the Hebrew term *chesed* which, following a practice adopted by certain English Bible translators, should be given as "loving-kindness."² But I do not see Spinoza as addressing himself to Hebraists or Bible translators but mostly to a free-thinking non-academic audience, principally of Christian extraction. And I think, in particular for understanding the so-called doctrines of universal faith, one of which stipulates that "the worship of God and obedience to him consist only in justice and charity, or in love toward one's neighbor [*Justitia, & Charitate, sive amore erga Proximum*],"³ that it is important to maintain everywhere the contextual connection to the Paulinian understanding of brotherly love that doubtless would be the principal connotation of the term *charitas* for Spinoza's intended reader. Curley moreover prefers "loving-kindness" in order to avoid the association to charity work in the sense of providing help to the needy.⁴ And certainly, Spinoza was no fan of giving alms but felt, rather perceptively, that "the case of the poor falls upon society as a whole, and concerns only the general advantage," while "the thankfulness which men ... display toward one another is for the most part a business transaction or [seu] an entrapment, rather than thankfulness."⁵ Still, as Beth Lord has shown in some excellent work on Spinoza and economic inequality, the association might not be quite as inappropriate as Curley thinks.⁶

By contrast, I have followed Curley in translating *dogma* by "doctrine," as opposed to the more theologically connoted "dogma." While I am unmoved by Curley's explicit reason for shunning "dogma"—that it "now frequently has the connotation, not present in the Latin, of 'an imperious or arrogant declaration of opinion' (OED), of uncritical and unjustified acceptance"—it quickly became apparent to me while writing that using "dogma" became awkward and artificial in many contexts where an English equivalent of *dogma* was necessarily called for. I am, however, not entirely confident that I have made the right choice, so I will register some of my concerns here. First, and most importantly, it makes it somewhat difficult to navigate the lexical field between the terms *dogma* (given by Curley as "doctrine," occasionally "maxim"), *doctrina* ("teaching," but sometimes "doctrine"), *documentum* ("teaching" or "lesson"), and *documenta docere* ("to teach lessons").⁷ Next, in the context of Spinoza's discussion of the doctrines of universal faith (*fidei universalis dogmata*) in TTP XIV, translating *dogma* by "doctrine" tends to render less obvious some relations to the theological context of Spinoza's discussion. For example, in the translations I have used of Lodewijk Meyer's *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (by Shirley) or Grotius's *Meletius* (by Posthumus Meyjes), *dogma* is everywhere given as "dogma" in comparable discussions of the foundations of the Christian faith. Spinoza does, however, also occasionally use the expression *dogmata politica* that we must translate

1 See Steenbakkens, "The Text of Spinoza's Tractatus," pp. 37–8.

2 TTP XIII, G III.171|C II.261; see Curley's Glossary, C II.641. Spinoza is discussing Jeremiah 9:24 (mistakenly given as 9:23) which he renders as "ego Jehova facio charitatem, iudicium, & justitiam in terra." Curley does not name the English translators he has in mind, but the practice can be observed, for example, in KJV: "I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth." Note that Spinoza's rendering differs from the Latin translations he used. Junius and Tremellius have "me esse Jehovam, exercentem benignitatem, ius, & justitia in terra"; the Vulgate has "ego sum Dominus qui facio misericordiam, et iudicium, et justitiam in terra."

3 TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.269.

4 See Curley, Glossary, C II.641.

5 E4app17, G II.271|C I.591; see also E4p71, G II.264–5|C I.586.

6 Lord, "The Free Man," pp. 300–1.

7 See Curley, Glossary, C.II.624, 661.

as “political doctrines,” and translating differently in the theological and in the political context would seriously obscure a crucially important symmetry between the argumentative structures on the theological and political sides of Spinoza’s overall development.

Curley gives the expression *summa potestas* as “supreme ‘power.’” I have not changed this choice of translation when quoting Spinoza’s text, apart from removing the prime symbol, but it is important to realize—as Curley also makes clear in his glossary¹—that the appropriate translation depends on what kind of context one wants to place Spinoza in, whether one wants to coordinate with seventeenth-century translations or contemporary translations and critical editions, and so on. For example, the 1689 translation of the TTP gives *summa potestas* as “sovereign power”; Hobbes uses *summa potestas* to translate the English “sovereign” in the 1665 Latin *Leviathan*; the current critical edition of Grotius’s *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra* gives *summa potestas* as “supreme power”; etc. In my own commentary, I often render the expression by the hybrid “sovereign power” or “sovereign powers,” and occasionally by “sovereign” when a single person, i.e., a monarch, is clearly under discussion.

Regarding the translation of the term *respublica*, I follow Curley and translate it by “republic.” In some contexts, in particular in relation to Spinoza’s treatment of the *respublica Hebraeorum*, this can sometimes come through as misleading: Moses’s putatively theocratic regime, lasting even beyond his grave, was hardly “republican” in the sense we would use that term today. Still, as is often pointed out, even this seemingly authoritarian government was originally constituted—or rather imagined by the Hebrews to be constituted²—by the common agreement of the people, who established the republic “as with one voice.”³ Moreover, other possible translations create problems. The term “state” is best used as one translation of *imperium*, to be employed when referring to the governmental structure emanating from the *summa potestas*, being sometimes even identified with the latter.⁴ The term “commonwealth” must be reserved for the translation of *civitas*, in accordance with a seventeenth-century practice that can be observed, for example, between the English and Latin versions of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*,⁵ and that Curley also follows.⁶

In TTP XVIII, in his account of the decline of the Hebrew Republic, Spinoza argues that “there were no sects in their religion until after the high priests [Pontifices] in the second state had the authority to make [religious] decrees.” He explains how, in the first state, “no decree could derive its validity from the high priest [pontifex].” Later, however, the Jews fell prey to “the flattery of the priests [pontificum adulatio]” after “the priests [pontifices] were trying to get the rule at the beginning of the restoration.” For this reason, Malachi “reproached the priests [sacerdotes] of his time.”⁷ Throughout these passages, Curley has “high priest” for the two first occurrences of Spinoza’s *pontifex*, then “priest” for the following two, and then “priest” again for the single occurrence of *sacerdos*. One section later, however, he reverts back to giving *pontifex* as “high priest” when Spinoza notes that “certainly the high priests [Pontifices] were never able to do this so discreetly that the wise did not notice it.”⁸ Now, *pontifex* is usually translated “high priest,” while *sacerdos* is translated “priest.”⁹ So why does Curley’s translation not simply track Spinoza’s terms here? From a general interpretive perspective, the choice is not unimportant. Spinoza’s analysis of the religious decline of the Hebrew Republic is a foil for his critique of orthodox Calvinism and the question is whether, in this context, he is criticizing the entire class of churchmen (“priests”) or only ecclesiastical leaders (“high priests”). Now, Curley does not explain why, on two occasions, he translates *pontifex* as if Spinoza had written *sacerdos*, but I suspect

1 C II.649–50.

2 See Chapter 10, sect. “Security as the Standard of Contract.”

3 TTP XVII, G III.205–6|C II.302–3; see also James, Spinoza, p. 270.

4 See e.g. TP III.2; and Curley’s glossary at C II.558–9.

5 See e.g. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVII, pp. 254–5.

6 See e.g. TP III.1–2, G III.284–5|C II.517.

7 TTP XVIII, G III.222–3|C II.323–4. I shall have occasion to discuss the episode several times. See Chapter 6, sect. “Flattery”; Chapter 11, sect. “The Hebrew Republic.”

8 TTP XVIII, G III.223|C II.324.

9 See Curley, Glossary, C II.651.

we must seek an explanation in the biblical passage Spinoza is commenting on, namely Malachi 2:7–8. Spinoza, in Curley’s rendering, gives these two verses as follows: “The priest’s lips keep knowledge safe [Labia pontificis custodiunt scientiam], and the law is sought from his mouth, because he is God’s messenger; but you have departed from the path.”¹ Here as well, Curley retains “priest” for Spinoza’s pontifex, but it is easier to see why: Spinoza’s Latin rendering of Malachi 2:7 is troubling. It is out of tune with both Latin versions of the Old Testament he used: the Junius-Tremellius edition has “Quum labia sacerdotis observarent scientiam”²; the Vulgate has “Labia enim sacerdotis custodient scientiam.” Spinoza’s Spanish Bible—the 1602 Amsterdam edition of the *Biblio del Cantaro*³—only has a personal pronoun at Malachi 2:7 (“La Ley de verdad estuvo en su boca”), but it is correlated with a sacerdos at Malachi 2:1. The Hebrew has כֹּהֵן, kohen, usually given as “priest,” not כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל, kohen gadol, usually given as “high priest.” Spinoza’s translation is closest to the Vulgate, but changes sacerdos to pontifex. I can only assume that, on authority of the single occurrence of the term sacerdos we find in Spinoza’s text, Curley then makes the choice to correct both Spinoza’s rendering of the verse and the directly associated commentary, so that they are in conformity with the editions of the Bible Spinoza uses. I think, however, it is the wrong call to second-guess Spinoza here and have chosen to give all occurrences of pontifex in his text as “high priest.”⁴

Curley translates Spinoza’s *acquiescentia in se ipso*—our highest good according to the *Ethics*—by “self-esteem.”⁵ His choice is governed by the fact that Spinoza is using Cartesian terminology and that, in Spinoza’s Latin edition of Descartes’s *Passions de l’âme*, *acquiescentia in se ipso* translates the French *satisfaction de soy mesme*.⁶ Curley does, however, recognize that other options are acceptable and offers alternative translations for other, closely related notions.⁷ For example, at E5p27 and E5p32d, he translates *mentis acquiescentia* by “satisfaction of mind”⁸ and *vera animi acquiescentia* at E5p42s as “true peace of mind.” At E4app4 and E5p10s, he translates *animi acquiescentia* by “satisfaction of the mind.”⁹ He gives this same expression as “peace of mind” in the TTP.¹⁰ While many commentators maintain Curley’s choices, they have occasioned some scholarly discussion.¹¹ Most recently, Clare Carlisle has argued that Curley’s translation “distorts and obscures Spinoza’s account of the human good,” partly because it renders the lexical field constituted around the term *acquiescentia* indiscernible, arguing that it obfuscates the connotations to stillness and quietude implied by the Latin.¹² I, for my part, would not go quite that far, but I have been troubled by the possible confusion the translation creates with the passion called *edelmoedigheit* in the KV, a Dutch term perhaps most naturally translated as “generosity,” “nobility,” or “magnanimity,” but that Curley (advisedly) gives as “legitimate self-esteem.”¹³ While close connections clearly exist between them,

1 TTP XVIII, G III.223|C II.324.

2 The Junius-Tremellius edition was in Spinoza’s library. See Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-quarto no. 5, pp. 138–9.

3 See Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-folio no. 11, p. 127.

4 This is also the choice of Moreau and Lagrée who everywhere give *pontifex* as “pontife.” On Spinoza’s terminology for describing various kinds of priests, see Moreau, *Problèmes du spinozisme*, pp. 131–7.

5 See E3p30s, G II.163|C I.510; E3def.aff.25, G II.196|C I.536; E4p52&d, C II.248|C I.575; E4p58s, G II.253|C I.578.

6 Spinoza owned a copy of the 1650 Elzevier edition of Descartes’s *Opera philosophica* (see Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-quarto no. 24, pp. 152–3). I have consulted the fifth edition of 1672. The Latin translation of the *Passions de l’âme* was made by Henri Desmarets. See Descartes, *De Passiones, sive De affectibus animæ*, III, art. 190: “De satisfactione sive *Acquiescentia in se ipso*,” in *Opera*, vol. III, pp. 83–4. For the French, see Descartes, *Passions de l’âme*, AT XI.471–2.

7 See Curley, *Glossary*, C I.655.

8 G II.297|C I.609 and G II.300|C I.611.

9 G II.267|C I.588 and G II.288|C I.602.

10 TTP VII, G III.111|C II.185.

11 See Rutherford, “Salvation as a State of Mind”; LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom*, pp. 22–3, 198–200.

12 Carlisle, “Spinoza’s *Acquiescentia*,” pp. 210–11. In Descartes, *satisfaction de soy même/acquiescentia in se ipso* is defined as “un habitude en leur ame sui se nomme tranquillité & repos de conscience / habitus in eorum anima qui vocatur tranquillitas & Quies Conscientiæ” (Descartes, *Des Passions de l’âme*, III, 190, AT XI.471/*De Passiones, sive De affectibus animæ*, in *Opera*, vol. III, p. 83). Pierre-François Moreau indicates that, even before Desmarets appropriated the notion of *acquiescentia* for his translation of Descartes, this non-classical term had acquired the double sense of contentment and quietude in Calvinist scholasticism. Retaining both the Cartesian and Calvinist resonances, he gives the term in Spinoza as “satisfaction de soi-même” (see note 172 in Spinoza, *Éthique*, ed. Steenbakkers and Moreau, pp. 563–4).

13 KV II, vii, §3 and §7, G I.69|C I.111. Curley does not spell out the reasoning behind his choice, but it can perhaps be reconstructed as follows. In Glazemaker’s translations of Descartes’s *Passions de l’âme*, the Dutch *edelmoedigheit* and the Latin *generositas* both correspond to the French *générosité* (to compare the three, see Descartes, *Les passions de l’âme*, III, art. 153 and 156, AT XI.445–6 and 447–8; Lydingen van den ziel, pp. 169 and 172; *De Passiones, sive De affectibus animæ*, in *Opera*, vol. III, pp. 69–70). The term has a technical sense in

there is no way that *edelmoedigheid* can be considered as straightforwardly equivalent to *acquiescentia in se ipso* and I find it potentially misleading to translate them both as “self-esteem.”¹ I therefore opt for “self-contentment” as a safer translation of *acquiescentia in se ipso*.²

Finally, I should make a note about gendered pronouns and how they are used throughout this study. Most English translations of Spinoza’s principal works, including the almost contemporary 1689 translation of the TTP, and the vast majority of commentaries will translate *homo* in Spinoza by “man” rather than “human being.” Since those are translations and commentaries that I will constantly engage with in the following, trying to change that practice has proven impossible. But it is important to realize that, despite the fact that Spinoza was hardly a feminist, no gender attribution is a priori given with the Latin term or, in Spinoza’s own context, necessarily implied. For example, if we turn to the 1677 Dutch translation of the Ethics in the *Nagelate Schriften*, *homo* is translated by *mensch*, i.e., a human being, rather than *man*. The Dutch version of the *Korte Verhandeling* (which is the only one we have) also employs *mensch*. This given, I have—as, incidentally, the Oxford University Press house style also requires—opted for gender-neutral terms like “human being” or “people” whenever I felt it was possible, but in some cases attempting to do so gave rise to the most infelicitous constructions and circumlocutions. In those cases, in the interest of readability, I have declared defeat to older conventions of language and used masculine nouns and pronouns. This also applies to fixed English expressions like “common man” (*vulgus*), “wise man” (*sapiens*), “honorable man” (*honestus*), etc.

I have employed the following abbreviations:

Spinoza

Texts

CM Cogitata metaphysica

E Ethica; 1–5 = part numbers; d = definition (when following the part number); a = axiom, p = proposition, d = demonstration (when after a proposition number); c = corollary, s = scholium; l = lemma; app = appendix (followed by chapter number, when applicable); def.aff. = definitions of the affects. E.g., E2p40s2 is the second scholium to proposition 40 in part 2 of the Ethics

KV Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelvs Welstand

PPD Renati Descartes Principiorum philosophiae

TdIE Tractatus de intellectus emendatione (section numbers by Bruder, also used by Curley)

TP Tractatus politicus

TTP Tractatus theologico-politicus

Editions

C Spinoza, Benedictus. The Collected Works of Spinoza, 2 vols., edited and translated by Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985–2016)

Descartes from which Curley takes his cue: a person, writes Descartes, has *generositas* when he “esteems himself to the highest point as he legitimately can [*s’estime au plus haut point qu’il se peut legitiment estimer*]” (Descartes, *Les Passions de l’âme*, art. 163, AT XI.445–6). Hence, on the (correct) assumption that Spinoza’s classification of the affects in the KV owes a great deal to the *Passions de l’âme*, *edelmoedigheid* becomes “legitimate self-esteem.”

1 Glazemaker’s Dutch version of Descartes’s *Passions de l’âme* translates *satisfaction de soi-même* by *vernoeging van zich zelf* (Descartes, *Lydingen van den Ziel*, art. 190, p. 205). In the *Nagelate Schriften*, Glazemaker gives Spinoza’s *acquiescentia in se ipso* as *gerustheit in zich zelf*. By contrast, *edelmoedigheid* translates *generositas* in Glazemaker’s Dutch version of the Ethics, i.e., the term that Curley gives in English as “nobility” (see the *Nagelate Schriften* at E3p73s, E3def.58exp., and E4p46).

2 “Self-contentment” is George Eliot’s choice for *acquiescentia in se ipso* in her 1856 translation of the Ethics, the first complete English version (see Spinoza’s Ethics, trans. Eliot, ed. Carlisle, pp. 185 and 214). In his recent commentary, Michael LeBuffe also opts for “self-contentment” but still sometimes follows Curley (see *From Freedom to Bondage*, pp. 22–3 and 198–9). Donald Rutherford acknowledges that “self-contentment” is an attractive option, but maintains Curley’s choice (see “Salvation,” pp. 451–2).

G Spinoza, Benedictus. Opera omnia, 4 vols., edited by Carl Gebhardt (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925)

Descartes

AT Oeuvres, 12 vols., translated by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Cerf, 1897–1909)

CSMK The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, 3 vols., edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91)

1

Introduction

The End of the Republic

When the Amsterdam municipality in 2008 decided to erect a monument for Spinoza (1632–77) near the city hall at Zwanenburgwal, they chose to engrave onto the pedestal the quote they presumably believed would best capture Spinoza’s lasting philosophical legacy and contribution to the history of Dutch political thought. It is a short phrase that can be found in chapter XX of his 1670 *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (Theological-Political Treatise, hereafter TTP) according to which “the end of the republic is really freedom” or, as Spinoza writes in the original Latin, *finis ... reipublicae revera libertas est*.¹ The philosopher was thus, by reference to the final chapter of his treatise, honored as someone who had primarily defended freedom and who saw freedom as the noblest aim of society.

However, some seventeen chapters earlier in the same book, Spinoza makes an equally unambiguous, but seemingly entirely different, claim about the aim of the state, namely in chapter III when proclaiming that “the end of all society and of the state ... is to live securely and conveniently [*finis universae societatis, & imperii est ... secure & commode vivere*].”² Spinoza writes this in the specific context of a discussion of the ancient Hebrew Republic, while explaining how God’s promise to the Patriarchs did not involve any particular privilege of the Jewish people, or imply that they were a chosen people in any strong sense, but only that obedience to the law would bring “continual prosperity.”³ He makes it clear, however, by adding that he intends to “show [this] more fully in what follows”⁴ and by, later, in TTP XVII, realigning his thinking with the republican slogan drawn from Cicero, *Salus populi suprema lex est*,⁵ that his analysis in TTP III is not limited to the particular context of the Hebrew Republic but has a general application, just as that other phrase in TTP XX.

So what was, in fact, the aim of the republic for Spinoza? Was it freedom or was it security? One important first step toward answering that question involves realizing that the phrase engraved on the Spinoza monument was not originally conceived as a stand-alone motto. It is extracted from a longer passage and its meaning governed by the immediate context in which it occurs. Hence, in the engraving on the pedestal, a word is omitted, indicated by three suspension points in the Latin rendering of the phrase above, namely the conjunction *ergo*. Spinoza in fact wrote: “So [*ergo*] the end of the republic is really freedom.” This inconspicuous word, *ergo*, is important because it invites us—in fact, obliges us—to consider what precedes the phrase in Spinoza’s text. Moreover, it also suggests that we should take that preceding passage as something that, for Spinoza, could be described adequately by the term “freedom.” And what that preceding passage describes is how the state’s role with regard to its citizens is “to enable their minds and bodies to perform their functions safely, to enable them to use their reason freely, and not to clash with one another in hatred, anger or deception, or deal inequitably with one another.”⁶ Therefore, as becomes clear when correlating the two passages, if freedom and safety, i.e., security, are both the aim of the state, it is because the latter is an integral part of the former, or that security is just one component of a more complex conception of freedom that also incorporates the use of reason, equity, and the absence of hatred, anger, and deception.

1 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

2 TTP III, G III.48|C II.115; trans. modified. Curley has “of the whole social order” for *universae societatis*. Curley translates *societas* either as “social order” or as “society.” He opts for “social order” when he thinks Spinoza is “conceiving the *societas* as one which has laws someone is empowered to enforce,” in a meaning close to *imperium*, or “state.” By contrast, he opts for “society” when “Spinoza seems to be thinking of the members of the society as a collective entity, but in abstraction from the government” (see Glossary, C II.658). I agree with Piet Steenbakkers that such a distinction is not clearly discernible in Spinoza (Steenbakkers, “*Societas*,” in Van Bunge et al., *The Continuum Companion*, p. 313).

3 TTP III, G III.48|C II.115.

4 TTP III, G III.48|C II.115.

5 TTP XVII, G III.218|C II.318: “the laws ... always aim only at the honor, well-being and security of the whole people.” See also James, Spinoza, p. 237.

6 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

The argument of the present work is that this complex conception of freedom also governs the meaning of the notion that Spinoza introduces in the subtitle of the TTP, namely the “freedom of philosophizing,” or *libertas philosophandi*. My polemical aim is to do away with a still current but I think misguided understanding of the freedom of philosophizing as something akin to a broad legal permission to express whatever opinion one embraces, comparable to a right to “free speech” in the sense it has acquired especially in the American legal tradition and political culture, enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. How to interpret exactly the First Amendment, especially what kind of speech it covers and what its limits are, is of course an exceedingly complex matter that I cannot undertake to discuss in any detail here. However, I think it relatively uncontroversial to say that, in this tradition, “free speech” is understood as an individual right of citizens that the state honors by abstaining from putting legal constraints upon their speech. Free speech is thus understood in terms of the kind of freedom that Isaiah Berlin termed “negative,”¹ paradigmatically stated in Hobbes’s definition of liberty as “the absence of externall Impediments,”² as opposed to the kind of “positive” freedom as self-determination that Spinoza embraces in the Ethics, according to which “that thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone.”³ Such negatively defined free speech may have its limits; some kinds of speech may not be legally permitted. Still, on this understanding, whether one speaks freely or not is not as such a function of what one says or how one says it, but of whether one is legally allowed to say it or not. What I want to show is that Spinoza’s freedom of philosophizing, by contrast, is entirely predicated on what is being said and how. The collective political freedom of philosophizing in the TTP cannot be identified with the kind of individual ethical freedom whose conditions Spinoza explores throughout the Ethics. But it is still akin to it and the two distinct conceptions of freedom in the TTP and in the Ethics subtly coordinated with each other. The freedom of philosophizing represents a “positive” conception of how to better regulate our mutual interactions in view of collective self-determination, not a “negative” legal conception recommending a mere absence of rules. In fact, whether philosophizing is free or not is not a legal matter at all. It depends on whether those who engage in it interact with honorability and integrity, i.e., whether what they say genuinely reflects what they think and what they think reflects a judgment they can genuinely call their own.

A first important step toward avoiding the assimilation of Spinoza’s conception of the freedom of philosophizing to the legal tradition of free speech is to not confuse the “freedom” (*libertas*) of philosophizing with what Spinoza speaks of in terms of a “permission” (*licentia*) to say what we think. This latter term also figures prominently in the TTP, in the title of chapter XX where “it is shown that in a free republic everyone is permitted [*licere*] to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks.” On the influential reading that I reject, by “freedom of philosophizing” and “permission to say what one thinks” Spinoza basically refers to the same thing, namely a right to speak freely that citizens in a free republic are granted, and as something that can be legally allowed in the same way as it can also, in an unfree republic, be legally denied. In modern scholarship, this approach to Spinoza’s freedom of philosophizing was perhaps first suggested by Leo Strauss in his long article of 1947–8 on “How to Study Spinoza’s ‘Theologico-political Treatise’,” reprinted as a chapter in his 1952 *Persecution and the Art of Writing*.⁴ Reading Spinoza in this fashion requires that the notion of freedom of the TTP’s conception of the freedom of philosophizing is entirely distinct from the more considered notion of freedom that he develops in the Ethics. This is, for example, why Strauss insists that Spinoza’s plea for the freedom of philosophizing is “based on arguments taken from the character of the Biblical teaching.”⁵ The importance of this phrase can perhaps best be measured in terms of what it does not

1 See Warburton, *Free Speech*, pp. 7–8.

2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV, p. 198.

3 E1d7, G II.46|C I.409.

4 Strauss, “How to Study,” p. 53.

5 Strauss, “How to Study,” p. 121; Strauss, *Persecution*, pp. 142–201.

say, or implicitly denies, namely that the freedom of philosophizing, without necessarily being identical to it, is also informed by Spinoza's positive conception of freedom as self-determination in the Ethics.¹

Strauss, of course, composed his analysis over half a century ago and much has been said since then to deepen, correct, or refute it.² Nonetheless, *mutatis mutandis*, the position remains prominent. The reading was already consolidated and further elaborated by Lewis S. Feuer in *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism*, published in 1958.³ Still, the doubtless most influential—and in many ways insightful—example is Steven B. Smith's 1997 *Spinoza, Liberalism and the Question of Jewish Identity*. For him, "the Treatise ought to be considered a classic of modern liberal democratic theory," a theory which "is based on the model of the free or liberated individual. This individual is free not only in the philosophical sense ... but in the ordinary sense that comes with liberation from ecclesiastical tutelage and supervision."⁴ Faithful to that general framework of interpretation, predicated on an "ordinary sense" fraught with anachronism, Smith goes on to argue that "the great theme of the Treatise is the freedom to philosophize,"⁵ but provides very little by way of explaining what, exactly, the exercise of that freedom consists in. Instead, he puts considerable energy into demonstrating that it is secured by granting "individual liberty and freedom of speech"⁶ and for the rest focuses on the "liberated self" resulting from that.⁷ A more recent example of a liberalist reading of Spinoza's freedom of philosophizing can be found in Ronald Beiner's 2005 *Civil Religion*, where Spinoza's freedom of philosophizing simply expresses the conviction that a "liberal society requires a protected space for intellectual freedom."⁸ In this way, Beiner claims, the appeal to our "natural right to think freely" in chapter XX represents "the consummated statement of Spinoza's liberalism"⁹ where he is "trying to open up more space for individual liberty."¹⁰ I find very little to agree with in these characterizations.

A better, but still problematic, understanding of the relation between Spinoza's conceptions of the "freedom of philosophizing" and "permission to say what one thinks" is to consider them as two sides of a single, dialectical notion of freedom. Thomas Cook has argued "that in the first instance *libertas philosophandi* is best understood as negative freedom—i.e. freedom from constraint."¹¹ This "negative" approach leads Cook to depict the *libertas philosophandi* as being concerned with assigning the "limits of the sovereign's power and right" vis-à-vis the citizens of the state. On this understanding, Spinoza's freedom of philosophizing enshrines a legally protected right of individuals to say what they think and think what they want. Cook, however, then goes on to argue that Spinoza's concept also "points toward a more 'positive' conception that is closer to the freedom of the rational person," echoing what Manfred Walther has described as Spinoza's "dialectics of freedom."¹² This two-sided, dialectical conception of Spinoza's freedom of philosophizing shared by Cook and Walther represents, I think, a significant advance from Strauss, Smith, and Beiner's straightforward liberalist interpretations.¹³ The problem, as I will argue, is that it fails to capture Spinoza's systematic distinction between permission and freedom. In fact, there is nothing dialectical about Spinoza's conception of freedom because the notion of a permission to say what one thinks that he develops in TTP XX is not a core part of his notion of the freedom of philosophizing at all, but an auxiliary notion adjacent to it.

1 For another reading proposing such a separation, see Villaverde, "Spinoza's Paradoxes," p. 21.

2 The literature is extensive. For another recent study that strongly resists liberalist readings of Spinoza's conception of the freedom of philosophizing, see Cooper, "Freedom of Speech."

3 Feuer, *Spinoza*, p. 65.

4 Smith, *Spinoza*, p. 25.

5 Smith, *Spinoza*, p. 27.

6 Smith, *Spinoza*, pp. 156–62.

7 Smith, *Spinoza*, pp. 160–1.

8 Beiner, *Civil Religion*, pp. 114–15.

9 Beiner, *Civil Religion*, p. 145.

10 Beiner, *Civil Religion*, p. 146. For a couple of other studies describing Spinoza as a liberalist, see Schwartz, "Liberalism and the Jewish Question"; Den Yul and Warner, "Liberalism."

11 Cook, "Libertas Philosophandi," p. 216.

12 Cook, "Libertas Philosophandi," p. 216.

13 For a similar reading that distinguishes an "intellectual" sense—qualified as related only to "philosophy strictly speaking"—and a "political" sense of the freedom of philosophizing which "refers to the right of all citizens to think and say what they please," see Fraenkel, "Spinoza's Philosophy of Religion," p. 382. Julie Henry reconstructs Spinoza's conception of freedom of conscience in accordance with a similarly "ambiguous" notion of both political and ethical freedom (Henry, "Freedom of Conscience").

It is conceived as a political recommendation not to outlaw free philosophizing, as a necessary but far from sufficient condition of *libertas philosophandi*. Being permitted to philosophize is certainly not, for Spinoza, equivalent to doing so freely.¹

But let me briefly outline in more positive terms the alternative I propose. As I see it, Spinoza's freedom of philosophizing is not grounded in a legal permission enshrined in civil law but in a natural authority inseparable from human nature. As we shall see in Chapter 5, Spinoza describes free philosophizing in terms of an "authority to teach and advise" closely related to a freedom of judgment that belongs to all human beings in virtue of their humanity. Moreover, free philosophizing is the intellectual activity of a community. By contrast to Descartes's putatively solitary meditator, persons who philosophize freely in Spinoza's sense are by definition engaged in an activity relating them to others.² This is also, as we shall see in Chapter 4, why Spinoza characterizes free philosophizing as a "mode of speech" or a discursive "style," a style of "brotherly advice" that he opposes to the commanding style of prophetic revelation. This collective nature of the freedom of philosophizing points to what I take to be its fundamental political signification: the notion enshrines Spinoza's attempt to theorize a new republican public sphere. In this respect, the position I advocate is not unlike the one put forward by Julie Cooper when, resisting liberalist readings, she argues that "when Spinoza defends freedom of speech, he endorses a mode of democratic citizenship, and an ethos of public discourse."³ And I agree entirely with Christophe Miqueu when he presents Spinoza's republican project as one that advances an ideal of "citizenship as collective emancipation."⁴

In a nutshell, my view is that the freedom of philosophizing is not for Spinoza an individual civil right but a collective natural authority constitutive of a particular kind of public sphere.⁵ Its constitution requires that citizens collectively take control of their own free judgment in a way that Spinoza believes can be achieved only through "good education, integrity of character, and virtue."⁶ This is why, as I analyze it in Chapter 8, his attempt to establish the conceptual foundations of a republican public sphere is intimately related to a rudimentary program for reform of public education.

Bringing out the richer, positive notion of free philosophizing sketched above is the first aim of the present study. A second aim is a reassessment of Spinoza's contribution to the modern conception of toleration. Politically, Spinoza's aim is to show that free philosophizing is not only harmless, but beneficial for the peace and stability of a republic. As he writes in the preface to the TTP, "the main thing" that he "resolved to demonstrate in this treatise" was not only that "this freedom can be granted without harm to piety and the peace of the republic, but also that it cannot be abolished unless piety and the peace of the republic are abolished with it."⁷ This conception has, among present-day commentators, earned Spinoza a prominent place among the important and most forward-looking defenders of "toleration" of the seventeenth century. Spinoza scholars in the English-speaking world who have defended that position include Edwin Curley, Jonathan Israel, Michael Rosenthal, John Christian Laursen, and Justin Steinberg.⁸ Moreover, in the broader literature on toleration, including

1 According to Theo Verbeek—in an analysis approaching the perspective I adopt here—we should not see a dialectics between "negative" and "positive" freedom in Spinoza, but rather a basic separation of civil right from subjective right, the latter understood as "the legitimate freedom that each individual can claim for himself against the state simply in virtue of being a man" (Verbeek, "Liberté, vertu, démocratie," p. 368). Conceptually, the distinction between public, civil authority to govern, and private, natural authority to teach and advise that I establish is not too far removed from this distinction between civil and subjective right.

2 TTP Preface, G III.14 | C II.75.

3 Cooper, "Freedom of Speech," pp. 91–114, here p. 94. Cooper goes on to stress anonymity, understood as the absence of self-display, as an important prerequisite for free philosophizing, understood as selfless intervention in public debate, and a "democratic protocol."

4 Miqueu, Spinoza, Locke, et l'idée de citoyenneté, p. 478. For a similar point, see also Sharp, Spinoza and the Politics, p. 53.

5 I use the notion of a "public sphere" roughly in the sense it is used in Jürgen Habermas's 1962 work on The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. For comparison of Spinoza and Habermas, see the general conclusion in Chapter 12.

6 TTP XX, G III.244 | C II.349.

7 TTP Preface, G III.7 | C II.69.

8 Curley, "Castellio vs. Spinoza"; Curley, "Rara temporum Felicitas"; Israel, "Spinoza, Locke and the Enlightenment Battle for Toleration," pp. 102–3; Israel, Radical Enlightenment, pp. 265–70; Israel, Enlightenment Contested, pp. 135–63; Rosenthal, "Toleration and the Right to Resist"; Rosenthal, "Toleration as a Virtue"; Rosenthal, "Spinoza's Republican Argument"; Rosenthal, "Why Spinoza is Intolerant of Atheists"; Steinberg, "Spinoza's Curious Defense of Toleration"; Laursen, "Spinoza on Lying"; Laursen, "Spinoza on Toleration"; Steinberg, "Spinoza's

in very influential historical commentaries such as those by Perez Zagorin, Simone Zurbuchen, Philip Milton, or Rainer Forst, Spinoza consistently figures, along with Locke and Bayle, as one of three paradigmatic tolerationists of the early modern period.¹ I have no quarrel with those readings. Spinoza, of course, does not, strictly speaking, have a notion of toleration. The noun *tolerantia* figures only once in his entire work, in TTP XX, in a context where it is most appropriately translated as “endurance.”² Even if we include his use of the verbal or adjectival forms of the term, none of them suggest “toleration” in the required sense.³ Still, one could argue that it matters little if the term is present if only the idea is, and some aspects of Spinoza’s conception of the freedom of philosophizing certainly resonate strongly with later, modern conceptions of toleration.⁴ His political theory incorporates ideals of peaceful coexistence that, for all intents and purposes, amount to something like a political theory of toleration, stressing, for example, that “men must be so governed that they can openly hold different and contrary opinions, and still live in harmony.”⁵ Moreover, he describes the suppression of the freedom of philosophizing in ways that today can hardly fail to conjure up the term “intolerance.” He argues fiercely against those who “try to take this freedom [of judgment] away from men” and who seek to “bring to judgment the opinions of those who disagree with them.”⁶ And he proclaims those who “censure publicly those who disagree” and “persecute in a hostile spirit” to be “the worst men,”⁷ even to be “antichrists.”⁸

At the same time, however, when building his theological-political doctrine, Spinoza also appeals, and gives central importance, to theories that are not today usually associated with doctrines of political or religious tolerance. First, in TTP XIX, he develops an Erastian theory of church–state relations, arguing in favor of giving the state firm control over ecclesiastical matters. But today, after Locke, toleration is most often associated with a political regime that does not subject religious opinions to political control. Second, in TTP XVI, he adopts a contract theory clearly informed by Thomas Hobbes who can hardly be said to represent a beacon of modern toleration in the contemporary scholarly literature. Even those commentators who have most successfully attempted to attribute Hobbes a positive role in the elaboration of the modern conception of toleration—such as Edwin Curley or, more recently, Teresa Bejan—struggle to get the theory off the ground, mostly because of the firm control over public worship that Hobbes grants the civil sovereign, limiting toleration to the internal realm of a mute individual conscience.⁹ As I shall argue in Chapter 11, I concede that there is a small crack in Hobbes’s otherwise hermetically closed theoretical edifice, having to do with his conception of private worship in secret that allows toleration some minimal, additional wriggling room within his basic schema of obligatory external profession and free internal faith.¹⁰ But it is hardly enough to make *De Cive* or the *Leviathan* the go-to place for a positive understanding of modern toleration, and the putative background of Spinoza’s political philosophy in Hobbes gives some reason to at least question his tolerationist credentials and the overall coherence of his political theory from that perspective.

Political Philosophy,” sect. 3.5; Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*, pp. 129–61. For an Italian-French debate on the topic, see Mignini, “Spinoza: oltre l’idea di tolleranza” and Lagrée, “Théologie et tolerance.”

1 See Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, p. 245; Zurbuchen, “Republicanism and Toleration,” pp. 59–60; Milton, “Religious Toleration”; Forst, *Toleration in Conflict*, pp. 169–70; Forst, “Toleration.”

2 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.350.

3 See TTP VII, G III.104|C II.177: “submit to injuries [toleranda injuria]”; TTP VIII, G III.118|C II.192: “might still have endured [tolerandum esset]”; TTP IX, G III.137|C II.220: “regarded ... as acceptable [tolerabilem aestimabant]”; TTP IX, G III.139–40|C II.222: “yield a tolerable meaning [sensus tolerabilem pareret]”; TTP XII, G III.159|C II.249: “intolerable superstition [intolerabilis ... superstitio]”; TTP XVI, G III.200|C II.295: “be prepared to bear anything [omnia potius tolerarent]”; TTP XVII, G III.205|C II.301: “intolerable oppression of the Egyptians [intoleranda Aegyptiorum oppressione]”; TTP XVII, G III.215|C II.314: “to bear everything [ad omnia ... tolerandum]”; TTP XVII, G III.216 |C II.315: “be more bearable [tolerabilior esse]”; TTP XVIII, G III.223|C II.325: “intolerable ... to ... kings [regibus ... intolerabiles].”

4 See Lagrée, “Théologie et tolerance,” p. 16; see also Lærke, “Virtual Union,” pp. 3–7.

5 TTP XX, G III.247|C II.353.

6 TTP XX, G III.247|C II.353.

7 TTP Preface, G III.8–9|C II.70–1.

8 TTP XIV, G III.176|C II.267.

9 See Curley, “Hobbes and the Cause”; Bejan, *Mere Civility*, pp. 82–111; Bejan, “Difference without Disagreement.” Other defenses of Hobbes’s tolerationist credentials include Ryan, “A More Tolerant Hobbes?”; Ryan, “Hobbes, Toleration and the Inner Life”; Tuck, “Hobbes and Locke”; Abizadeh, “Publicity, Privacy, and Religious Toleration”; Judd Owen, “The Tolerant Leviathan.” For a recent refutation of the position, see Sreedhar, “Rethinking Hobbes.”

10 See Chapter 11, sect. “Hobbes and Lucius Antistius Constans.”

Both these aspects of Spinoza's theological politics—his theory of *ius circa sacra* and his contract theory—render it impossible to assimilate his conception of the freedom of philosophizing in any straightforward way to contemporary theories of free speech and toleration in the broadly Lockean tradition, which tends to think about these matters in terms of constitutionally guaranteed individual liberties and the separation of church and state.

Elements of Method

This study is methodologically informed by work I have published elsewhere on the methods, aims, and history of the history of philosophy as a discipline, and I should very briefly give the reader a sense of the programmatic intuitions behind this previous work, of the terminology I have devised in order to implement them, and the bearing they have on the way that I approach Spinoza's work.¹

As I see it, the history of philosophy, as a discipline, is essentially concerned with the reconstruction of the historical meaning of past philosophical texts. It must attempt to strike a difficult balance between systematic and historical considerations, between reconstruction of arguments internally within the texts and inquiry into the historical circumstances and intellectual context of the writing and subsequent reception of those texts, grounded in a principled notion of what such historical meaning amounts to. The text, rather than the author, constitutes the privileged relay between the conceptual structure on the one hand and the historical situation on the other: the text has one foot in the philosophy it signifies, the other in the history in which it signifies. Now, one way—popular among historians of philosophy and intellectual historians alike—of capturing both the systematic and historical aspects of past philosophical texts, and the interaction between them, has been to study them as contributions to historical controversies.² It is a methodological wagon that I am happy to jump on. I fully agree with Susan James that “works of philosophy are best understood as contributions to ongoing conversations or debates.”³

The controversies within which philosophical texts acquire their meaning are defined partly by an intellectual context, partly by historical circumstances.⁴ By the intellectual context of a text, I understand a cluster of other texts that this text responds to, or that respond to it, at a given historical moment and under particular historical circumstances. Within that context, these texts communicate in all conceivable ways, by reinforcing, contradicting, dismissing, overruling, correcting, expanding, re-appropriating, misconstruing, or confronting each other. In this way, the texts within a given contextual cluster form interpretive perspectives on each other—perspectives that can inform us about the historical meaning of each of them within that specific context. By historical circumstances, I understand the non-textual setting of the text, including the institutional framework, the political situation, socio-cultural factors, and so on. My contention is then that the meaning of a past philosophical text can be determined by considering the internal, structured argument of the text as a singular response to a given external context of writing established within particular historical circumstances; in short, by considering the text as a structured contribution to a given philosophical controversy.

This approach, systematically constructed around the past philosophical text, its intellectual context, and the historical circumstances of its reading, has a bearing on two methodological problems specifically related to the reading of Spinoza's TTP, both having to do with the nature of his writing.

¹ See Lærke, “The Anthropological Analogy”; Lærke, *Les Lumières*, pp. 11–46; Lærke, “La controverse,” pp. 403–7.

² For some intellectual historians who have adopted this approach, see Lilti, “Comment écrit-on l’histoire intellectuelle des Lumières?”; Lilti, “Querelles et controverses”; Fabiani, “Disputes”; Lemieux, “À quoi sert l’analyse des controverses?”; Carey, “John Locke,” pp. 61–5. For a prominent example among the historians of philosophy, see the extensive work by Marcelo Dascal, for example “The Study of Controversies” or “The Controversy about Ideas.”

³ James, *Spinoza*, p. 4.

⁴ This terminological distinction, rarely made systematically by contextualist historians of philosophy, has roots in an older and much longer philosophical and literary tradition, going from Antiquity to the Enlightenment. It is partly accounted for in an excellent paper by Peter Burke (“Context in Context”).

First, my focus on the text explains the singular importance I give to Spinoza's words, both to the systematic sense they acquire within the conceptual structure of his arguments and to the resonances they have within the intellectual context and historical circumstances of his use of them. I am particularly interested in the ways that those two aspects of their signification work together—or in Spinoza's case, often clash—in singular ways so as to bestow upon the TTP a particular historical meaning. Such a terminology-oriented approach, however, presupposes that the TTP is a carefully written philosophical text containing not just carefully thought-out philosophical arguments, but also a carefully elaborated philosophical language to express them. And this assumption is at odds with at least one prominent commentator on the TTP. According to Theo Verbeek,

every reader of Spinoza's Theologico-political Treatise (1670) will know that it is a difficult book but will also realize that its difficulties are not like those of, say, the Critique of Pure Reason or the Phenomenology of the Mind. Its vocabulary is not technical at all; nor is its reasoning complicated or its logic extraordinary. If it is difficult it is ... because one fails to see how things combine; how particular arguments fit into a comprehensive argument; how a single chapter or couple of chapters relate to the book as a whole and how the book relates to Spinoza's other work.¹

This is not a depiction of the TTP and of the difficulties associated with reading it that I can recognize. Verbeek's evaluation, it seems to me, underestimates the conceptual precision and complex coherence of Spinoza's argument and, it should be noted, the excellent systematic interpretation of the TTP that follows these introductory remarks in Verbeek's book belies his own assessment. Spinoza is, on the whole, and especially in his later works—the Ethics, the TTP, and the Tractatus politicus (Political Treatise, hereafter TP)—careful, consistent, and systematic about his use of particular terms, and I shall generally assume that he is, unless there is irrefutable proof to the contrary. Apparent inconsistencies should always be considered an invitation to seek out deeper, more complex patterns, and Spinoza's text declared genuinely inconsistent or his writing careless only when all other options have been exhausted.

My reading of the TTP thus relies importantly on two methodological assumptions.² First, I operate with a structural assumption that an established orderly pattern in the use of some term or set of terms—an ordered lexical field, so to speak—constitutes a formal argument in favor of a given interpretation on a par with explicit textual evidence. For example, my entire reconstruction in Chapter 5 of Spinoza's understanding of "authority" (*authoritas*) is derived from a review of occurrences and their context of use within the TTP. Spinoza never explicitly thematizes the term. The same applies to a number of other terms that have systematic meaning on my analysis, including "doctrine" (*dogma*), "foundation" (*fundamentum*), "standard" (*norma*), "to embrace" (*amplecti*), "integrity" (*integritas*), "collegially" (*collegialiter*), and many others. Second, I operate with a systematic assumption that the orderly use of given terms already established in one domain will, in principle, apply to the same terms when employed in relation to other domains as well—a kind of *analogia fidei* of philosophical text interpretation. As the most important example, my analysis of Spinoza's contract theory in Chapter 10 relies importantly on the idea that the structure of argumentation underlying his doctrine of a social contract is formally similar to the one underlying his account of the so-called doctrines of universal faith—an idea based on the systematic assumption that Spinoza employs the terms "doctrine" (*dogma*) and "foundation" (*fundamentum*) in analogous ways in the political and theological contexts. Without these two methodological assumptions, many analyses in this book will appear merely conjectural.

¹ Verbeek, Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise, p. 1.

² Both assumptions are derived from a French historiographical tradition that can be traced back to Victor Delbos and Martial Gueroult and the latter's notion of "structural analysis." More generally, however, my approach owes a considerable debt to the more historical turn given to this tradition by Pierre-François Moreau (see *Problèmes du Spinozisme*, pp. 7–14). On these issues, see Lærke, "French Historiographical Spinozism"; Lærke, "Structural Analysis and Dianoematics."

By insisting on the philosophically careful writing and systematic character of the TTP, however, I do not want to imply that the deepest meaning of the book reduces to the relation it entertains with Spinoza's systematic philosophy, i.e., the Ethics. Spinoza interrupted his work on the Ethics in 1665 to work on the TTP. The TTP was completed in 1670, after which he returned to working on the Ethics, completing it sometime in 1675.¹ The writing of the TTP, then, took place quite literally in the middle of his work on the Ethics. Given this history, considerable correlation and overlap between the two works is only to be expected, and I agree with Susan James that "although these two works vary enormously in style and scope, they are intimately connected."² The TTP and the Ethics are, via their common ethical agenda, inseparable.³ Moreover, it does not take much reading in the TTP to realize how often, in individual passages and in the use of specific terminology, Spinoza draws on conceptions also found in the Ethics when elaborating his arguments in the TTP, for example about common notions and knowledge of God,⁴ the identity of the power of nature with the power of God,⁵ the necessity of the universal laws of nature,⁶ the relation between the power of nature and the divine intellect,⁷ the conception of man as a "part of the power of nature,"⁸ and so on. The connections are countless.⁹ Still, as Susan James also stresses,¹⁰ it would be a serious mistake to take one book to be the foundation of the other. We will fail to grasp the systematic argument of the TTP if we simply presuppose that its underlying systematic framework has a form similar to that of the metaphysics of the Ethics. The TTP has a systematic character entirely of its own. It is borne out in strikingly precise use of terms and concepts, meticulously elaborated and constructed internally within the text, yet in constant external dialogue both with the Ethics and with the terminology and concepts of other, contemporary writers concerned with similar theological, political, and philosophical issues.

The focus I put on the text and its systematic meaning also has an immediate bearing on a topic much discussed by both supporters and detractors of the so-called "esoteric" reading of Spinoza first championed by Leo Strauss, namely whether and to what extent we should read the TTP "between the lines" in order to gain access to the meaning of the text, understood as Spinoza's deliberately hidden, but more authentic intentions.¹¹ One important aspect of my text-oriented approach is an effort to take seriously an insight which is today a truism among literary scholars but which remains, in practice at least, surprisingly ignored by historians of philosophy. It is that the meaning of a text does not reduce to the intention of its author and that common expressions such as "What Locke wanted to say" or "What Hegel had in mind" refer less to primary intentions of authors than to attributed intentions that are not at the root of the text's meaning but effects of their interpretation.¹² However, by considering author intentions as derivative of text interpretation, a text-focused approach such as mine also tends to mostly neutralize the question of "esoteric" reading. On this level, I fully agree with Jacqueline Lagrée when she suggests that it is "wiser to read the Theological-Political Treatise à la lettre and presuppose that Spinoza writes what he thinks and thinks what he writes, even

1 On these issues, see Steenbakkers, "The Textual History," pp. 26–7; Steenbakkers, "The Text of Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus," pp. 29–30; Moreau and Steenbakkers, "Introduction," pp. 15–17.

2 James, Spinoza, p. 2.

3 Note in this context the reference to "universal ethics" in TTP IV, G III.60|C II.128.

4 See e.g. TTP IV, G III.61|C II.129; TTP Annotation VI, G III.252–3|C II.156. For more detailed study, see Lærke, "Prejudices, Common Notions, Intuitions."

5 See e.g. TTP I, G III.29|C II.92: "the power of nature is just God's power itself." See also TTP VI, G III.83|C II.154; TTP XVI, G III.189|C II.282.

6 TTP IV, G III.58|C II.126: "everything is determined by the universal laws of nature to exist and produce effects in a fixed and determinate way."

7 TTP VI, G III.83|C II.155: "we must believe without reservation that the power of nature is infinite, and ... its laws are so broad that they extend to everything which is conceived by the divine intellect itself."

8 TTP IV, G III.58|C II.126: "insofar as man is a part of nature, he constitutes part of the power of nature."

9 For a volume entirely dedicated to the topic, see Garber, Lærke, Moreau, and Totaro, eds., Spinoza: Reason, Religion and Politics. For a recent and insightful short study, see also Melamed, "The Metaphysics of the Theological-Political Treatise."

10 James, Spinoza, p. 3.

11 Strauss, "How to Study," pp. 111–12. Esotericism in Spinoza was the topic of a particularly virulent debate in the 1990s between Errol E. Harris (who rejected it) and Paul J. Bagley (who defended it). See Harris, "Is There an Esoteric Doctrine?" [1995]; Bagley, "Harris, Strauss" [1996]; Bagley, "Spinoza, Philosophical Communication" [1999]; Harris, "Esotericism and Spinoza" [2000]; Bagley, Philosophy, Theology, and Politics [2008]. For other recent avatars of the esoteric reading of Spinoza, see Smith, Spinoza, pp. 38–44; Parens, Maimonides and Spinoza, pp. 193–212. For more discussion, see also Frampton, Spinoza, pp. 18–22.

12 For an excellent discussion, see Condren, Hobbes, pp. 144–5.

though he probably does not write all that he thinks.”¹ For Lagrée, I suspect, the “wisdom” of taking this approach does not lie in knowing where best to search out an author’s true intentions, but in realizing what it is our task as historians of philosophy to study in the first place, namely the meaning of texts. It obviously makes little sense to look beyond the text to discover what is thought if the text just is, by definition, the place where thinking is effectively produced.² Those English-speaking commentators who have taken Lagrée’s point up for discussion, whether it has been to endorse it (Steven Nadler) or to reject it (Edwin Curley),³ have to some extent failed to appreciate these deeper convictions about the primacy of the text and the derivative nature of authorial intentions. And yet the point is foundational for those French historians of philosophy who, like Lagrée, grew up in the shadow of Martial Gueroult whose method of structural analysis rests on a similar textual imperative.⁴ On this understanding, to restate Lagrée’s point more bluntly, whether Spinoza the historical person thought what he wrote when he wrote it, or whether he thought something else, is a matter of common psychologist conjecture best left to one side by the historian of philosophy whose focus should be on what is written or not written in the text and on what the intellectual context and historical circumstances of the text can contribute to the reading of it.

The question of strategic writing—including writing involving dissimulation—does, however, return with a vengeance on a second level concerned not with the authorial intention behind a text, but with the attributed intention that an author name comes to represent in the interpretation of the text. An approach like mine that considers texts as contributions to controversies will necessarily attribute a strategic dimension to them. It will always see them as responding and adapting to other texts that they communicate with, establishing the parameters for an internal play of mutual interpretation among them. The question of strategic writing, then, should not be stated in terms of a distinction between what is on the surface of a text and what is behind it, what is in it and what is not, but in terms of seemingly contradictory strands of argumentation, all placed on the surface of the text and explicitly present within it, but whose reconciliation within a unified interpretive framework requires that we attribute to the author either outright inconsistency or strategic intentions. And on this level, as much as I fundamentally agree with Lagrée’s point when correctly understood, I also agree with Curley that she may have missed an important aspect of Strauss’s argument, which is perhaps less about going behind the text to make it say something other than what it actually says, and more about finding a way to reconcile conflicting strands of what it actually says so as to produce a unified interpretation.⁵ For it is true that, in Spinoza’s texts, there are both self-reflective statements pointing in the direction of strategic writing and apparent contradictions within the text that can be resolved by appealing to “writing between the lines,” even if Strauss grossly exaggerates those contradictions.⁶

It is, however, another matter whether we should understand Spinoza’s strategies as parts of such a pervasive art of writing deployed for the purpose of avoiding persecution, governed by an esoteric effort to dissimulate more authentic views, or whether better options exist for explaining their function and construction. I, for my part, find little or nothing in the TTP or the related correspondence strong enough to warrant the assumption that fear of persecution was a significant factor in its composition. In 1665, when Spinoza began writing the TTP, he may have been provoked to undertake it by the “excessive authority and aggressiveness” of the preachers.⁷ In the event, however, the preachers’ aggressiveness led him to speak his mind with remarkable candor rather than the contrary.⁸

1 Lagrée, *Spinoza et le débat religieux*, pp. 9–13, esp. p. 10. The principle was first formulated by Alexandre Matheron but, as far as I know, never in print.

2 I partly owe the formulation to Pierre-François Moreau. For a similar point regarding Pierre Bayle, see Lærke, *Les Lumières*, p. 82.

3 See Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, p. 247 n. 6; see also p. 172.

4 Gueroult described his own method as a “return to the text” (Gueroult, *Descartes*, I, p. 10). This focus on the text was, in turn, grounded in convictions that Gueroult inherited from Victor Delbos (see Lærke, “French Historiographical Spinozism,” pp. 3–4, 9).

5 Curley, “Resurrecting Leo Strauss,” p. 131. Curley also defends the “fundamental point” of Strauss’s approach in the editorial preface to the TTP, C II.53–6.

6 Lagrée and Curley agree on this point. See Lagrée, *Spinoza et le débat religieux*, p. 13 n. 22; Curley, “Resurrecting Leo Strauss,” p. 131 n. 11.

7 Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. October 1, 1665, Letter 30, G IV.166|C II.15.

8 For an interesting analysis of Spinoza’s attitude toward censorship and anonymity, see Cooper, “Freedom of Speech.”

Moreover, the political conjuncture in 1665 was such that the preachers, no matter how aggressive, had limited means of enforcing their agenda. Except in extreme cases, the public authorities were deeply averse to backing up the orthodox Calvinists with coercive power.¹ More importantly, however, I find that understanding Spinoza's strategies not as attempts to dissimulate but to adapt—to adapt religious terminology to Spinoza's philosophy in terms of content and, conversely, to adapt Spinoza's philosophy to religious terminology in terms of form—most often makes for better and more comprehensive explanations of the TTP.² In fact, Spinoza's most explicit statement about dissimulation and caution in the TTP is formulated in the context of his broader theory of adaptation. He thus recognizes that accommodating one's discourse to the mentality of interlocutors can be useful for civil life because “the better we know the customs and character of men ... the more cautiously we will be able to live among them and the better we will be able to accommodate our actions and lives to their mentality, as much as reason allows.”³

I should already here mention one particularly complex instance of these strategies of adaptation governing Spinoza's argumentation throughout the TTP. The doubtless most powerful argument in favor of an esoteric reading of the TTP is the exposition of the so-called doctrines of universal faith in TTP XIV. These are doctrines that Spinoza insists people must believe in order to be pious, but many of which, if compared with the position he defends in the Ethics, he arguably considered false. Some attempts have been made to demonstrate Spinoza's own commitment to some version or interpretation of those doctrines in order to overcome the Straussian conclusion that they are all smoke and mirrors. I am unconvinced that such interpretive reconciliation is necessary, or even desirable, in order to grasp the overall coherence of Spinoza's philosophical and religious views, or to understand the way that the doctrines constitute a useful theological framework adapted to the mentality of the common man. Instead, in Chapter 9, I offer a reading of the doctrines of universal faith that attempts to overcome these difficulties in another way, by assigning to such doctrines an epistemological status quite different from that of philosophical propositions, but without putting into doubt the kind of practical or functional truth Spinoza in fact attributes to them. Still, despite my resistance to esoteric readings, I will not contest that the TTP is often best analyzed as a strategic piece of writing whose inner tensions are not the result of carelessness, but almost always rhetorical effects of a careful linguistic and argumentative strategy in which the author never loses sight of his prospective “philosophical reader” or, indeed, of those whom he would prefer “to neglect this book entirely” because they would only “make trouble by interpreting it perversely.”⁴

Outline of the General Argument

Before delving into the interpretation of Spinoza's text, let me finally provide a brief outline of how my global argument is structured and how the chapters of this book are organized. Putting to one side the

1 For more on censorship in the Dutch Republic, see Chapter 2, sect. “Freedom of Conscience I: The Political Circumstances.” I insist on the year 1665 to forestall an objection referring to the later Annotation XXI, written by Spinoza in view of a planned but never published second edition of the TTP. Here, in relation to a matter of biblical exegesis that need not concern us, Spinoza indicates that he has “preferred to pass over these things in silence, for reasons which the oppressiveness of our times does not permit me to explain. For the wise a hint is enough” (G III.224|C II.224; Curley appeals to this passage in “Resurrecting Leo Strauss,” pp. 134–5 n. 19; the phrase does not figure in all versions of the annotations: Marchand refers to “injustices and reigning superstition”). But what “times” is Spinoza speaking of here? When he undertook writing the annotations in later 1675, circumstances had changed from the time of writing of the TTP, published in 1670, two years before the assassination of the De Witt brothers. In 1675, the preachers now had the backing of the Orangist public authorities to enforce their agenda. Spinoza had felt the impact of these changed circumstances when preparing to publish the Ethics in the fall of that year, only to find out that it was now too dangerous because “certain theologians, perhaps the authors of the rumor [that a certain book of mine about God was in the press], took the opportunity to complain about me to the Prince [of Orange] and the magistrates” (Spinoza to Oldenburg, September/October 1675, Letter 68, G IV.299|C II.459; see Moreau and Steenbakkens, “Introduction,” pp. 24–5). It was exactly at this time that he was also writing up his annotations to the TTP. This would suggest that the “times” Spinoza refers to in Annotation XXI were specifically those of the Dutch Republic after the fall of De Witt.

2 Lagrée, *Spinoza et le débat religieux*, p. 12; for a similar viewpoint, see Rosenthal, “Spinoza's Universal Dogmas.” See finally, for more critical discussion of Strauss, Jaquet, *Les expressions de la puissance d'agir*, pp. 17–30. For a Straussian reading which tends to do the contrary, i.e., reduce Spinoza's theory of accommodation to a practice of dissimulation, or a mere “practice of outward conformity,” see Smith, *Spinoza*, pp. 52–4.

3 TTP IV, G III.62|C II.130.

4 TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.75.

introduction in this chapter and the conclusion in Chapter 12, it is constituted by three main chapter blocks.

In the first block, formed by Chapters 2 to 5, I attempt to pin down exactly what Spinoza understands by the expression *libertas philosophandi*.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to a study of the historical circumstances and the intellectual context of Spinoza's conception. I am principally interested in the common meaning and connotations of the expression itself. For Spinoza, the question of the freedom of philosophizing was associated with two distinct controversies. Beginning with the disputes between Italian natural philosophers and the Roman Catholic Church in the wake of Galileo's condemnation in 1633, the expression itself became inseparable from theological-philosophical disputes about academic freedom and the separation of natural science from theology. This was still the principal meaning of the notion in the quarrels between Cartesian philosophers and Calvinist theologians in the Dutch universities during the middle and later decades of the seventeenth century. As I show via an analysis of Spinoza's brief exchange with Ludwig Fabritius regarding a university position in Heidelberg that the philosopher declined, Spinoza widened the scope of the expression, bringing it into contact with another controversy regarding freedom of religious conscience going back to the early years of the Dutch Republic in the later sixteenth century, but which constantly returned in different guises throughout the entire seventeenth century. I argue that it was Spinoza who first managed to bring these two conceptions of academic freedom and freedom of religious conscience together under a single, systematic conception of *libertas philosophandi*.

Chapter 3 contains a more text- and term-oriented analysis of the term "philosophizing" and the meaning it acquires within the argumentative economy of the TTP. I argue that by "philosophizing" we should not understand "to do philosophy" in a narrow sense, but a broader activity—an argumentative style—tied to the use of the natural light common to all and of right and sound reason. It includes not just adequate deductions from certain premises and legitimate inferences from true definitions, but also reasoning from experience and certain principles of interpretation; not just rational analysis of truth, but also historical inquiry into meaning and sound judgment regarding authority. The chapter lays down the groundwork for what I shall argue later, to wit, that when recommending that the state should grant citizens the permission to philosophize freely, Spinoza had something considerably broader in mind than just allowing natural philosophers to pursue their studies without interference from the theologians. The chapter constitutes the systematic counterpart to the historical argument already developed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 focuses on chapter XI of the TTP where Spinoza offers an analysis of the Apostles' Letters in the New Testament. On his analysis, the Apostles use a "style" or "mode of speech" in their Letters which is argumentative, candid, non-apodictic, and egalitarian. Contrasting it with the prophetic command used by the Apostles when they spoke publicly as prophets, he also defines the Apostles' epistolary style in terms of giving mutual "brotherly advice." This style, I argue, forms a veritable paradigm of how to engage in free philosophizing. In this chapter, I also show how, by conceiving the collective exercise of the freedom of philosophizing in terms of mutual teaching and the open sharing of knowledge among noble minds, Spinoza draws on common, classical ideals of intellectual friendship.

Chapter 5 studies the kind of authority that free philosophizing is associated with. Who has the authority to give brotherly advice and what kind of authority does such advice come with? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to reconstruct Spinoza's—largely implicit—theory of *authoritas* which includes numerous both genuine and spurious kinds, including prophetic, scriptural, divine, priestly, private, and public authority. Such a reconstruction eventually allows us to outline exactly the features of the special kind of authority associated with free philosophizing, namely "authority to teach and advise." This authority belongs to all human beings as an inalienable natural right that they can only be denied by turning them into beasts or automata. It is, moreover, a private authority which nonetheless is exercised in relation to others and which therefore also has a public dimension. Next,

addressing a key distinction, I discuss how the association of free philosophizing with the style of brotherly advice and the natural authority to teach and advise sets it apart from the legal permission to speak one's mind that, in TTP XX, Spinoza recommends the sovereign powers should grant citizens in a free republic. Finally, I discuss his conception of "violent rule," defined as any political attempt to deprive citizens of their inalienable natural right to teach and advise.

In the second block of chapters, formed by Chapters 6 to 8, I address a serious concern in Spinoza's model of the freedom of philosophizing. It arises from the fact that free philosophizing is defined in terms of a natural authority rather than a civil right. Nothing in Spinoza's conceptualization of our authority to teach and advise stipulates that it can be used only to engage in candid exchanges with equals in view of our common advantage, and not to deceive and manipulate others in order to gain control over them and seek our own private benefit. In other words, since the authority to teach and advise does not fall under civil law, and since the concept itself contains nothing to prevent it, Spinoza's conception provides him with no conceptual resources for excluding uses of our natural authority to teach and advise that are directly adverse to the freedom of philosophizing.

Chapter 6 studies in some detail these "unfree" uses of our natural authority to teach and advise. They take two basic forms: submissive and abusive. In submissive uses, we ourselves reinforce our lack of control over our own free judgment. They are associated with what Spinoza describes as "preoccupied" or "prejudiced" minds. Such preoccupation and prejudice are contrasted with the integrity and self-contentment of minds in control of their own free judgment. In abusive uses, we prevent others from exercising their freedom of judgment. Spinoza discusses them as "deception with evil intent" and "flattery." The chapter resituates these notions in a complex context of classical sources and contemporary accounts of similar vices, most importantly humanist discussions of fraudulent political counsel. The chapter finally offers an account of how the submissive and abusive uses of the natural authority to teach and advise relate to violent rule and the political instrumentalization of the mob.

In Chapters 7 and 8, I turn to the remedies that Spinoza proposes to counter both submissive and abusive uses of our natural authority to teach and advise and thus curb the "unavoidable disadvantages" of prejudice, deceit with evil intent, and flattery. The first remedy, studied in Chapter 7, is associated specifically with the authority to advise. It consists in drastically expanding the structures of political counsel to encompass the entire citizenry. Denouncing the traditional courtly systems of privy counselors, Spinoza envisages a broader public sphere of free philosophizing as a source of political advice for the public authorities. He thus lays down the groundwork of a normative theory of active citizenship and democratic participation. This forms the basis for discussions of absolutism, political resistance, and the principles of democratic deliberation and collegiality.

The second remedy, specifically concerned with the authority to teach, is the topic of Chapter 8. It consists in a rudimentary program for public education, intended to ensure that citizens receive sufficient instruction in the arts and sciences to be worthwhile consulting, but also enough civic education for them to feel obliged to participate in free philosophizing with a view to public benefit. Spinoza's theory of education is frustratingly underdeveloped. A conjectural reconstruction of his views on the topic can, however, be made, partly via internal reconstruction of his use of education-related terminology in the TTP, partly via context, taking into account theories of popular and civic education elaborated by Dutch republican thinkers very close to him. Finally, Spinoza's combined views on counsel and education are brought into sharper focus by being systematically contrasted with those of Hobbes.

The third and final block of chapters comprises Chapters 9 to 11. They discuss how to organize a free republic with citizens who are less than fully rational and whose actions are not always guided by reason, but often by the imagination. In order to ensure that such citizens consistently respect certain "standards" (*normae*) of communal life, they must learn—as an important part of the public instruction of all citizens, to be taught in the schools and from the pulpits—so-called doctrines (*dogmata*). The

way that Spinoza conceptually relates standards to doctrines is at the very core of his theological-political model. Standards are practical in the sense that they consist in precepts or moral lessons about how to act. Doctrines, by contrast, help ensure that people adhere to those standards, but are themselves “speculative” in the sense that they consist in propositions that people are required to believe. Doctrines, however, need not be true in order to fulfill their practical purpose. They do not aim at making people understand or at communicating adequate knowledge. They aim at structuring the collective imagination of citizens, at shaping their mental life in such a way that they will act according to their own rational self-interest even when they do not have the requisite knowledge to adequately understand what that consists in. Spinoza envisages two sets of such doctrines, one theological and the other political.

In Chapter 9, I consider the theological side of Spinoza’s doctrinal model, concerned with the so-called doctrines of universal faith discussed in TTP XIV. The theoretical truth or falsity of such doctrines is irrelevant to their purpose. They only serve to structure the collective religious imagination of common people according to a certain practical standard which consists in the exercise of justice and charity alone, also called “true religion.” If theoretical truth is irrelevant to the function of such doctrines of faith, it is, however, still necessary that those who profess them should believe them to be theoretically true in order for them to fulfill their practical purpose. No one will act in accordance with a doctrine that they do not believe to be true. In the second half of the chapter, I show how these epistemic complications eventually prompt Spinoza to break with the model of doctrinal minimalism otherwise favored by tolerationist thinkers in his intellectual context, such as Hugo Grotius and Isaac d’Huisseau. As they do, Spinoza argues that excessive focus on inessential doctrinal divergences among different religions, confessions, and sects, at the expense of an otherwise common religious message of brotherly love, is one of the principal causes of theological hatred. Contrary to them, however, Spinoza does not argue that we should simply do away with such “indifferent things,” but recognizes that they play a significant role in ensuring that people embrace their doctrines of faith with the fervor required to render their beliefs practically efficacious. This argument is at the heart of Spinoza’s cautious and in some respects conflicted defense of religious pluralism.

In Chapter 10, now turning to the political side of Spinoza’s doctrinal model, I explore his “political doctrine” of the social contract as developed in TTP XVI, ostensibly as an account of how republics are originally established. The analysis I offer relies on the systematic assumption that, in this political context, Spinoza understands the notion of a “doctrine” in a way that is structurally analogous to the way in which he employs that same notion in the theological context. This implies in particular that I attribute a greater role to the imagination in my account of the contract theory than TTP XVI might otherwise suggest. Contrasting Spinoza’s views with those of Hobbes, I thus interpret the social contract not as a logical, historical, or causal account of the state’s foundations, but as a fictional narrative, grounded entirely in the imagination, that citizens in a free republic must embrace in order to prevent mutual persecution and ensure collective security. I show how such a reading of the social contract can help explain otherwise inconsistent assertions in the TTP. Finally, I suggest how it can help resolve, in a new way, fundamental tensions between the TTP and the later TP regarding the utility of a social contract that until now have been most convincingly explained in terms of a fundamental development between Spinoza’s two political treatises.

Chapter 11 studies how Spinoza’s theory of doctrines comes together in an integrated theological-political model of church–state relations. TTP XIX proposes a theory of *ius circa sacra* along broadly Erastian lines. Later, in TP VIII, Spinoza prolongs this theory with an argument in favor of establishing a national religion. These closely connected texts raise questions regarding the coherence of his overall model, especially about how to reconcile his defense of religious freedom with the establishment of a state-controlled national religion. Comparing Spinoza’s position with those of Hobbes and Lucius Antistius Constans (pseud.), the chapter attempts to solve these tensions by showing how Spinoza’s national religion is conceived as a general framework for safeguarding the definition of true religion, while still allowing for a plurality of forms of worship to exist within that framework. The chapter

concludes with an analysis of the specific situation of the Jews in the ancient Hebrew Republic which prompted Moses to impose religious uniformity, contrasting it with the historical circumstances of Spinoza's contemporary Dutch Republic.

The general conclusion in Chapter 12 offers some perspectives on Spinoza's understanding of the freedom of philosophizing. It argues how Spinoza's conception responded to the need for new normative theories of public debate and civic engagement in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. It also confronts Spinoza's conception of collective free philosophizing with Jürgen Habermas's classic account of the bourgeois public sphere. While pointing to essential similarities between their conceptions, it also shows how Spinoza's model of *libertas philosophandi*, based on democratic realignment of the structures of political counsel and sovereign command, and on a model of public speech driven by the pursuit of intellectual joy, offers a theoretical alternative to Habermas's dialectical understanding of the relations between the state and the public sphere, and to his consensus-oriented conception of public debate.

Circles and Spheres of Free Philosophizing

Two Controversies

In 1665, around the time he began writing the TTP, Spinoza explained to Henry Oldenburg, secretary to the Royal Society in London, how one of the principal aims of this new book project was to speak up for “the freedom of philosophizing and saying what we think, which I want to defend in every way.”¹ True to this original intention, the notion of “freedom of philosophizing” figures prominently in the subtitle of the work published some five years later, describing the contents of the work as “several discussions showing that the republic can grant freedom of philosophizing, without harming its piece and piety, and cannot deny it without destroying its peace and piety.”²

When readers contemporary with Spinoza heard of such an intention—defending the freedom of philosophizing—what were they likely to take that to mean? How do Spinoza’s intellectual context and historical circumstances illuminate what he meant when using that particular expression? In the Netherlands at the time when the TTP was published, freedom of thought was an important notion in the context of two distinct spheres of controversy. One sphere was concerned with academic freedom and the liberation of scientific research from the constraints of theology in the wake of Copernicanism and the introduction of the new Cartesian science in the Dutch universities. The other sphere was concerned with the question of freedom of religious conscience. This freedom was enshrined in the foundational texts of the young Dutch Republic but subject to a wide variety of interpretations and implementations throughout the long seventeenth century. Spinoza’s approach to the freedom of philosophizing was characterized by an original ambition to integrate these two distinct spheres of debate about academic freedom and freedom of religious conscience, bringing them together in a single conception of the freedom of philosophizing.

Academic Freedom

The notion *libertas philosophandi* is not originally Spinoza’s. It was coined by Italian natural philosophers around the end of the sixteenth century in the controversies about post-Copernican natural philosophy.³ In his letter to the rector of the University of Paris of 1588, Giordano Bruno already referred to himself as someone “at liberty to reason freely, philosophically in philosophy, and to express his own opinion.”⁴ A few decades later, in his famous 1615 Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina, first published in 1636, Galileo also employed the notion while discussing natural philosophy’s liberation from the constraints of theology, stressing that “one must not ... block the way of freedom of philosophizing about things of the world and of nature, as if they had all already been discovered and disclosed with certainty.”⁵ Tommaso Campanella took up the expression in a similar context in his *Apologia pro Galileo* (written 1616; published 1622), here claiming to have shown that “the freedom of philosophizing is more vigorous in Christian than in other nations.”⁶ Campanella’s conception, as also Galileo’s, relied on a distinction between two domains of human knowledge, nature and Scripture, seen as mutually exclusive and governed by distinct epistemological norms.⁷ In his 1624 *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus aristoteleos*, Pierre Gassendi, the foremost among the “new Epicureans” as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz later called them,⁸ adopted a closely related conception of *libertas philosophandi*. He used the phrase while defending a new notion of intellectual

¹ Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. October 1, 1665, Letter 30, G IV.166|C II.15.

² TTP Title, G III.3|C II.65.

³ Stewart, “*Libertas Philosophandi*,” pp. 34–5.

⁴ Bruno quoted in Sutton, “The Phrase,” p. 312.

⁵ Galileo, *The Essential Galileo*, p. 121; see also Sutton, “The Phrase”; Damanti, *Libertas philosophandi*.

⁶ Campanella, *Apologia pro Galileo*, p. 27, trans. in Sutton, “The Phrase,” p. 311.

⁷ See Headley, “Campanella,” pp. 165–77. For studies of more radical, Cartesian iterations of the battle for *libertas philosophandi* among the novatores in mid-seventeenth-century Italy, see Girard, “*Libertins et libertas philosophandi*” and Girard, *Comme des lumières*, pp. 25–7.

⁸ Leibniz, “*Sentiments de Socrate opposés aux nouveaux stoïciens et épicuriens*,” in *Sämtliche Schriften*, VI, iv, pp. 1384–5.

integrity and independence, as opposed to the submission to Aristotelian orthodoxy characterizing the old scholastic philosophy.¹ In Gassendi as well, the separation of two domains of, on the one hand, reason and nature and, on the other, revelation and Scripture played a crucial role in his attempt to liberate natural philosophy from the authority of a heavily theologized philosophical tradition.² In all three authors, “freedom of philosophizing” referred to the independent pursuit of truth in natural philosophy and was associated with the freedom to judge according to one’s own reason without regard for a given authority, be it theological or philosophical. As Galileo wrote,

it seems more advisable to first become sure about the necessary and immutable truth of the matter, over which no one has control, than to condemn one side when such certainty is lacking; this would imply a loss of freedom of decision and of choice insofar as it would give necessity to things which are presently indifferent, free, and dependent on the will of the supreme authority.³

These discussions were still very much alive in the later seventeenth century. For example, while traveling in Italy in 1689–90, Leibniz got caught up in the still ongoing controversies about Galileo’s condemnation and defended the *libertas philosophandi* promoted by the Italian natural philosophers. In October 1699, he thus recounted to Antonio Magliabechi how, while in Rome, he had encouraged “certain distinguished men with authority” to “favor philosophical freedom in matters of no great danger.”⁴ He firmly opposed the censorship of Galileo and defended the right to freely inquire into natural philosophy, which he saw as harmless to true religion: “I have no objections to refuting authors whose opinions are dangerous, but I do not know whether it is suitable to establish a sort of inquisition against them, when their false opinions have no influence on morality.”⁵

At the time, however, the notion had acquired a broader application and was sometimes employed more generally in discussions regarding theological censorship. For example, writing in 1702 to Bartholomew des Bosses concerning the persecutions of Jansenists, Leibniz noted yet again that even if he did “not approve of the main views of an author, [he] should like to have conceded to the learned ... the freedom of philosophizing, which inspires competition and arouses intellects,” and he warned that “it is extremely harmful that freedom of opinion be restrained from day to day within unnecessary limits.”⁶ For another prominent example, at the beginning of the “*Éclaircissements*” that the French Huguenot and skeptic Pierre Bayle added to the 1702 edition of his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, while attempting to justify the fact that he had reported a great number of things in his dictionary that appeared either atheist, Manichean, Pyrrhonian, or obscene to his readers, he advanced a number of reasons that had made him “think that if [he] sometimes took recourse to what is called the freedom to philosophize, it would not be taken in a bad way,” while acknowledging in the same breath that “what took place did not correspond to what [he] had hoped for.”⁷

Turning now to Spinoza’s more local context, the phrase *libertas philosophandi* was circulating in the Netherlands from the early mid-seventeenth century onward as a kind of rallying cry for the new philosophy and its struggles against the theologians. As shown by Rienk Vermij, Copernican astronomy was widely debated throughout the seventeenth century, partly framed within Cartesian debates about the freedom of philosophizing.⁸ Descartes’s long letter to Gisbertus Voetius of 1643, concerned with academic freedom, proclaimed free philosophizing, including the freedom to err, a necessary part of natural philosophy:

1 See Maia Neto, “Scepticism,” pp. 231–2.

2 Murr, “Foi religieuse et ‘libertas philosophandi’ chez Gassendi,” pp. 85–100, esp. 87. See also MacLean, “The ‘Sceptical Crisis’ Reconsidered,” pp. 268–71.

3 Galileo, *The Essential Galileo*, p. 140.

4 Leibniz to Magliabechi, October 1699, in *Opera omnia*, V, p. 128; see also Robinet, G.W. Leibniz. *Iter Italicum*, pp. 58–9, 96–118.

5 Leibniz to Burnett, January 23, 1698, *Philosophische Schriften*, III, p. 221; see also Antognazza, *Leibniz: An Intellectual Biography*, pp. 301–2.

6 Leibniz to Des Bosses, July 21, 1702, in *The Leibniz-Des Bosses Correspondence*, pp. 93 and 95.

7 Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, XV, p. 271; see also Stewart, “*Libertas Philosophandi*,” p. 32.

8 See Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans*, pp. 272, 279–87; Verbeek, “Spinoza et la liberté de philosopher,” pp. 19–28.

So free has philosophizing always been, and so many have been those hitherto who have harmlessly committed errors with regard to the knowledge of nature, that if I, coming after the others, have been deceived, there is no fear that this will put the human race at risk.¹

In 1655, Lambert van Velthuysen, a prominent modern philosopher in Utrecht, published a “Proof that neither the doctrine about the sun standing still nor that of the motion of the earth is contrary to God’s word,”² where he presented the Dutch debates about astronomy and its theological implications as an avatar of a broader controversy about the orthodoxy of Cartesian philosophy ongoing since the early 1640s. Van Velthuysen took it upon himself to push back against the theologians so that “nobody will be subjected to prejudice too easily; religion may keep its liberty; and learned speculations and opinions will not be subjugated.”³

A few years earlier, the Leiden philosophy professor Adriaan Heereboord—a so-called reformed philosopher in favor of reframing rather than opposing Aristotelianism by means of the new philosophy—employed the expression in his inaugural lecture of 1641, partly used in his *Ad curatores epistola*, a frequently reprinted text, including in his 1654 compendium *Meletemata philosophica* that Spinoza was familiar with. Heereboord used the phrase in a sense close to the one already found in Gassendi, as a rallying cry for those who wanted to free philosophy from the scholastic tradition. He praised in particular Bacon and Descartes for having taken up the baton, but also established a longer roster of natural philosophers.⁴ Hence, in a 1647 disputation *De libertate philosophandi*, reprinted in the *Meletemata*, Heereboord described Pico, Ramus, Telesio, Patrizi, Campanella, Vivès, and Gassendi as so many philosophers who had practiced “the freedom of philosophizing,” liberating natural philosophy from the old authority and undertaking much-needed reform of the discipline.⁵ Contrary to Gassendi, however, Heereboord’s reform program was not intended to liberate philosophy from Aristotelianism, but rather to liberate Aristotelianism from scholasticism by reading it through modern philosophy. The effort reached back to Italian naturalists of the previous century, Jacobus Zabarella in particular.⁶ We also find it among other philosophers in Holland at the time, most prominently Johannes De Raey—a student of Heereboord—whose *Clavis philosophiae naturalis* found a substantial European audience.⁷ In this context, Theo Verbeek highlights an interesting disputation by De Raey, written in 1666, concerned with “freedom and slavery in general but also in philosophy,” where he associates the freedom of philosophizing with clear and distinct ideas, limiting it to philosophy as a discipline.⁸

In sum, in seventeenth-century Europe, including in the Netherlands, the use and discussion of the phrase *libertas philosophandi* focused either on the question of the relations between natural philosophy and theology, or on the relations between Aristotelian, scholastic, renaissance, and modern natural philosophy. It was associated with the efforts of the new philosophy to de-theologize the discipline. By the middle of the century, Theo Verbeek explains, the phrase “refer[red] to the professional freedom of philosophers, that is, the freedom they should enjoy to pursue their own

1 Descartes to Voetius, 1643. AT VIII(2).3, trans. in Stewart, “*Libertas Philosophandi*,” p. 37.

2 Van Velthuysen, *Bewys*.

3 Van Velthuysen cit. in Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans*, p. 281; see also Krop, “The General Freedom,” p. 81.

4 See Heereboord, *Ad curatores, Epistola*, in *Meletemata philosophica*, pp. 1–20, esp. 2 and 5 (I use the 1665 edition).

5 Heereboord, *Disputationum ex Philosophia selectarum*, II, pp. 330–4. See also Strazzoni, “The Dutch Fates,” pp. 251–81, esp. 253–6; Robinet, *Aux sources de l’esprit cartésien*, p. 304; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 47–9; Nyden-Bullock, *Spinoza’s Radical Cartesian Mind*, pp. 10–11.

6 Similarly to the later so-called reformed philosophers, Zabarella attempted to give voice to a more authentic Aristotelianism, insisting that one must “philosophize on Aristotle in a correct and Aristotelian manner” (cit. in Jardine, “Keeping Order,” p. 184). On the important reception of Zabarella in northern Europe, see MacLean, “Mediations of Zabarella,” pp. 173–98. Zabarella’s *De rebus naturalibus* is, for example, omnipresent in Heereboord’s *Meletemata*.

7 The young Leibniz, for example, defended a reformed philosophy drawing on the work of both De Raey and Zabarella. See Bodéüs, “Jean de Raey”; Mercer, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics*, pp. 100–9, 114–19; Mercer, “Leibniz and His Master”; Lærke, “Form, Figure,” pp. 139–43.

8 See Verbeek, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, p. 152. I have consulted the expanded edition published as an appendix in Raei, *Cogitata de interpretatione*, appendix V: “*Libertas et Servitus universim atque etiam in Philosophando*,” pp. 425–37, esp. 428. See also Strazzoni, “The Dutch Fates,” pp. 256–7.

program, without interference of the ‘higher faculties’ (medicine, law and especially theology).”¹ It was in the context of these controversies that, in October 1656, the States of Holland issued an “Order relating to the entanglement of theology and philosophy and to the abuse of the freedom to philosophize to the detriment of Scripture,” stipulating that the freedom of philosophizing was not to be encroached upon for reasons of theology, but that abuse of that freedom by philosophers was not acceptable either.²

Declining a Job Offer: Spinoza’s Answer to Fabritius

Spinoza’s argument in favor of the freedom of philosophizing in the TTP contributes—and was doubtless intended to contribute—to these discussions about the liberation of natural philosophy from theological and scholastic constraints. His hostility to scholasticism comes through in the preface to the TTP when he rails against those who have not “taught anything but Aristotelian and Platonic speculations” and “have accommodated Scripture to these speculations.”³ The separation of philosophy from theology in TTP XV, i.e., his notion “that Scripture leaves reason absolutely free, and that it has nothing in common with philosophy, but that each rests on its own foundation,”⁴ is clearly indebted to the modern conceptions of academic freedom stemming from Galileo. The same heritage can be felt in Spinoza’s argument when, in the preface to the TTP, he discourages the “common man” from reading his book, for “they will do themselves no good, but will harm others who would philosophize more freely if they weren’t prevented by this one thought: that reason ought to be the handmaid of theology.”⁵ Moreover, in TTP II when he refers to those “who have learned to philosophize more correctly, since they understand that the earth moves,” he clearly alludes to post-Galilean astronomers and to the Dutch debates about the new astronomy in the preceding decades.⁶ Finally, it is also the originally Galilean effort to isolate natural knowledge from Scriptural revelation that Spinoza has in mind when stressing that the truth of philosophy “must be sought only from nature”⁷ and that the “foundation of philosophy” is “the universal history of nature.”⁸

The question is, however, whether Spinoza’s understanding of the freedom of philosophizing is explicable in terms of those debates alone; whether the “freedom of philosophizing” he promotes refers only to the theologically independent pursuit of natural philosophy. Can the “philosophizing” in question be understood, in Verbeek’s formulation, exclusively as “a technical and professional affair, a competency which is acquired through the reading and commentary of texts, and through discussion with the great philosophers of the past”?⁹ I think not. In Spinoza’s understanding of the *libertas philosophandi*, Verbeek distinguishes between a “professional right” concerned with academic freedom and a “civil right” pertaining to the constitution of society as a whole.¹⁰ I have, as we shall see, some slight misgivings about the characterization of *libertas philosophandi* as a civil right because I think it is first of all a natural one. I do, however, fully agree with Verbeek that Spinoza’s conception also, and importantly, includes this broader, public dimension.

We can turn to Spinoza’s correspondence for a good illustration of the point. In 1673, Ludwig Fabritius, professor of theology, extended an offer of employment at the University of Heidelberg to Spinoza on behalf of Karl Ludwig, the Elector Palatine. It was doubtless with the academic notion of *libertas philosophandi* in mind that he tepidly reassured the philosopher: “You will have the most ample

1 Verbeek, “*Libertas Philosophandi*,” in Van Bunge et al., *The Continuum Companion*, p. 252.

2 The order was intended to calm the overheated theological controversies that began with the publication of the Cartesian Christoph Wittich’s *Dissertationes duae* in 1653. The first dissertation was on the use and abuse of Scripture in philosophy; the second on the indefinite nature of the world and the movement of the Earth. The *libertas philosophica* was a central part of the latter discussion. See Stewart, “*Libertas Philosophandi*,” p. 41; Dibon, “*Histoire des idées*,” pp. 444–5; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, p. 52.

3 TTP Preface, C III.9|C II.71; see also TTP XIII, G III.168|C II.258: “If you ask what mysteries they see hidden in Scripture, you will find nothing but the inventions of Aristotle or Plato or someone else like that.”

4 TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.72.

5 TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.75.

6 TTP II, G III.36|C II.101.

7 TTP XIV, G III.179|C II.271.

8 TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278.

9 Verbeek, “*Spinoza et la liberté de philosophe*,” p. 21.

10 Verbeek, “*Libertas philosophandi*,” in Van Bunge et al., *The Continuum Companion*, p. 252.

freedom of philosophizing [Philosophandi libertatem], which he believes you will not abuse to disturb the publicly established religion.”¹ By “freedom,” he meant that Spinoza would be able to pursue university research in philosophy without interference from the theology faculty. At the same time, however, Fabritius thought it necessary to remind his correspondent that he was not issuing a license to upset the political and theological balance in the broader public sphere. Spinoza was, in short, to be allowed to discuss natural philosophy freely with his natural philosophy colleagues and would not be bothered by theologians, but was in return required not to take his argument outside the university buildings and to confine himself to the academic setting. Fabritius, an orthodox Calvinist, was rather less than enthusiastic about the prospect of Spinoza accepting the offer and his letter was arguably devised to elicit exactly the response he in fact received: Spinoza declined.² For, as the philosopher wrote back, “I don’t know what the limits of that freedom of philosophizing might have to be, for me not to seem to want to disturb the publicly established religion.”³

The episode, and Spinoza’s reply, is instructive in a number of respects. First, Spinoza’s cautious if not outright suspicious attitude toward his correspondent, Fabritius, an advisor to the Elector Palatine, illustrates a deeper and more general distrust of court counselors that I will consider in some detail in Chapters 6 and 7.⁴ Second, and more importantly, it shows that Spinoza did not see the relatively settled and at least partly institutionalized consensus about the nature and limits of the freedom of philosophizing as a satisfactory status quo. He had misgivings about the restriction not to challenge what was “publicly established.” Claiming not to know what that would imply, exactly, he clearly felt uneasy about the idea that this broader, public dimension of free philosophizing should be politically and theologically regulated. As it appears, he did not think that the freedom of philosophizing should be constrained within the narrow limits of academic freedom, but that it involved an essential, broader relation to the public sphere. It was to be extended to a nonacademic audience and, as I will argue in more detail in Chapter 3, apply to a less technical understanding of “philosophizing” than just academic writing about natural philosophy. Spinoza was not particularly keen on gaining an academic audience. He was, on the contrary, worried about the institutional limits that placing himself in a university setting would put on his exchanges with people outside academia.⁵

This conclusion gains additional weight when considering Spinoza’s own training, the circles he moved in, and the people with whom he engaged. As the reply to Fabritius makes quite clear, Spinoza did not see formal university education as the best training ground for free philosophers. In that respect, the exchange contains a valuable lesson about his attitude toward higher education that we will have occasion to explore in some detail in Chapter 8. But it also reflects biographical circumstances. Spinoza himself held no university degree but was for the most part educated outside the universities, in the schools of the Jewish community of Amsterdam in his youth and, later, in the Latin school of Franciscus van den Enden.⁶ He likely did spend a couple of years attending lectures at Leiden University in the early 1660s, but he never enrolled. Moreover, he did not surround himself or exchange much with university students or professors. Close friends like Jarig Jelles, Simon de Vries, and Pieter Balling were wealthy merchants associated with the collegiant movement. Certainly, some of his acquaintances were distinguished intellectuals who engaged in highly technical natural philosophy: Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, a late arrival in Spinoza’s circles, was an important modern philosopher, mathematician, and experimentalist, later the author of an influential epistemological treatise, the *Medicina mentis* of 1687, and the first European to rediscover the technique for making porcelain; Johannes Hudde produced important work in mathematics and optics while working with Frans van Schooten in the 1650s and 1660s. Yet others were prominent figures on the Dutch cultural scene: Lodewijk Meyer was director of the Amsterdam City Theater and a founding member of the intellectual

1 Fabritius to Spinoza, February 16, 1673, Letter 47, G IV, 234–5 | C II.396; trans. modified.

2 See Mayer, “Spinoza’s Berufung”; Roth, *Institutio oratoria*, pp. 451–552.

3 Spinoza to Fabritius, March 30, 1673, Letter 48, G IV.236 | C II.397.

4 See Chapter 6, sect. “Flattery”; and Chapter 7, sect. “Public Consultation and Political Resistance.”

5 For an alternative reading of the exchange with Fabritius, see Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l’idée de citoyenneté*, pp. 65–6.

6 On the nature and status of Latin schools in the Dutch republic, see Frijhoff and Spies, 1650: *Hard-Won Unity*, pp. 243–6.

society Nil volentibus arduum; Johannes Bouwmeester moved in the same circles. But none of these people held a post at a university or any other school of higher education and, surely, when Spinoza addressed the TTP to those “who would philosophize more freely,” he did not intend to exclude his own intellectual community.

Freedom of Conscience I: The Political Circumstances

We shall have occasion to return in more detail to the importance of Spinoza’s broader conception of the freedom of philosophizing for his conception of civic engagement and public education in Chapters 7 and 8. Here, however, we need to consider in more depth the implications it has for the extension of the notion itself, or how it affects the topics that the notion is concerned with. Most importantly, broadening the notion of the freedom of philosophizing to encompass also broader debate within the public sphere implies that it begins to overlap with another notion that was at the heart of the Dutch political debates throughout the long seventeenth century, namely freedom of religious conscience. Spinoza, admittedly, never explicitly uses that precise notion. He does, however, stress in his conception of “freedom of judgment” that everyone should be granted the right “to worship God according to his mentality.”¹ Moreover, he declares that

since each person has the supreme right to think freely, even about religion, and it’s inconceivable that anyone can abandon his claim to this right, each person will also have the supreme right and the supreme authority to judge freely concerning religion, and hence to explain it and interpret it for himself.²

Clearly, Spinoza’s conception of the freedom of philosophizing referred not just to the Dutch debate about academic freedom. It also, and importantly, contributed to a general discussion about freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion in particular, that reached back to the founding of the Dutch Republic.

That republic was born from constant war and religious strife. The 1579 Union of Utrecht was more the result of exasperation with conflict than of any genuine ambition of national unity. With the document of the Union, the Northern Provinces somewhat inadvertently—it was certainly not designed for that purpose—acquired a rudimentary common constitution that should later prove foundational, but that for many decades still did not make for anything like a genuine confederation.³ The United Provinces remained a highly unstable and conflict-ridden conglomeration of territories and peoples with distinct political and religious aspirations. Indeed, as Raia Prokhovnik puts it laconically, “the Netherlanders were uniting in the desire to reaffirm their fiercely held separateness.”⁴ Moreover, while the Spanish rule was abjured in 1581 by the States General, the independence of the United Provinces was not established until the 1648 Treaty of Münster.

Already in 1579, however, the Netherlands found themselves at a religious crossroads, having to decide how to deal with the religious coexistence of Catholics and Calvinists. As Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, a prominent Huguenot and advisor to William of Orange, put it in a brief *Discours sur la permission de liberté de religion*, written that same year: “Taking everything into consideration, we have two choices: we can either allow them to live in peace with us or we can all die together; we can either let them be or, desiring to destroy them, be ourselves destroyed by their ruin.”⁵ The Dutch went for the first option because the religious geography of the Netherlands did not really leave them any other option: freedom of conscience was expressly granted in article XIII of the Union of Utrecht,

¹ TTP Preface, G III.7 | C II.69.

² TTP VII, G III.117 | C II.191.

³ Prokhovnik, *Spinoza and Republicanism*, pp. 16, 28–9.

⁴ Prokhovnik, *Spinoza and Republicanism*, p. 25.

⁵ Anon. [probably Philippe Duplessis-Mornay], *A Discourse upon the Freedom of Religion, called Religions-vrede, in the Netherlands*, in Kossman and Mellink, *Texts*, pp. 163–4. See also Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought*, pp. 221–3.

declaring that “in accordance with the Pacification of Ghent each individual enjoys freedom of religion and no one is persecuted or questioned about his religion.”¹

Subsequently, with freedom of conscience thus embedded in the basic political construction of the United Provinces, the problem was no longer to choose for or against it, but to establish what, exactly, it was supposed to consist in and how far and to whom it extended.² The earlier 1576 Pacification of Ghent, an important reference for determining the nature and range of freedom of conscience, had itself been subject to a whole range of interpretations, in particular with regard to the degree of freedom it extended to Roman Catholics. Moreover, with the establishment of the United Provinces and their separation from the south in 1579, Calvinism was established as the “public” religion. This was a notoriously ambiguous status. The Calvinist church was not exactly a state religion. It was not subject to the control of civil government but doctrinally and, to some extent, institutionally independent. Still, it was privileged: it enjoyed the support of the state, financial and otherwise, and was given considerable leeway to shape public opinion and morality. By the end of the 1580s, placcaeten or edicts forbidding public worship other than Calvinist had been issued everywhere. On the local level, however, authorities turned a blind eye to both the private and semi-private practice of other cults, establishing precedence for the kind of “managed toleration,” in Christine Kooi’s expression, that gave rise to the unique situation characteristic of the Dutch Republic, namely “a state with a privileged church but a multi-confessional population.”³ Freedom of conscience became an increasingly private freedom as the orthodox Calvinist church, as the state-funded public church, came to dominate civil society.⁴ But the question always remained contentious: the toleration of Catholics was hotly debated in the later decades of the sixteenth century; the toleration of Arminians was denied after the Synod of Dort; the toleration of Jews was never official and equally contested; the toleration of non-confessional sects—Quakers, Mennonites, Socinians, and so on—became an increasingly pressing issue as the seventeenth century progressed and became intermingled with the perceived problem of secular freethinkers.⁵ In that respect, the 1653 ban issued by the Court of Holland against Socinian writings that was later used as a pretext to censor the works of Spinoza, Hobbes, Meyer, and Kuyper in 1674 is an important piece of legislation for understanding how these struggles played out politically in the second half of the century.⁶

Moreover, the end to internal religious strife that came about with the Union of Utrecht was more of a political achievement than a cultural or religious one. The new freedom of religion was established and enforced by political decision. It did not rely on any natural or cultural unity or any particular sense of moral responsibility toward fellow citizens of different faiths on the part of the Netherlanders. In fact, the intention of article XIII, already quoted above, was not so much to provide citizens in the seven provinces with reassurance that they would not be persecuted by the civil authorities, but on the contrary to give the civil authorities a political and legal tool that would allow them to manage religious animosity among citizens so as to prevent them from persecuting each other. Hence, we learn in an authoritative 1579 Discours contenant le vray entendement de la Pacification de Gand that

the Religions-Frid is the only means of keeping peace and harmony among the inhabitants of these provinces And should any difficulty on that subject arise, it must be solved not at the

1 Treaty of the Union, Eternal Alliance and Confederation made in the Town of Utrecht by the Countries and their Towns and Members (January 29, 1579), in Kossman and Mellink, *Texts*, pp. 165–73, esp. 169–70. See also the Pacification of Ghent (November 8, 1676), in Kossman and Mellink, *Texts*, pp. 126–32, esp. art. iv, p. 128; and the Second Union of Brussels (December 10, 1577), in Kossman and Mellink, *Texts*, pp. 145–8, esp. 147. See also Krop, “The General Freedom,” p. 68.

2 Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 20–1; Krop, “The General Freedom,” pp. 68–9; Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought*, pp. 218–28.

3 Kooi, “Religious Toleration,” pp. 208–10.

4 Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, pp. 172–83; Kooi, “Religious Tolerance,” pp. 212–13; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 372.

5 See Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 375–7, 499–505, 637–45.

6 Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, pp. 142–3; Van Bunge, “Censorship,” pp. 95–117; Israel, *Dutch Republic*, pp. 909–16; Israel, “The Banning of Spinoza”; Van der Deijl, “The Dutch Translation,” pp. 212–13.

whim of some private persons but by the States who are the authors of the Pacification and Union.¹

These circumstances also explain why, later, it was the thinkers who were religiously more liberal who became associated with forms of Erastianism in the 1610s. Arminian-leaning thinkers like Wtenbogaert and Grotius recommended firm state control of sacred matters.² They applauded—indeed designed—Oldenbarnevelt’s political intervention in the theological brawls about predestination between Gomarists and Arminians. Conversely, these circumstances also explain why, in the Dutch context, it was the orthodox Calvinists who called for greater independence of the church from state control, in order to acquire greater authority to shape civil society and impose religious uniformity without interference from the state.

Spinoza wrote the TTP during the Stadhoudersless rule of Johan De Witt (1650–72), although at a time when De Witt’s so-called regime of “True Freedom” was increasingly under pressure, culminating with the French invasion and public assassination of the brothers De Witt in 1672. Nonetheless, all things considered, the Netherlands in the late 1660s was as good a place politically for free intellectual enterprise as could be hoped for at the time, and certainly better than any other place in Europe. As William Aglionby, a fellow of the Royal Society, wrote in his 1669 *The Present State of the United Provinces*:

Here is the greatest Equality in the World. ... Certainly when I do reflect on the miserable condition of some Christians in Europe ... I cannot choose but cry out: O happy Holland, that hast preserved that precious jewel of Liberty: preserve it well, for with its loss, goes that of thy happiness.³

It is clear that part of Spinoza’s overarching aim with the TTP was to defend those increasingly threatened liberties. And if, undoubtedly, it includes an element of deliberately exaggerated idealization, I see nothing ironic or sarcastic about his descriptions in TTP XX of “the city of Amsterdam, which, from its great growth and the admiration of all nations, knows by experience the fruits of this freedom.”⁴ Only we should note that, by the “city” (*urbs*) and “fruits” (*fructus*) here, Spinoza refers not only to civil society and the alleged bliss of the Amsterdammers, but also to the governing authorities of the city and the political and economic benefits they reaped from the commercial activities of an exceptionally diverse urban population. The freedom they granted was good for business and they had little interest in engaging in religious policing.⁵

This said, it is true that Spinoza felt he needed to exercise some caution in communicating his ideas generally.⁶ In particular, even while De Witt was still in power, he did not want the TTP to be published in the vernacular, knowing that it would likely prompt an official ban.⁷ And just a few years later, in 1674, even without a Dutch translation having been produced, the TTP was in fact banned in the Netherlands under the 1653 anti-Socinian laws. In addition, Spinoza was in the crosshairs of the Calvinist consistories and widely condemned long before that.⁸ The fate of Adriaan Koerbagh—his

1 Anon., *A Discourse Containing a True Understanding of the Pacification of Ghent, of the Union of the State and other Ensuing Treatises on the Matter of Religion*, in Kossman and Mellink, *Texts*, pp. 173–7, here 174.

2 By “Erastianism,” I understand broadly a doctrine that subordinates the church to the state. The notion, of course, derives from the name of Thomas Erastus, but should not be confused with the doctrines developed in his 1589 *Explicatio gravissimae quaestionis* which is concerned with a less general question, i.e., who has the right to excommunicate. One can quibble with the appropriateness of the designation, but it was already operative in the seventeenth century, so is historically justified at least in that regard. For some critical discussion, see Gunnoe, “The Evolution of Erastianism.” On Erastus, see Gunnoe, *Thomas Erastus*.

3 Aglionby, *The Present State*, pp. 352–3.

4 TTP XX, G III.245–6|C II.351; trans. modified. On this point, I disagree with Meinsma, *Spinoza*, p. 375, and partly also with Curley who considers ironic a similar passage in the preface where Spinoza mentions “the rare fortune [we have] of living in a republic where everyone is granted complete freedom of judgment” (“Resurrecting Leo Strauss,” p. 133; for this second passage in Spinoza, see TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.69).

5 Price, *Dutch Culture*, p. 188.

6 Villaverde, “Spinoza’s Paradoxes,” p. 11.

7 Spinoza to Jelles, February 17, 1671, Letter 44, G IV.227|C I.390.

8 On the publication, early circulation, and censorship of the TTP, see Israel, “The Banning of Spinoza’s Works”; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 275–85; Van Bunge, “Censorship on Philosophy,” pp. 105–6; Van der Deijl, “The Dutch Translation.”

arrest and death in an Amsterdam prison in 1669 because of his book *Een Ligt schijnende in duystere plaatsen*¹—is also sometimes put forward to support the view that Spinoza had good reason to fear persecution.² The reference to the Koerbagh affair does, however, have its limits as an explanatory strategy when analyzing the TTP, and I think Steven Nadler overstates his point when claiming that “the Treatise was also a very personal book. It is the response to the loss of a dear friend.”³ First, Koerbagh’s apprehension, trial, imprisonment, and death occurred in the timespan between July 1668 and October 1669, and the chronology of the affair as a whole does not allow for any substantial impact on the contents of the TTP which was begun in 1665 and printed in late 1669, a few months after Koerbagh’s death. The undertaking as such was clearly not motivated by Koerbagh’s fate. Moreover, Koerbagh’s death occurred when Spinoza’s manuscript presumably was completed and in the process of being typeset.⁴ Second, the Koerbagh affair can hardly be said to reflect the general tenor of Dutch censorship in the late 1660s. State-perpetrated, public censorship of the kind suffered by Koerbagh was very rare, paralleled perhaps only by the condemnation of Johannes Duijkerius and his publisher, Aart Wolsgryn, after the publication of the second part of the Spinozist novel *Het leven van Philopater* in 1691.⁵ It was not that censorship of philosophy and theology did not occur, of course. Laws existed; edicts were issued. But they were rarely efficiently enforced.⁶ When they were, this was most often only under pressure from the Calvinist church. The censorship of the “aggressive preachers” whose influence Spinoza deplored was, for the most part, not justified by law or enforced by the state, but directly imposed by the consistories and synods that had means other than legal for punishing transgressors, such as stripping them of their positions and salaries, excommunicating them, denying them access to their financial and commercial networks, and cutting them off from their communities.⁷

In any case, at least up until the French invasion in 1672, and to some extent even after that date, the threat to free philosophizing came not from the civil authorities who, for a variety of reasons, including economic, had rather set themselves up as guardians of both religious and academic freedom. Instead, the threat came from theologians in the universities and ecclesiastics in the consistories who not only sought to interfere with both freedom of worship and academic freedom directly from the auditoriums and the pulpits, but also lobbied to persuade local political authorities to intervene on their behalf. The threat to individual citizens’ freedom of philosophizing came not from the state, but from “ecclesiastical citizens”⁸—members or leaders of the dominant church.

Freedom of Conscience II: The Intellectual Context

1 For a critical edition and English translation, see Koerbagh, *A Light Shining in Dark Places*.

2 Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 51; Curley, “Resurrecting Leo Strauss,” pp. 133–4; Price, *Dutch Culture*, p. 193. For some accounts of the Koerbagh trial, see Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 100–2; Van Bunge, “Introduction,” pp. 30–7; Van Bunge, “Censorship on Philosophy,” pp. 107–9; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 192–6; Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, pp. 38–43.

3 Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 51.

4 Steenbakkens, “The Text of Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,” p. 33. I would agree, however, that the Koerbagh affair was on Spinoza’s mind when he implored Jarig Jelles to stop an initiative to print a Dutch version of the TTP prepared by Glazemaker in early 1671 (Spinoza to Jelles, February 17, 1671, Letter 44, G IV.227|C II.390; the translation eventually came out in 1693 under the title *De Rechtzinnige Theologant, of Godgeleerde Staatkundige Verhandeling*; see C II.63; see also Van der Deijl, “The Dutch Translation”). The fact that Koerbagh published his works in the vernacular rather than in Latin was an important reason why he was so severely sanctioned (Den Boer, “Le dictionnaire libertin,” pp. 117–18). The Koerbagh affair was perhaps also in the back of Spinoza’s mind when, later in 1675, he wrote an intriguing phrase about the “oppressiveness of our times” in TTP, Annotation XXI (G III.260|C II.224). But, as already noted in chapter 1, note 69, it is more natural to correlate this particular remark with the exactly contemporary circumstances in 1675 that prompted Spinoza not to have the Ethics printed. When he completed the work in 1675, the De Witt regime had fallen three years earlier and True Freedom had come to an end. Moreover, because of the TTP, Spinoza had acquired a reputation as an atheist and rumors were circulating that he was about to publish a book where, from what Spinoza heard, he “tried to show that there is no God.” As a result of this, he “decided to put off the publication [he] was planning, until [he] saw how the matter would turn out” (Spinoza to Oldenburg, September/October 1675, G IV.299|C II.459). See Steenbakkens, “A Seventeenth-Century Reader,” p. 63; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 285–94.

5 Van Bunge, “Censorship on Philosophy,” pp. 109–10.

6 Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, pp. 54–6.

7 Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. October 1, 1665, Letter 30, G IV.166|C II.15. Pierre Bayle, who lost his job at the Illustrious School of Rotterdam in 1693, is the most famous example of this, but other examples abound: Pontiaan van Hattem was removed from his ministry in 1638; Balthasar Bekker suffered the same fate in 1692 on account of *De betoverde Weereld*; Willem Deurhoff, a Spinozist, was excommunicated; etc. On these various affairs, see Van Bunge, “Censorship of Philosophy”; Krop, “The General Freedom,” pp. 78–9.

8 I borrow the expression from Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, VI, p. 76.

In the intellectual context, the controversy over freedom of conscience reached back to that between Justus Lipsius and Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert in the late 1580s regarding the punishment of heretics. In the broader historical circumstances of early modern Calvinism, this debate resonated strongly with the acrid dispute between Calvin and the tolerationist Sebastien Castellio about the burning of Michel Servet for heresy in Geneva in 1553.¹ In his *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* of 1589 Lipsius argued—or at least Coornhert saw Lipsius as arguing—in favor of executing heretics. Adopting what Joseph Lecler describes as the position of a moderate politique, Lipsius defended his position on the pragmatic grounds that political stability absolutely required religious uniformity so that “one religion ought to be observed in one kingdom.”² As for heretics, he quoted Seneca: “Here is no place for clemency, burn, saw asunder, for it is better that one member be cast away, than that the whole body runs to ruin.”³ When Lipsius’s book appeared in 1589, Coornhert—an heir to the humanist tolerationism of Jacob Acontius and Sebastien Castellio—had already been holding against such arguments for a decade in numerous writings, perhaps most importantly in his famous 1582 Synode over de Gewetensvrijheid (“Synod on the Freedom of Conscience”), written in response to the Middelburg Synod of 1581 and in particular to the excommunication of a Leiden minister, Caspar Coolhaes, that resulted from it.⁴ Repeating his general argument against Lipsius, and after a heated correspondence with Lipsius himself was cut short, Coornhert argued in his 1590 *Proces van’t Ketter-Dooden ende Dwangh der Conscienten* (“Trial of the Killing of Heretics and the Forcing of Consciences”) that the punishment of heretics was both unchristian and impractical to implement.⁵ As he had already done in the Synode, he favored a form of religious toleration and pluralism.

The clash between Coornhert and Lipsius is sometimes depicted as pitting the ideal of freedom of conscience and religious toleration against a politically motivated defense of state-enforced religious persecution. At the time, Coornhert certainly did his best to depict it that way and Lipsius did not always react in ways that contradicted it. And yet the conflict deserves a less Manichean analysis. Lipsius’s position was that the state ought to play an active role in preventing the damage that dangerous heresies represented for the social fabric, and that the Netherlands would benefit from the social cohesion that comes from religious uniformity.⁶ A pragmatist, or politique, he did not believe that a religiously pluralist state could subsist without the state regulating the religious landscape: “One religion is the author of unity; and from a confused religion there always grows dissention.”⁷ The state had to take an active role in mitigating the harmful effects of theological conflict among citizens. Coornhert, for his part, put his faith in some version of Christian liberty, in the free exercise of moral conscience: state control over religious affairs would only bolster the domination and possible persecution of others by the sect favored by the civil sovereign. For Coornhert, the principal danger for citizens’ freedom of conscience came from the abuse of civil authority, not from other citizens.⁸ Hence, between Coornhert and Lipsius, it was not a question of being for or against freedom of conscience, but of determining where the threat of persecution came from. Lipsius defended, in particular in the original version of *Politica*, the primacy of private internal religion as a way to leave some level of freedom of conscience within a system of *ius circa sacra* that otherwise attempted to avoid religious conflict through public state-enforced religious uniformity. For Lipsius, by taking control

1 LeCler, *Histoire*, pp. 312–45; Curley, “Sebastian Castellio”; Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, pp. 93–144; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 13–14; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, pp. 15–22.

2 Lipsius, *Six Books of Politickes*, IV, 3, p. 63 (I update the English spelling of this 1594 edition); see also IV, ii, p. 62: “One religion is the author of unity; and from a confused religion there always grows dissention.” For commentary, see Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, p. 14; Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought*, pp. 254–5.

3 Lipsius, *Six Books of Politickes*, IV, 3, p. 64; see also Voogt, *Primacy*, p. 1234; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, p. 58.

4 See Coornhert, *Synod on the Freedom of Conscience*. For the context, see Voogt, “Introduction,” pp. 1–22, esp. 8–9. See also Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought*, pp. 231–6, 243–56; Lecler, *Histoire*, pp. 627–36.

5 For reconstruction of this controversy, see Voogt, “Primacy,” pp. 1231–49; Lecler, *Histoire*, pp. 636–9; Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 58–9.

6 Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 56–8; Lagrée, *Le Néostoïcisme*, pp. 167–8.

7 Lipsius, *Six Books of Politickes*, IV, 2, p. 62.

8 See Coornhert, *Synod*, Book II, Tenth, Eleventh, and Seventeenth Session, esp. pp. 113, 116–18, 120–2, 133–5, 193, 195–8, 200–2.

of the religious landscape, the state could best protect its citizens, not only from slaughtering each other in sectarian frenzy, but also from more systematic persecution by a dominant church.

By 1592, Lipsius had left Leiden, moved to Louvain, and returned to the fold of the Roman Catholic church. His credentials among the Dutch thus tarnished, his name was hardly ever mentioned in the defining disputes between Arminians and Gomarists in the 1610s.¹ And yet, Wtenbogaert and Grotius, the political thinkers in the entourage of Oldenbarnevelt who would go on to outline the contours of the Dutch liberal tradition more clearly, mostly leaned toward a political solution like Lipsius's, less reliant on the individual moral conscience and more inclined toward the use of state power. Wtenbogaert, in his 1610 *Tractaet van t'ampt ende authoriteyt eener hoogher Christelicher overheydt in kerckliche saecken*, argued against the "collaterality" model of church–state relations favored by the Calvinist church, holding that the "true design of God" was to subordinate the church to the state.² In the third part of his 1613 partisan tract in favor of Oldenbarnevelt's church policies, the *Ordinum pietas*, Grotius, much inspired by Wtenbogaert's *Tractaet*, defended the right of the state to interfere with church politics.³ And again, in his *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, published posthumously in 1647 but already written around 1616–17, Grotius again argued that the civil authorities should firmly control religion within the state.⁴ In a text written shortly after his incarceration at Loevestein Castle in 1619, Grotius succinctly summarized his views on state–church relations in those two publications and the bearing they had on the question of freedom of religious conscience:

As to my views on the power of the Christian authorities in ecclesiastical matters, I refer to my ... booklet *De Pietate Ordinum Hollandiae* and especially to an unpublished book *De Imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, where I have treated the matter in more detail ... I may summarize my feelings thus: that the authorities should scrutinize God's word so thoroughly as to impose nothing which is against it; if they act in this way, they shall in good conscience have control of the public churches and public worship—but without persecuting those who err from the right way.⁵

As a political solution to toleration, this Erastian approach required a relatively secular civil government with no vested interest in narrow religious uniformity. If it tended toward the establishment of a national church, with the sovereign power alone at the top of both the civil and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it also required a head of state willing to embrace a very broad definition of acceptable worship—a "latitudinarian" or "broad" state church, as they would later call it on the other side of the English Channel—in order to cater for the freedom of conscience proclaimed by the foundational tracts of the young republic. It is within such a framework that Grotius's ideal of a public church, conceived along the lines of the Anglican church under James I, must be understood: subjecting the church to the state rather than separating it from it was, under these historical circumstances, the best way to curb ecclesiastical power and allow for freedom of conscience and some religious toleration within civil society. But it had to be accompanied by a very nonrestrictive theology, which is exactly what we find in Grotius as well, in the *Ordinum pietas* already,⁶ but most clearly in the 1611 *Meletius*.⁷ Here, Grotius argued that "the principal cause [of Christians being diverse and out of harmony] is that the dogmas are declared the most essential part of the religion, whereas the ethical

1 Voogt, "Primacy," p. 1248. For an interesting exception, see Grotius, *Ordinum pietas*, p. 169.

2 Wtenbogaert, *Tractaet van t'ampt ende authoriteyt*. For commentary, see Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration*, pp. 25–49; Rabbie, "Introduction," pp. 15–16; Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 18–24.

3 Grotius, *Ordinum pietas*; see also Rabbie, "Hugo Grotius's *Ordinum pietas*"; Rabbie, "Introduction," pp. 16, 38–9; Van Dam, "Second Thoughts?," pp. 126, 129–30; Rohls, "Autorité de l'État."

4 Grotius, *De imperio*, chap. 1; see also Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration*, pp. 59–91; Caspani, "Alle origini"; Beal, "Grotius et le *Ius circa sacra*"; Rabbie, "L'Eglise et l'Etat"; Van Dam, "De imperio"; Van Dam, "Introduction," pp. 6–30; Lærke, "La controverse," pp. 409–10 and 413–16; Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 43–50, 102–7; Barducci, *Hugo Grotius*, pp. 89–93; Secretan, "La démocratie absolue," p. 347. See finally Chapter 11, sect. "Ius circa sacra."

5 Fruin, *Verhooren*, p. 6, cited and translated from the Dutch in Van Dam, "De imperio," p. 22.

6 Grotius, *Ordinum pietas*, p. 169.

7 The work was only recently discovered and first published in 1988 in an edition and English translation by G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes. A French translation can also be found as an appendix to Lagrée, *La Raison ardente*.

precepts are disregarded.” For, “since ethical precepts are mostly plainer and less complicated, it stands to reason that most people readily agree on precepts.” Consequently, “the remedy for this disease will therefore consist in limiting the number of necessary articles of faith to those few that are most self-evident.”¹ Meletius is, as Jacqueline Lagrée has shown, a paradigmatic example of the minimalist tradition of natural religion that developed in the humanist tradition from Erasmus to Grotius and beyond.² It does, however, also represent a sketch of the appropriate doctrinal framework for a state-controlled public church that would be able to politically enforce freedom of conscience and some level of toleration.

The problem was, of course, that with the execution of Oldenbarnevelt and the demise of the Arminians after the Synod of Dort in 1618–19, the flipside of such a fusion of state and church became patently evident, because, on this model, state power could be used not only to curb the ambitions of the clergy but also, and conversely, to prop up the dominant orthodoxy and persecute its adversaries: in the event, over 200 Arminian ministers were banned from the United Provinces.³ Much of the subsequent Dutch theology-political controversies of the seventeenth century can be considered as a constant effort, on all sides of the argument, to take control of this balance of ecclesiastical power, sometimes making it incline to one side, sometimes to the other. In this respect, the original Coornhert–Lipsius debate was paradigmatic for the dilemma that republican thinkers of the Dutch Golden Age faced. They had to decide whether to defend freedom of conscience on a political foundation (inheriting the *politique* argument from Lipsius) or on a moral foundation (inheriting the tolerationist argument from Coornhert). In any case, they had to figure out a workable way to navigate between those two dimensions of their new-found freedom of conscience.

Much happened in the Netherlands in the eight decades separating the controversy between Lipsius and Coornhert in the late 1580s and the publication of the TTP in 1670. But important elements of their controversy were carried over, repeated, and adapted to the contexts of other, similar controversies in different historical circumstances throughout the century. The question whether the freedom of religion enshrined in the very foundations of the Union was to be secured and implemented by the state (Lipsius) or protected against the state and implemented by separating religion from politics (Coornhert) remained a crucial one that reappeared in different guises throughout the entire Golden Age. And, as we shall see in this book, Spinoza’s understanding of the freedom of philosophizing too must be considered a particular way of redefining precisely these relations. When arguing that “the republic can grant freedom of philosophizing without harming its peace and piety,” he was trying to formulate a new solution to the theoretical conflict between political and ethical concerns that had already divided Lipsius and Coornhert. Indeed, as we shall see, it was an attempt to both have the cake and eat it, so to speak—to have both state control over sacred matters and a regime of religious plurality and toleration.

Conclusion

For Spinoza, the question of *libertas philosophandi* was associated with two controversies: on the one hand, a theological-philosophical controversy regarding academic freedom and the separation of natural science from theology reaching back to Galileo and Descartes; on the other hand, a theological-political controversy regarding freedom of religious conscience reaching back, in the Netherlands, to the disputes between Coornhert and Lipsius, and, in the broader European context, to the quarrels between Calvin and Castellio after the execution of Michel Servet. The TTP clearly addresses, and was intended to address, both problems. And in order to understand exactly the construction of Spinoza’s theory of the freedom of philosophizing, it is of paramount importance to grasp how his treatise brings together these two otherwise relatively distinct problematics. For, by relating systematically these two dimensions of the freedom of philosophizing—as academic freedom and as freedom of religious conscience—Spinoza brought something new to the table. Certainly, until then, the two dimensions

¹ For all three quotes, see Grotius, Meletius, epilogue, §§89–91, p. 133.

² Lagrée, *La Raison ardente*.

³ Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 19, 24.

were biographically, historically, and institutionally linked. But they were not really conceptually related. Earlier in the century, the same thinkers in the entourage of Oldenbarnevelt both intervened in church matters defending Arminian theology and developed secular theories of natural right in favor of the Oldenbarnevelt regime. But there was no intrinsic conceptual connection between these theological and political orientations. Similarly, moving a few decades forward, there was no necessary connection between the Cartesian efforts to liberate natural philosophy from theology and the political defenses of the True Freedom emanating from Dutch republican thinkers.¹ Certainly, it was often the same intellectuals who defended both. Lambert van Velthuysen, not only an important modern philosopher but also a respectable member of the Walloon church and a prominent local politician in Utrecht, is probably the best example of an intellectual who straddled all these philosophical, theological, and political strands at once.² He was both a Cartesian promoting independent natural philosophy and a Hobbesian champion of the freedoms of Dutch republicanism. But such biographical and institutional overlap between the defenders of free academic inquiry and political freedom remained theoretically coincidental, in the sense that it was based on historical circumstance rather than conceptual necessity. It took Spinoza to philosophically integrate these two conceptions of academic freedom and freedom of religious conscience into a single complex notion of *libertas philosophandi*.

¹ See Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*, p. 11.

² Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 83–5; Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, pp. 51–3; Krop, “The General Freedom,” pp. 80–4. For more detailed work on Van Velthuysen’s philosophy, see Catherine Secretan, “Introduction [to Velthuysen 1]”; “Introduction [to Velthuysen 2].”

Philosophizing

In the mid-seventeenth century, the term “philosophy” did not have the same extension it has today. The entry “Philosophia” in Johannes Micraelius’s 1653 *Lexicon philosophicum*—a widely used philosophical dictionary that gives a good sense of early modern use of philosophical terminology, especially in northern Europe—begins by noting that “philosophy” was for the Greek what *magia* was for the Chaldeans and that philosophers consequently are like “magicians” (*magi*). They are also comparable to the “gymnosophists” of the Indians, the “druids” of the Gauls, and the “kabbalists” of the Jews. Following this line of thought, Micraelius initially defines philosophy as a “constant habit of wisdom and prudence,” i.e., as a quality of individuals and discourse more than a discipline (“to have philosophy”). When he eventually gets to defining philosophy as a discipline, he divides it into natural philosophy which is theoretical, moral philosophy which is practical, and organic philosophy which is instrumental.¹ Natural philosophy is concerned with a very long list of topics, ranging from metaphysics and physics to zoology and anthropology, and also includes mathematics. Moral philosophy includes not only ethics, but also economics and politics. Organic philosophy covers grammar, rhetoric, and logic.²

For a seventeenth-century mind, as it turns out, “philosophy” and “philosophizing” could mean a great many things. And yet, as I argue in this chapter, the “philosophizing” the freedom of which Spinoza sets out to defend in the TTP includes an even longer list of topics than the one provided in the *Lexicon philosophicum*. For Spinoza—and Micraelius initially—uses the term “philosophizing” more to convey a quality or mode of discourse than to confine that discourse to a given range of topics, and therefore in principle it can be about anything. As we shall see in this chapter and Chapter 4, Spinoza thus understands “philosophizing” partly in terms of a broadly defined method of investigation which includes deductive, historical, and philological inquiry alike, and partly in terms of a particular style of speaking and reasoning.

Style: Scriptural and Geometrical

Style is, in the first place, an important aspect in which Spinoza sees a basic difference between prophecy and philosophy: “Scripture imparts and teaches things in the way which enables each person to most easily perceive them. It does not deduce them from axioms and definitions and connect them with one another.” Instead, it relates God’s command “in a style and with expressions most apt to move ordinary people’s hearts.”³ These characteristics do not, however, originate in God, since “the revealed word of God is ... but a simple concept of the divine mind.”⁴ In fact, “God has no particular style of speaking, but ... is refined, succinct, and severe, unsophisticated, wordy, and obscure, according to the learning and capacity of the prophet.”⁵ The stylistic differences between the prophetic writings in the Bible reflect the imagination of each of the prophets, i.e., how they received God’s word and not how this word was originally communicated to them by God. This is why “the style of the prophecy varied according to the articulateness of each prophet.”⁶

The analysis is, on the whole, conventionally Cartesian. The question of Scriptural style was a central issue in the heated discussions among Cartesian and orthodox theologians in Holland. In 1653, the young Christoph Wittich published his *Dissertationes duae*, the first of which was dedicated to *de usu et abusu Scripturae in rebus philosophicis*. The book set off a protracted controversy during the 1650s. Wittich’s sequel to this work, published in 1656, was entitled *Consideratio theologica de stylo Scripturae*, i.e. “Theological Considerations on the Style of Scripture.” Why was style an issue in these debates? The main concern of the Cartesian-leaning theologians—not only Wittich, but also his friends

1 “Organic”: from the Greek *organon*, i.e., “instrument” or “tool,” a term also used to describe the corpus of Aristotle’s logic.

2 Micraelius, *Lexicon philosophicum*, entry “Philosophia,” pp. 823–6.

3 TTP XIII, G III.167 | C II.257; my italics. See also TTP VI, G III.90 | C II.162, and Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 40, 81–2.

4 TTP Preface, G III.10 | C II.73.

5 TTP II, G III.34 | C II.99.

6 TTP II, G III.33 | C II.98.

Tobias Andreae and Johannes Clauberg—was to resolve any possible conflict between faith and reason, or more specifically, between the Bible and Cartesian natural philosophy and Copernican astronomy. In order to achieve that, their exegesis distinguished between the divine meaning of revelation and the language of the inspired writer, between the “enounced thing” (*res enunciata*) and the “way of enouncing” (*modus enunciandi*), as Wittich puts it.¹ This distinction allowed arguing that the authors of the Bible had adapted their message, speaking *ad captum vulgi*. Biblical passages in contradiction with natural philosophy could then be explained away as “accommodations” made by writers who were adapting their way of enouncing to their audiences of common people of particular nations, but that were irrelevant to the enounced meaning of revelation itself.² The position was deemed blasphemous by orthodox theologians because, to them, the Cartesians’ view implied either that God did not speak truthfully in Scripture and was lying outright,³ or that they made “Holy Scripture err with the common man [*errat cum vulgo*] about natural things,” as Wittich indignantly quotes one opinion attributed to him.⁴

In the TTP, Spinoza aligned himself with Wittich and his fellow Cartesians when arguing that it was not the Cartesian philosophers who made Scripture err, but the theologians who “interpret[ed] nature in amazing ways, as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are,”⁵ and the scholastics who accommodated Scripture to Plato and Aristotle: “It wasn’t enough for them to be insane with the Greeks, they wanted the prophets to rave with them.”⁶ No wonder Spinoza was annoyed when, after the publication of the TTP, the Dutch Cartesians, including Wittich, could not write refutations virulent enough in order to distance themselves from an argument that clearly took their side, but that they feared the consequences of being associated with: “the stupid Cartesians, because they are believed to favor me, try to remove that suspicion from themselves by constantly denouncing my opinions and writings everywhere. Even now they’re still at it.”⁷

The Cartesians were, however, right to fear the assimilation. Just as they did, Spinoza held that “the purpose of Scripture was not to teach the sciences,”⁸ stressed that Scripture was written *ad captum vulgi*, and argued that revelation and prophesy were associated with a variety of styles reflecting differences in the constitution of the imagination of the prophets and the people to whom they addressed their prophecies.⁹ As Spinoza writes, “revelation varied according to the disposition of [the prophet’s] imagination: if the prophet was refined, he perceived the mind of God in a refined style; if he was confused, he perceived it confusedly.”¹⁰ For this reason, “the style of the prophecy varied according to the articulateness of each prophet” and “anyone who is skilled in the Hebrew language ... will find a great difference in style.”¹¹ Moreover, as for Wittich and the other Cartesian theologians, Spinoza’s theory of adaptation or accommodation is at the heart of his approach to the Bible. Prophetic speech, he argues, was originally adapted to the prophets’ imagination and to the mentality of their audience. Moreover, Scripture, where prophetic speech is fixed in writing, was received differently throughout the ages; its interpretation was adapted to the time and historical context and

1 Wittich, *Consideratio theologica*, p. 55; see also Dibon, “Histoire,” p. 443.

2 Wittich, *Consideratio theologica*, pp. 3–4; see also pp. 52, 60–1. For a detailed study of Wittich’s Cartesian theology, see Eberhardt, *Vernunft und Offenbarung*; Del Prete, “Y a-t-il une interpretation cartésienne de la Bible?”; Cellamare, “A Theologian Teaching Descartes”; Lee, *The Biblical Accommodation Debate*, pp. 23–35.

3 Wittich, *Consideratio theologica*, pp. 70–7.

4 Wittich, *Consideratio theologica*, p. 17; see also Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, p. 52.

5 TTP Preface, G III.5 | C II.66.

6 TTP Preface, G III.9 | C II.71; see also E1app, where Spinoza criticizes finalist philosophers that “seem to have shown only that nature and the God are as mad as they are” (G II.79 | C I.441).

7 Spinoza to Oldenburg, September/October 1675, Letter 68, G III.299 | C II.459. Spinoza is not referring specifically to Wittich: his influential refutation, the *Anti-Spinoza*, was only published long after Spinoza’s death, in 1690. The literature on Spinoza, Wittich, and the Dutch Cartesians is extensive. See Pape, *Christoph Wittich’s Anti-Spinoza*; Hubert, *Les premières réfutations*, pp. 21–9; Israel, “The Early Dutch and German Reaction,” pp. 86–90; M. Aalderink, “Christoph Wittich,” in Van Bunge et al., *The Continuum Companion*, pp. 129–40; Verbeek, “Les Cartésiens face à Spinoza”; Verbeek, “Spinoza and Cartesianism”; Verbeek, “Wittich’s Critique of Spinoza”; Douglas, “Christoph Wittich’s *Anti-Spinoza*”; Douglas, “Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians”; Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism*, pp. 113–46.

8 TTP XIII, G III.168 | C II.258.

9 See TTP V, GP III.77 | C II.148; TTP XV, G III.180 | C II.272.

10 TTP II, G III.32 | C II.97.

11 TTP II, G III.33–4 | C II.99.

circumstances of reading. In terms of its meaning, it thus carries the full historical weight of its past and deep traces of the historical existence of those to whom the divine word was originally revealed, of the initial audience, but also of its subsequent transmission. Infused with experience and informed by the imagination throughout its entire history, the meaning of Scripture is “old,” so to speak. This is why its language exhibits such a broad variety of different styles.

By contrast, geometrical demonstration—similarly to the “simple concept of the divine mind”—is at the opposite extreme of the stylistic spectrum. It has no particular style.¹ It is not addressed to anyone in particular, nor is it colored by the experience and imagination of any particular persons or peoples. In short, it is not saturated with history, but “childish”:

Euclid, who wrote only about things which were quite simple and most intelligible, is easily explained by anyone in any language. For to grasp his intention and to be certain of his true meaning it is not necessary to have a complete knowledge of the language in which he wrote, but only a quite common and almost childish knowledge. Nor is it necessary to know the life, concerns and customs of the author, nor in what language, to whom and when he wrote, nor the fate of his book, nor its various readings, nor how nor by whose deliberation it was accepted. What I have said here about Euclid must be said about everyone who has written about things by their nature comprehensible.²

Exactly because of its lack of experience, its childlike quality, the *mos geometricus* is a universal style appealing to the common rationality of all human beings and not just the imagination of some. It presents knowledge in the form of propositions logically derived from axioms that no person of sound mind can deny. The language of Spinoza’s own philosophy is inseparable from this conception of the stylistic neutrality of mathematical language. In this respect, his adoption of the geometrical style is an integral part of his effort to separate the use of reason from the mechanisms of the imagination, liberating philosophical language not only from natural language, saturated with the imaginations of the mind, but also from the discursive styles associated with prophetic speech and theology according to the Cartesian reading best represented by Wittich’s *Consideratio theologica de stylo Scripturae*. The geometrical style is the neutral style of simple truth and the appropriate style to adopt in a philosophical language arguably designed to reflect the very structure of the divine intellect.³

What separates theology from philosophy is thus, in important ways, a difference in style. Following this line of thought, the neutral style of the *mos geometricus* also becomes associated with the pursuit of rational knowledge in a disinterested, “scientific” spirit; it makes geometrical demonstration an apt form for free philosophizing in the narrow sense inherited from Galileo and Descartes. Spinoza, however, broadens the application of this stylistic paradigm to philosophizing about other things than just natural philosophy. Philosophizing in geometrical style is, for him, not just about separating natural scientific language from theological language, but reflects a more general commitment to a moral attitude of disinterested detachment with evident Stoic resonances. As he writes to Oldenburg at the time of the outbreak of the second Anglo-Dutch war in 1665, “these turmoils move me, neither to laughter nor even to tears, but to philosophizing and to observing human nature better.”⁴ Indeed, the neutrality of geometrical deduction—describing “human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies”⁵—is exactly what makes Spinoza’s *Ethics* an “ethics,” as opposed to a mere moral satire.⁶ Deductive rigor is also what makes the later TP a true science of politics, because Spinoza here vows “to investigate the matters pertaining to this science with the same

¹ Spinoza also contrasts the neutral language of philosophy with the poetic language of the Bible: the psalmists are “speaking poetically”; miracles are “celebrated in a poetic style”; “[Scripture] depicts everything poetically” (TTP I, G III.26|C II.90; TTP VI, G III.90|C II.162; TTP VI, G III.91|C II.163).

² TTP VII, G III.111|C II.185.

³ See Lærke, “Spinoza’s Language”; Zourabichvili, Spinoza. Une physique de la pensée, pp. 11, 147–84.

⁴ Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. October 1, 1665, Letter 30, G IV.166|C II.14.

⁵ E3preface, G II.138|C II.511.

⁶ In the TP, Spinoza distinguishes “ethics” from “satire” by saying that the latter “conceives men not as they are, but as they want them to be” (TP I.1, G III.273|C II.503).

freedom of spirit [animi libertate] we're accustomed to use in investigating mathematical subjects," noting how he "took great pains not to laugh at human actions, or mourn them, or curse them, but only to understand them."¹ What is here dubbed "freedom of spirit" is clearly akin to the *libertas philosophandi* claimed by the natural philosophers, but it is applied to topics—ethics and politics—that fall entirely outside the scope of natural philosophy. They belong to moral philosophy according to *Micraelius's* representative categories.

The analysis does, however, present us with a problem. For, on this picture, freeing philosophy from the language of the religious imagination and the prophetic style at the same time appears to shackle it to the language of mathematics, making any type of discourse which is less than demonstrative or deductive inadequate to the task of philosophizing freely. If we stopped here, we would saddle Spinoza with a conception of free philosophizing akin to the one defended by Johannes de Raey in his *Libertas et Servitus universim atque etiam in Philosophando*, where the freedom of philosophizing is understood exclusively in terms of entertaining clear and distinct ideas, restricting it to mathematical reasoning and to "philosophizing" in the strictest academic sense.² So, should we take Spinoza to hold that free philosophizing applies exclusively to such reasoning which, following Galileo, takes everything to be "written in a mathematical language" and whose "characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures"?³ Is it even possible to "philosophize freely" in a form other than the geometrical one? Restricting free philosophizing to mathematical reasoning quickly leads to questions that are sufficiently uncomfortable to justify a closer look at Spinoza's understanding of "philosophizing" and consider whether it does not include a wider range of styles.

The Natural Light

Whenever Spinoza seems most concerned to be precise and technical in his descriptions of the "philosophizing" the freedom of which he has taken it upon himself to defend, he speaks of "the natural light." It is, of course, a thoroughly Cartesian trope.⁴ We could mention also that metaphors of light and illumination were prominent in the collegiant and freethinking circles that Spinoza was moving in during the late 1650s and early 1660s, from the rationalist spiritualism of Pieter Balling's 1662 *Het Licht op den kandelaar*, translated into English in 1663 as *The Light Upon the Candlestick*, to the virulent anti-religion in Koerbagh's 1668 *Een Ligt schijnende in duystere plaats*, "A Light Shining in Dark Places."⁵ But what was, for Spinoza, this "natural light" that illuminates our mind when we engage in philosophizing?

In the TTP, Spinoza defines the natural light broadly as the ability to form adequate notions through inferences: "this light consists above all in this: that by legitimate principles of inference it deduces and infers things obscure from things known, or given as known."⁶ Should we take that to mean that the natural light just is "reason" in the technical sense, i.e., adequate knowledge of the second kind, the kind of knowledge we obtain through geometrical reasoning, for example?⁷ Some caution should here be exercised because—strikingly enough—the notion of the "natural light" figures nowhere in the *Ethics*.⁸ Moreover, Spinoza clearly does not restrict the use of the natural light to the narrow sphere of technical philosophy. In fact, he constantly refers to the natural light as an exceedingly common ability: it is "the natural light common to all"⁹ or "the common natural light."¹⁰ He sees the natural

1 TP I.4, G III.274|C II.505.

2 See Raei, *Cogitata de interpretatione*, appendix V, pp. 425–37; Verbeek, *Spinoza's Theologico-political treatise*, p. 152.

3 Galileo, "The Assayer (1623)," in *The Essential Galileo*, p. 183: "Philosophy is written in this all-encompassing book that is constantly open before our eyes, that is the universe; but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to understand the language and knows the characters in which it is written. It is written in mathematical language, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures."

4 For a survey and controversial analysis of Descartes's use of this expression, see Morris, "Descartes's Natural Light."

5 On the "inner-light spiritualism" of the collegiants, see Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, pp. 75, 118–19, 185–214; on Jelles and Balling in particular, see pp. 192–4, 199–205 (Balling), and 205–11 (Jelles).

6 TTP VII, G III.112|C II.186.

7 E2p40s1–2, G II.120–2|C I.475–8.

8 See Moreau, *Problèmes du spinozisme*, pp. 137–8.

9 TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191.

10 TTP XII, G III.163|C II.252; see also TTP I, G III.15|C II.77.

light as mostly having a practical application, as intimately related to our everyday conduct and “manner of living.” In a passage in TTP I where he proposes to say “a few words about the natural light,” he thus explains how “our mind ... has the power to form certain notions which explain the nature of things and teach us how to conduct our lives.”¹ Finally, the natural light is a power to reason, in the sense of an ability or aptitude that is not necessarily realized in actual acts of reasoning. On this point, his position is aligned with Descartes, who also sees both the natural light and the ability to form adequate notions as an aptitude belonging to all human beings without it being equally actualized in them all, since this ability is sometimes clouded by lack of attention or prejudice. As Spinoza puts it in E1p40s1, some adequate notions “are only clearly perceived by those who have no prejudices.”² As we shall see below, this potential aspect of the natural light distinguishes it from what Spinoza describes as “sound reason,” which is always actual.

These various occurrences of the notion of the “natural light” in the TTP appear in line with the kind of project Spinoza also undertakes in the Ethics: to propose inferences on the basis of adequate common notions about how to live; that is to say, to conceive of a universal ethics based on reason. And yet, aspects of Spinoza’s argumentation in the TTP tend to disturb clear-cut correlation between the TTP and the Ethics on this point. First, in the TTP, the terms “philosophizing” and “natural light” frequently refer to forms of thought and discourse that are clearly not deductive. Second, and more importantly, Spinoza’s use of those terms does not respect his own systematic barrier between theology and philosophy. For example, he describes Solomon as “the philosopher”³ and as someone “who surpassed everyone in his age in the natural light.”⁴ He also asserts that, among the Apostles, no one “philosophized more than Paul.”⁵ But one would be hard pressed to deny that Solomon or Paul (also) wrote about theological matters. Admittedly, Spinoza felt that Paul had done much damage by philosophizing in theology, but that does not change the fact that he was willing to characterize what Paul was doing as “philosophizing.”

Similar patterns emerge from Spinoza’s more conversational practices. Before the epistolary exchange with the merchant Willem van Blijenbergh eventually soured—because our philosopher realized that his interlocutor was more preoccupied with defending prejudices than with his own free judgment—Spinoza wrote that he was “sincerely, very grateful to you for revealing to me your manner of philosophizing.”⁶ Even at this early stage of their correspondence, however, Blijenbergh’s reflections had nothing demonstrative about them. The point also applies to Spinoza himself. Oldenburg snidely remarked about the project of the TTP in a 1665 letter: “I see that you are not so much philosophizing as (if it is permissible to speak thus) theologizing; for you are recording your thoughts about angels, prophecy and miracles. But perhaps you are doing this philosophically.”⁷ Spinoza would have objected immediately to this characterization if “thinking philosophically” was to be understood in the narrow sense of subjecting Scripture to strict philosophical analysis. As we shall see shortly, he objected vigorously to the idea that the meaning of Scripture should be grasped philosophically, maintaining instead that it must be understood by means of a historical inquiry into the origins, reception, and transmission of the biblical narratives. But Spinoza did not object to Oldenburg’s characterization. Finally, in the TTP, he constantly repeats that any proper grasp of Scripture requires a contribution from the natural light: “the true method of interpreting Scripture ... requires no light beyond the natural light itself”;⁸ “the standard of interpretation must be nothing but the natural light common to all.”⁹ So, it seems, unless we are to saddle Spinoza with repeated violations of the barrier he himself

1 TTP I, G III.16|C II.78.

2 E1p40s1, C II.120|G I.476.

3 TTP VI, G III.95|C II.168.

4 TTP II, G III.41|C II.107; see also TTP IV, G III.66|C II.135.

5 TTP XI, G III.158|C II.269.

6 Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665, Letter 21, G IV.127|C I.376.

7 Oldenburg to Spinoza, c. September 20, 1665, Letter 29, G IV.165|C II.11.

8 TTP VII, G III.112|C II.186.

9 TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191.

installed between philosophy and theology, we cannot take the notions of “natural light” as used in the TTP and “reason” in the strict sense of the Ethics to be straightforwardly identical.

A first step toward sorting out Spinoza’s terminology on this point requires highlighting a kind of semantic antinomy which assigns the “natural light” and “reason” a role on two distinct levels of understanding.

Occasionally, in an uncombative mode, he contrasts the natural light with the “prophetic light” that guided the prophets in their interpretation of God’s word, essentially a combination of their virtue and their lively imagination.¹ Most often, however, he opposes the “natural light” polemically to the “supernatural light” that corrupt theologians eager to gain control over religion claim is needed to grasp the true meaning of Scripture. In these contexts, the natural light is invoked as an alternative standard of interpretation: “we must examine the opinion of those who maintain that the natural light does not have the power to interpret Scripture, but that a supernatural light is most necessary for this. What this light is beyond the natural light, I leave it to them to explain.”² In fact, Spinoza argues, “since each person has the utmost authority to interpret Scripture, the standard of interpretation [interpretandi ... norma] must be nothing but the natural light common to all, not any supernatural light or external authority.”³

In this context, it is important to understand exactly how the “natural light” is the “standard of interpretation” (norma interpretandi) of Scripture in order to avoid assimilating Spinoza’s exegetical principles to those of Lodewijk Meyer’s in his 1666 *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres*. Meyer argues that philosophy should be the interpreter of Scripture because

no one can be certain that he understands the true and authentic sense of a clearer passage of Scripture and has also elicited and explained the sense of an obscurer passage unless he has investigated and searched it out through and by true philosophy as an infallible norm [normam infallibilem], nor can he demonstrate with certainty to others that this is the true sense except through that same norm [per eandem normam].⁴

In the TTP, Spinoza rejects this position by proxy, so to speak, by criticizing Maimonides. Maimonides, he writes in TTP VII, “thought ... that we aren’t certain of the true meaning of any passage [of Scripture] unless we know that, as we interpret it, it contains nothing which does not agree with reason, or which is contrary to it.”⁵ But, in fact, “hardly any of the things found in these texts can be deduced from principles known by the natural light” and “the power of the natural light can’t establish anything for us about their truth.”⁶ So “we won’t be able to explain or interpret [Scripture] according to this standard [norma].”⁷ Lambert van Velthuysen is thus entirely right when he writes to Jacob Ostens that

[Spinoza] utterly condemns [the opinion that a freedom has been granted to anyone reading Holy Scripture to judge of the meaning and purpose of the holy teacher from the principles of his own reason], and rejects [it] along with those who teach, with the paradoxical theologian [= Maimonides], that reason is the interpreter of Scripture [= Meyer].⁸

Is Spinoza, however, not straightforwardly contradicting himself when maintaining that the standard of interpretation of Scripture must be nothing but the natural light common to all, while also asserting

1 See TTP IV, G III.61|C II.129: “[The law of Moses] was enacted by the prophetic light”; TTP XIX, G III.230|C II.334: “It doesn’t matter, I say, whether we conceive religion to be revealed by the light of nature or by the prophetic light”; TTP XIX, G III.232|C II.336: “whether religion is revealed by the natural light or by the prophetic light, it acquires the force of a command only by the decree of those who have the right to rule.” See also Moreau, *Problèmes du spinozisme*, pp. 146–50.

2 TTP VII, G III.112|C II.186.

3 TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191; see also Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 105–6.

4 Meyer, *Philosophia*, XVI, §8, pp. 102–3, trans. Shirley, p. 220.

5 TTP VII, G III.113|C II.187; see also Preus, *Spinoza*, p. 37.

6 TTP VII, G III.114|C II.188.

7 TTP VII, G III.115–16|C II.190; see also Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 106–8.

8 Van Velthuysen to Ostens, January 24, 1671, Letter 42, G IV.211|C II.377.

that Scripture cannot be interpreted according to this very same standard? To overcome the problem, we must distinguish between two distinct levels of interpretation, one concerning the reconstruction of the meaning of Scripture, the other the evaluation of its truth.¹ Spinoza's idea is not that the natural light should be called upon in order to evaluate the intended meaning of the biblical narratives as understood by their authors. For this, philology and textual critique are required. We must engage in historical inquiry, not philosophical judgment, to study the imagination, experience, and mentality of the prophets and their direct interlocutors, for "the better we know someone's spirit and mentality, the more easily we can explain his words."² And since the prophets were not versed in natural science, but simple men whose principal virtues were a vivid imagination and an inclination toward charity and justice, their narratives include a great many propositions that are literally false: "many things are related in Scripture as real, and were even believed to be real, which were, nevertheless, only representations and imaginary things."³ This does not imply that the Bible propounds falsities. When Joshua declares that the sun stood still, we should not understand this as a (false) assertion in the Bible that the sun really stood still, but only as the (true) assertion that Joshua, in his ignorance of astronomy, really believed that the sun stood still.⁴

What biblical characters affirm to be true—what they mean by what they say—is thus not what the Bible as such affirms to be true. It is in order to establish exactly what that is, i.e., the truth of Scripture, that we will have to call upon the natural light. For, "once we've unearthed the true meaning, we must, necessarily, use judgment and reason to give it our assent."⁵ Reason is required to extract some truth from the thicket of imaginary assertions constituting the narrative fabric of Scripture. It is required to determine in what sense the Bible speaks revealed truth even though it contains many assertions that are, in fact, false. And on this level of inquiry, the interpretation of Scripture resembles the rational investigation of nature:

I say that the method of interpreting Scripture does not differ at all from the method of interpreting nature, but agrees with it completely. For the method of interpreting nature consists above all in putting together a history of nature, from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things. In the same way, to interpret Scripture it is necessary to prepare a straightforward history of Scripture and to infer from it the mind of Scripture's authors, by legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles.⁶

In order to grasp what the Bible truly teaches, the lessons or teaching it conveys by means of the particular narratives it contains, we should deploy the same techniques of inference we use when investigating nature, by searching out in the Bible those common elements that structure its stories everywhere, or such aspects of them that are equally present everywhere; in short, we should infer the common notion of Scripture from the correlation and comparison of its various narratives, extracting from them the doctrinal elements they all share.⁷ As Spinoza says of the way the Apostles preached the Gospel:

although religion, as the Apostles preached it, by relating the simple story of Christ, does not fall under reason [sub rationem non cadat], nevertheless, by the natural light [lumine naturali]

1 In my analysis of the differences between Spinoza and Meyer, I essentially follow the converging readings in Moreau, "La méthode d'interprétation"; Moreau, "Les principes de la lecture"; Lagrée, "La lecture de la Bible"; Lagrée, "Théologie et tolérance"; Walther, "Biblische Hermeneutik"; Douglas, "Spinoza and the Dutch Cartesians," pp. 583–5. See also my own Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza, pp. 280–1. I consider the interpretive question settled at this point, but for a dissenting view, see Klever, "L'Erreur de Velthuysen."

2 TTP VII, G III.102 | C II.175.

3 TTP VI, G III.92–3 | C II.165.

4 See TTP II, G III.36 | C II.101; TTP VI, G III.92 | C II.164. The example (Joshua 10:12–13) is standard. It was at the center of a major controversy in Utrecht in the mid-1650s about the principles of biblical hermeneutics between Lambert van Velthuysen and Jacobus Du Bois and other Voetians. See Van Miert, *The Emancipation*, pp. 219–20; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, pp. 75–81; Vermij, *The Calvinist Copernicans*, pp. 281–8.

5 TTP XV, G III.182 | C II.274–5.

6 TTP VII, G III.98 | C II.171; see also TTP VII, G III.99 | C II.172.

7 For an insightful analysis of this "natural reading of Scripture," see Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 97–9. For Spinoza's conception of common notions, see E2p37–p40, G III.118–22 | C I.475–8; for more detailed discussion, see also Chapter 9, sect. "Doctrines of Universal Faith."

everyone can easily appreciate its most important themes, which, like the whole of Christ's teaching, consist chiefly of moral lessons.¹

We shall have occasion later to consider in more detail the distinction between "reason" and "the natural light" Spinoza draws in this passage. Here, we only need to note how the "natural light" becomes the standard of interpretation of Scripture, even though it plays no role in determining the intended meaning of its narratives. For, once the meaning is established, we must use procedures of rational inference to determine what those narratives everywhere affirm to be true, or to "perceive its most important themes."²

In Chapter 9, I study how the common notion of Scripture takes the form of a set of simple doctrines—the so-called doctrines of universal faith—designed to help Christians live according to the fundamental moral lessons of loving God and exercising justice and charity. These moral lessons constitute the practical core of Scripture, the "true religion" it contains.³ Indeed, the fact that Scripture teaches them is the sole reason for the text's divinity. This is why "Scripture would be equally divine even if it were written in other words or another language," if only that "which gives us a reason for calling it divine ... has reached us without corruption."⁴ By the same token, if Scripture is understood by corrupt interpreters to have "taught anything other than this, it would also have had to teach everything else differently, since this is the foundation of the whole religion," and "such a Scripture would not be the same book we are speaking about here; it would be a totally different book."⁵

Mathematics and the Authority of Scripture

Finally, over and above the questions of meaning and truth claims, Spinoza also inquires about the uses of the natural light in relation to yet a third question, namely the authority of Scripture. The teaching of certain moral lessons vouches for the divinity of Scripture. But what vouches for the divinity of the moral lessons? How do we know that the moral lessons taught by Scripture are divine commands and that our salvation depends on our obedience to them?

Spinoza denies that the authority of Scripture can be demonstrated by reason: "we can't perceive by the natural light that simple obedience is a path to salvation";⁶ "we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of theology—that men are saved only by obedience—is true or false."⁷ The argument is part of his effort to separate theology from philosophy. More specifically, he wants to stress the necessity of revelation for true religion: "I maintain unconditionally that the natural light cannot discover this fundamental tenet of theology—or at least that no one has demonstrated it yet. So revelation has been most necessary."⁸ Spinoza articulates this position relatively early on, in a text that will help clarify what he means by the "natural light" in this context. In a 1665 letter to Blijenbergh, he thus already asserts, while discussing whether "Scripture, just as it is, is the true revealed word of God," that one "cannot have a mathematical demonstration of it, but only divine revelation."⁹ At the same time, however, he also insists that he "firmly believe[s], but [does] not know mathematically, that the prophets were God's confidential counselors and trusty messengers."¹⁰ Therefore, "those who try to show the authority of Scripture by mathematical demonstrations are completely misguided. For the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the prophets."¹¹ Belief in revelation, not certain knowledge, gives Scripture authority and commands obedience.

1 TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245.

2 TTP XII, G III.165|C II.255.

3 For this expression, see TTP IV, G III.67|C II.136; TTP XI, G III.155|C II.244; TTP XII, G III.158–9|C II.248–9, G III.162–3|C II.252–3; TTP XV, G III.186|C II.279; TTP XIX, G III.230|C II.334; see also TP III.10, G III.289|C II.522.

4 TTP XII, G III.165|C II.255.

5 For all quotes, see TTP XII, G III.165|C II.255.

6 TTP VI, G III.188|C II.281.

7 TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278.

8 TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278.

9 Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665, Letter 21, G IV.133|C I.381; trans. modified. Curley has "except by" rather than "but only" for nisi.

10 Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665, Letter 21, G IV.133|C I.381.

11 TTP XV, G III.185–6|C II.279; see also Spinoza to Burgh, late 1675 or early 1676, Letter 76, G IV.322–3|C II.477.

Who was Spinoza aiming at when rejecting the use of mathematical demonstration in theology? Some commentators have suggested that his target was Faustus Socinus's *De auctoritate S. Scripturae* of 1580.¹ It is, however, not clear how Socinus's treatise fits the bill.² Contrary to later Socinians like Socinus's grandson, Andrea Wissowatius, who published a *Religio rationalis* in 1685,³ Socinus was not so much a rationalist as he was a literalist or scripturalist.⁴ And in the only place in Spinoza's writings where he explicitly addresses Socinian doctrine, he clearly refers to this original literalist orientation and not to the rationalist orientation associated with later iterations of the movement.⁵ In a 1665 letter to Blijenbergh, he thus derides the Socinians as particularly "dense" theologians who do "not perceive that Sacred Scripture very often speaks of God in a human way."⁶ Moreover, in the Dutch context, the historical development of Socinianism from literalism toward rationalism was cashed out in the simultaneous existence of competing factions whose disagreements played out within the Dutch collegiant movement during the last decades of the seventeenth century. Jonathan Israel thus distinguishes between "philosophical and anti-philosophical Socinians and Unitarians," counting Spinoza's friends Pieter Balling and Jarig Jelles among the former and, among the latter, Francis Kuyper, editor of the *Bibliotheca fratrum Polonorum* of 1665–8.⁷ When Spinoza denounces the "dense" Socinians, he undoubtedly had anti-philosophical Socinians like Kuyper in mind. Conversely, it is worth noting that, in Kuyper's 1676 refutation of Spinoza, the *Arcana atheismi revelata*,⁸ a rejection of the idea "that natural reason can be taken for the standard or judge of controversies in religious affairs," one of the Socinian's principal grievances against Spinoza is exactly that he finds Spinoza's use of mathematical methods in relation to religion inappropriate, arguing that "the certainty of all knowledge about religion and God is not at all mathematical but at most based on mere probability," and that "unless one carefully attends to the fact that faith cannot consist in mathematical demonstrations, one will necessarily be led toward atheism. Indeed, it is self-evident that demonstration by counting and measuring has no place at all in religious affairs."⁹ When seen against this contextual backdrop, it seems very unlikely that Spinoza had Socinus or the Socinians in mind when speaking against mathematical demonstrations of Scriptural authority.¹⁰

So who did he have in mind? Disappointingly, I have not been able to identify any specific, alternative target of Spinoza's criticism—no work he could have read that directly employs the geometrical method for the purposes of interpreting Scripture. But some contemporary writings, even if unknown by Spinoza, can provide us with instructive context. Geometrical demonstration in theology was far from uncommon at the time and used by a surprisingly wide variety of thinkers. Putting to one side

1 See Meli, Spinoza, and the note by Curley at C II.279.

2 Socinus speaks nowhere of mathematics or mathematical demonstration. He does argue that the authenticity of writings should be measured against "Decrees or Axioms of Christian Religion." but it is not clear that he uses the term "axiom" here in the required Euclidian sense, since he affirms in the same breath that "Reasoning ... is a Way too uncertain to be rely'd on" in order to identify them (Socinus, *The Authority*, pp. 24–5).

3 Wissowatius, *Religio rationalis*; see also Lagrée, *La Raison ardente*, pp. 41, 59–60, 111, 115–16, 194–5.

4 Certainly, Socinus argues in favor of resolving or ignoring places that involve "repugnancies or Contrarities," stresses that "nothing can be discover'd to be evidently false," and establishes as a principle that "nothing ... is to be read therein, that anyone can find probable Reasons to contradict or disprove, provided he has competent Knowledge of Christianity" (Socinus, *The Authority*, pp. 21, 24). In itself, however, none of this implies exegetical rationalism stronger than what can also be found in scholastic and late scholastic theology, be it Catholic or Protestant. On Socinus's literalism and scripturalism, see also Osier, "Faust Socin et la Bible"; Osier, *Faust Socin*.

5 On this development, see Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, p. 149.

6 Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665, G IV.132 | C I.381.

7 See Israel, "Grotius," pp. 24–5; Israel, *The Enlightenment that Failed*, pp. 109–10; Kolakowski, *Chrétien sans église*, pp. 261–5, 271–2.

8 See Israel, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction," pp. 96–9.

9 Kuyper, *Arcana atheismi revelata*, "Proemium" [unpaginated]. Israel, however, overstates this Socinian's opposition to Spinoza—as perhaps Spinoza himself overstates his opposition to the Socinians more generally—when denouncing Kuyper as a mere "fideist" and a "dogmatic anti-Trinitarian scriptural fundamentalist" ("The Early Dutch and German Reaction," p. 96). As shown by Andrew Cooper Fix, Kuyper took issue with the Cartesian and Spinozist conceptions of philosophical reason as he understood them, not necessarily with reason as such. In his 1677 *De Diepten des Satans*, Kuyper argues against using "natural reason" (*Natuurlijke reeden*) and in favor of using "sound reason" (*Gezonde reeden*) when reading the Bible. Natural reason is strictly deductive reasoning from first principles; sound reason is defined as "natural understanding" (*Natuurlijk verstand*) and includes more generally "the ability of human beings to think, conceive, deny or confirm," including knowledge from experience (Kuyper, *De Diepten des Satans*, "Voorreden," sect. 1–3, 5). According to Fix, "with his idea of 'healthy reason' Kuyper described the empirical, commonsense rationalism that formed the basis for Collegiant rational religion" (see Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, pp. 156–60, here 156).

10 See Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 118–20; Moreau, *Spinoza et le spinozisme*, pp. 30–1; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. 128.

Descartes's hapless attempt at demonstrating the existence of God geometrically in the Replies to the Second Objections,¹ which Spinoza of course knew, a first good example of an elaborate attempt at mathematical or geometrical demonstrations in theology from the period is Hermann Conring's *Fundamentorum fidei pontificae concussio*, published in 1654. Conring, a Lutheran and Aristotelian professor at the University of Helmstedt, aims at "shaking up the foundations of the pontifical faith," i.e., Roman Catholicism, which he deems *sine discrimine falsa*. He argues that if one is to see truth clearly, unadorned and simple, as the mathematicians do, it must be derived from axioms and hypotheses embraced universally by all Christians.² A second example is Jean-Baptiste Morin's *De vera cognitione Dei ex solo naturae lumine; per Theoremata adversus Ethnicos et Atheos Mathematico more demonstrata*, published in Paris in 1655.³ It is an expanded version of a 1635 pamphlet, the *Quod Deus sit*, already in geometrical form, but supplemented with a long discussion of Descartes's demonstrations of God in the Second Meditation.⁴ As a third example, in 1667, Johann Ludwig Fabritius—the same Fabritius who a few years later reluctantly extended a job offer at the University of Heidelberg to Spinoza on behalf of his prince⁵—published, under the pseudonym Janus Alexander Ferrarius, the treatise *Euclides catholicus, sive Demonstratio romanae fidei, ex primis, certis, et evidentibus principiis, mathematica methodo, et connexis continua serie propositionibus, deducta*, i.e., "the Catholic Euclid, or, Demonstration of the Roman faith, deduced from primary, certain and evident principles, from the mathematical method, and from the connection of a continuous series of propositions."⁶ Fabritius, a former student of Voetius and a strict Calvinist, develops a mock argument in favor of the authority of the Roman Catholic church on the basis of one definition, one axiom, and one postulate.⁷ These three texts, written by a Lutheran, a Catholic, and a Calvinist, respectively, testify to the variety in mid-seventeenth-century attempts at appropriating the geometrical paradigm for theological purposes.⁸

Now, Spinoza could in principle have joined in on Fabritius's geometrical mockery of the Roman Catholic church's ecclesiastical axioms. But he could hardly have opposed the use of the geometrical method in natural theology in the manner of Descartes or even Morin. After all, the entire first book of the *Ethics* is dedicated to the geometrical exploration of the nature and existence of God. Spinoza's criticism of mathematical demonstration in theology is clearly restricted to questions concerning revealed theology and Scripture. And the only relevant example I have come upon of a text that engages in such demonstration postdates Spinoza's death by a couple of years. It is, however, a demonstration that is important in the history of Spinoza's first reception, for it appears in the work of one of his most prominent European opponents, namely the *Demonstratio evangelica* published in 1679 by the French erudite Pierre-Daniel Huet.⁹ The *Demonstratio* is presented as a refutation of the "author of the freedom of philosophizing" and, to that effect, Huet develops a long geometrical demonstration of the prophetic agreement between the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰ On the basis of seven definitions and four axioms,¹¹ establishing the meaning of Scriptural authenticity, prophecy,

1 Descartes, *Replies to the Second Objections*, AT VII.160–6 | CSMK II.113–20.

2 Conring, *Fundamentorum fidei pontificae concussio*, p. 10.

3 See Morin, *De vera cognitione*; see also Garber, "J.-B. Morin," pp. 70–1.

4 Perhaps, as Daniel Garber has suggested, with the *Quod Deus sit*, Morin was even originally "responsible for the request that Descartes present his arguments in geometrical form" (Garber, Garber, "J.-B. Morin," p. 72; for the request to Descartes, see *Second Objections*, AT VII.128 | CSMK II.92). Descartes's geometrical demonstrations in the *Replies to the Second Objections* were his response to that request.

5 See Chapter 2, sect. "Declining a Job Offer: Spinoza's Answer to Fabritius."

6 I have consulted the edition of 1676, Fabritius [pseud. Ferrarius], *Euclides catholicus*.

7 Fabritius [pseud. Ferrarius], *Euclides catholicus*, p. 7. On this work, see also Bernard, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, April 1701, pp. 410–11.

8 On these various efforts, see also Lærke, "Leibniz: lire les géomètres," pp. 88–9.

9 Huet, *Demonstratio evangelica*. Spinoza was aware that Huet's voluminous treatise was in progress and would include a refutation of the TTP: he was informed about it in 1676 by Tschirnhaus who, in turn, most likely knew about it from his friend Leibniz who frequented Huet (Tschirnhaus to Spinoza, May 2, 1676, Letter 80, G IV.331 | C II.484). Spinoza was curious and asked for a copy (Spinoza to Tschirnhaus, July 15, 1676, Letter 83, G IV.334 | C II.487). Unfortunately, even though Huet's book was practically complete at that time, its publication was delayed by unforeseen trouble with the Royal Censorship (see Shelford, "Of Sceptres and Censors"). Spinoza died before having an opportunity to read and react to it. It appeared in 1679. See also Lærke, "À la recherche."

10 For detailed analysis of Huet's demonstration, see Shelford, "Thinking Geometrically"; Lærke, *Les Lumières de Leibniz*, pp. 107–203; Lærke, "La méthode géométrique."

11 Huet, *Demonstratio evangelica*, pp. 6–12.

and true Christian religion, Huet provides no fewer than 161 examples of prophetic concordance in the Bible, showing how the Old Testament prophetically predicts the New, hereby demonstrating the divine truth of the revelation it contains.¹ The argument represents exactly the kind of demonstration of the authority of Scripture that Spinoza deems “completely misguided.”²

So, in sum, while Spinoza in the Ethics joins a theologically broad field of thinkers in the seventeenth century deeming geometrical reasoning appropriate for natural theology, and moreover affirms that some of the inferential techniques for interpreting nature that are operative in the geometrical demonstrations of the Ethics can also be used to determine the truth claims of Scripture, he rejects the idea that reason in any strict sense can be employed to demonstrate the authority of Scripture. And yet, he denies that it is simply a question of faith. The authority of Scripture, too, should be subjected to some kind of reasoned evaluation. In TTP XV, while discussing the foundations of faith, Spinoza thus writes that “even though this foundation of the whole of theology and Scripture cannot be shown by a mathematical demonstration, we can still embrace it with sound judgment [sano ... iudicio amplectimur].”³ The passage echoes the distinction between “reason” and the “natural light” that he draws in a passage already quoted earlier when arguing that the religion of the Gospel does not “fall under reason,” but that its most important themes can still be known by “the natural light.”⁴ But what is this “sound judgment,” corresponding to a use of the natural light which is not quite demonstrative, but which still implies a kind of reasoning that helps us to “embrace” Scripture? To answer this question, we must turn to Spinoza’s more general use of the notions of “sound mind” (*mens sana*) and “sound reason” (*ratio sana*).

Sound Judgment and Right Reason

The notion of a “sound mind” appears in two contexts. First: in relation to Spinoza’s conception of the Holy Spirit. It does not immediately figure in TTP I where he analyzes the conception of the “Holy Spirit” or “God’s spirit or mind” in terms of singular virtue, constancy of heart, and good judgment.⁵ Later, however, in TTP XI, he refers back to these analyses as concerned with such “passages where the spirit of God and the Holy Spirit (which we spoke about in Chapter 1) are taken for a sound mind [*pro mente sana*], blessed and devoted to God.”⁶ This association of the sound mind with the Holy Spirit contributes to the impression that soundness of mind is principally a question of moral virtue, for, as we learn later in TTP XV, “really, the Holy Spirit is nothing but a satisfaction which arises in the mind from good actions.”⁷ Second: in TTP V, Spinoza explains how the prophet Isaiah “in return for freedom and charity ... promises a sound mind in a sound body [*mentem sanam in corpore sano*].”⁸ He is of course alluding to a very famous phrase from Juvenal’s Satires. But the correlation between mind and body it expresses is also deeply embedded in Spinoza’s own conception of mind–body relations in the Ethics.⁹ Indeed, the parallel concern for the soundness of mind and the health of the body already runs as a red thread through his first philosophical program in the TdIE.¹⁰ It shows up later in the TP and in the correspondence as well.¹¹ It is worth mentioning that Spinoza’s program for a combined medicine of the body and of the mind was subsequently taken up by Ehrenfried Walther von

1 Huet, *Demonstratio evangelica*, chap. ix–clxix, pp. 388–620.

2 TTP XV, G III.185–6|C II.279.

3 TTP XV, G III.187|C II.280.

4 TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245.

5 TTP I, G III.27|C II.91.

6 TTP XI, G III.155|C II.245; the parenthesis is Spinoza’s.

7 TTP XV, G III.188|C II.281.

8 TTP V, G III.71|C II.14; trans. modified.

9 E2p7&s, G II.89|C I.450–1.

10 See in particular TdIE, §§15–16, G II.9|C I.11.

11 See TP II.6, G III.278|C II.509: “experience teaches all too well that it’s no more in our power to have a sound mind than it is to have a sound body”; Spinoza to Oldenburg, February 7, 1676, Letter 78, G IV.326–7|C II.480: “no one can deny that it is no more in our power to have a healthy body than it is to have a sound mind, unless he wants to deny both experience and reason.”

Tschirnhaus, who published a *Medicina corporis* in 1686, followed by a *Medicina mentis* in 1687 (both reedited as a single volume in 1695).¹

As for “sound reason” (*sana ratio*), Spinoza principally employs the notion in the context of his analysis of the foundations of the republic in TTP XVI, and always to make the same point, namely that “sound reason” is not something we are naturally equipped with, but that it must be acquired. For example, he argues in TTP XVI that we cannot appeal to “sound reason” in order to explain how human beings enter into society and civil union, because “the natural right of each human being is determined not by sound reason, but by desire and power.”² Once acquired, however, sound reason is associated with the proper constitution of a free republic: “that republic is most free whose laws are founded on sound reason.”³ In the TP as well, “sound reason” plays a prominent role in Spinoza’s conception of the origins of society, arguing that “there is no way this union of minds can be conceived unless the commonwealth aims most at what sound reason teaches to be useful to all men.”⁴

One notable conclusion that can be drawn from these various passages concerns the relation that “sound reason” entertains with the “natural light.” Contrary to the natural light that is common to all as a universally shared ability to reason, sound reason is not common to all and associated with actual reasoning alone. Sound reason, one could then suggest, is the natural light actualized insofar as this aptitude develops in free men. It reflects, as Spinoza puts it in the TdIE, how “the intellect, by its inborn power, makes intellectual tools for itself, by which it acquires other powers for other intellectual works, and from these works still other tools, or the power of searching further, and so proceeds by stages, until it reaches the pinnacle of wisdom.”⁵ A passage in TTP XVI goes some way toward confirming that suggestion. While Spinoza elsewhere confirms that the natural light belongs to all and that it is of “the nature of the mind” to have “the power [potentiam] to form certain notions,” he here stresses that, regardless of that ability, still, in the state of nature before the establishment of civil society, nature “has denied them the actual power [actualem potentiam] to live according to sound reason. So they’re no more bound to live according to the laws of a sound mind than a cat is bound to live according to the laws of a lion’s nature.”⁶

In the Ethics, “sound reason” scores only three occurrences.⁷ “Sound mind” occurs only once, in yet another allusion to Juvenal.⁸ By contrast, “right reason” (*recta ratio*)—an expression Spinoza never uses in the TTP—appears more frequently and in key deductions.⁹ Between the two texts, those notions can, however, be understood as roughly equivalent. Both *sana ratio* and *recta ratio* are constantly associated with what Spinoza calls a way or principle of living. Hence, in TTP XVI, he defines “sound reason” as knowledge of the “true principle of living” (*vivendi ratio*) that allows one to acquire a “virtuous disposition.”¹⁰ Similarly, in the Ethics, “right reason” (*recta ratio*) and “way of living” (*ratio vivendi*) are intimately connected in the composite notion of “the right way of living” (*recta vivendi*

1 In 1675, while discussing Spinoza’s still unpublished Ethics with Leibniz in Paris, Tschirnhaus described it as follows: “Spinoza’s book will be about God, mind, blessedness or the idea of the perfect man, on the medicine of the soul, and medicine of the body” (Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften*, VI, iii, p. 384). For an excellent French translation of the *Medicina mentis* with an extended commentary and notes by Jean-Paul Wurtz, see Tschirnhaus, *Médecine de l’esprit*. I have argued in some detail elsewhere that Tschirnhaus’s original conception of a “medicine of the soul” must be traced back to his discussions with Spinoza in person in 1674 and to his reading of Spinoza’s philosophical papers in manuscript in 1675–6. See Lærke, “A Conjecture”; Lærke, “O Spinozismo de Tschirnhaus.”

2 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283; see also TTP XVI, G III.198–9|C II.293.

3 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

4 TP III.7, G III.287|C II.520.

5 TdIE, §31, G II.14|C I.17.

6 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283; my italics.

7 E1p33s2, G II.76|C I.438; E4p37 G II.237|C I.566; E5p39, G II.305|C I.614.

8 E5p39s, G II.305|C I.614: “if we pass the whole length of our life with a sound mind in a sound body [*mente sana in corpore sano*], that is considered happiness.”

9 According to Bernard Rousset, Spinoza’s use of the notion *recta ratio* in the Ethics is “discreet but formally calculated” (“*La Recta Ratio*,” p. 11).

10 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283; see also TTP XVI, C III.190|C II.284, where Spinoza opposes acting “under the guidance of sound reason” to acting “by the prompting of the affects.”

ratio). The conception of a *ratio vivendi* stands centrally in Spinoza's "universal ethics" as a whole. Indeed, he summarizes the entire part 4 of the Ethics as being about "the right way of living."¹

All these closely related notions—*mens sana*, *sana ratio*, *recta ratio*, *recta ratio vivendi*—come with considerable contextual baggage, as Spinoza himself acknowledges. Hence, in E3preface, he mentions the work of "those who have written about the affects, and men's way of living [*hominum vivendi ratione*]" and recognizes "some very distinguished men (to whose work and diligence we confess that we owe much), who have written many admirable things about the right way of living [*recta vivendi ratione*]."² The most important "distinguished men" Spinoza has in mind here are, I think, Cicero, Hobbes, and Descartes. As parts of a shared intellectual culture, these are all authors that Spinoza can reasonably assume his presumptive readers to be familiar with. Simply alluding to them and using their vocabulary mobilizes an entire conceptual universe that he does not need to make explicit.³

First, in terms of philosophical terminology, the notion *recta ratio* is inseparable from Cicero's *De legibus*, I, 23, where the Roman philosopher describes it as the reason common to divine and human nature, and declares it identical to law.⁴ In this respect, Spinoza's appeal to the notion in the context of formulating "rules of living" is symptomatic of the many points of convergence between Spinoza's ethics and Stoic moral philosophy, including their shared conceptions of reason as a virtue and of perfection as conformity to one's own nature, and their shared underlying metaphysical naturalism.⁵

Next, Spinoza's terminology partly resonates with the way Hobbes employs the notion of "right reason" in *De Cive* where, after defining natural law as "the dictate of right reason," he goes on to explain that "by right reason in men's natural state, I mean, not, as many do, an infallible faculty, but the act of reasoning, that is, a man's own true Reasoning about actions of his which may conduce to his advantage or other men's loss." He distinguishes it from "true reasoning" by which he understands "reasoning that draws conclusions from the true principles correctly stated."⁶ What Spinoza shares with these conceptions is first of all the idea that right reason, like sound reason, is necessarily actual, an act of reasoning rather than a mere ability. To this one might add that, for Spinoza as for Hobbes, "right reason" operates on a somewhat different level than strict deduction but includes other, less stringently rational procedures. I shall return to this point in more detail later.

Finally, regarding the connection to Descartes, it is most clearly suggested by E5p10s where Spinoza notes that "the best thing ... that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a right way of living, or sure doctrines of life [*rectam vivendi rationem seu certa vitae dogmata*]."⁷ The morale par provision envisaged by Descartes in the *Discours de la méthode*—"a provisional moral code consisting of just three or four maxims"⁸—clearly resonates in these remarks, even though Spinoza goes on to give a distinctly more systematic and epistemologically grounded version of such a "moral code."⁹ Similar thinking can be found in the TdIE where Spinoza explains that while we "devote ourselves to bringing the intellect back to the right path, it is necessary

1 E4app, G II.266|C I.588.

2 E3preface, G II.137|C I.49. In the definitions of the affects, Spinoza speaks of rectitude in relation to "right actions" (*acti recti*) as opposed to "wrong" ones, referring to the "customary" way of using those terms (EIII def.aff. XXVII, G II.197|C I.537). See also TP ii.20, where Spinoza says that "we're also accustomed to call sin what's contrary to the dictate of sound reason" (G III.283|C II.515).

3 It is part of the "contract" that Spinoza establishes with his readers, as Pierre-François Moreau has put it with a notion borrowed from Philippe Lejeune (see Moreau, "Une théorie de l'autobiographie," pp. 378–9).

4 Cicero, *De legibus*, I, p. 23, trans. in *The Political Works*, II, p. 40.

5 See e.g. TdIE, §13, where Spinoza writes that human perfection consists in "the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature" (G II.7|C I.11). A great many texts will support the claim, but this is not the place to discuss Spinoza's relations to Stoicism in any detail. The question has been explored in a now relatively substantial literature, including Matheron, "Le moment stoïcien"; James, "Spinoza the Stoic"; Lagrée, "Spinoza et le vocabulaire stoïcien"; DeBrabander, *Spinoza and the Stoics*; Miller, *Spinoza and the Stoics*. The association can be found as early as in Leibniz and Bayle (Miller, *Spinoza and the Stoics*, p. 1).

6 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, I.2, p. 33. For a discussion of Hobbes's conception of right reason, see Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 194–303.

7 E5p10s, G II.287|C I.601; trans. modified.

8 Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, III, AT VI.22|CSMK I.122.

9 See Sangiacomo, "Fixing Descartes."

to live. So we are forced, before we do anything else, to assume certain rules of living [vivendi regulas].”¹

Some additional remarks about the passage from E5p10s are necessary. For, as the attentive reader will perhaps have noted, I have modified Curley’s translation on two counts and it is, I think, instructive in this particular case to explain why in some detail.

First, in E5p10s, Curley translates dogmata by “maxims” rather than, as he does in the TTP, by “doctrines.” I presume he makes that choice because Descartes uses the French term maximes in the passage in the Discours de la méthode that Spinoza is conversing with. Also, there are no immediate contextual constraints in the Ethics on the choice of translation: the term dogma is not prominent in the work as a whole and no coordination with other propositions in terms of translation is required. In fact, the three occurrences of the term in E5p10s are the only occurrences in the entire work. If, however, we turn to the exact Latin edition of the Discours that Spinoza read, contained in the 1650 edition of the Opera philosophica from Elzevir, we realize that the Latin term translating Descartes’s French maximes here is not dogmata but regulae, or “rules,” making “maxims” a less appropriate choice of term in relation to Spinoza’s creative reappropriation of Descartes’s conception of provisional morality.² Furthermore, as we shall analyze it in detail in Chapters 9 and 10, “doctrines”—doctrines of faith (fidei dogmata) and political doctrines (dogmata politica)—play a fundamental and systematic role in Spinoza’s theological and political conception of how freedom and security can be established in a republic where (and when) citizens are less than rational but live according to the guidance of their imagination (which is, after all, most of the time, even in a free republic). In the TTP, Spinoza thus describes “doctrines” as the best available tool for structuring the collective imagination of people and making them act in accordance with their own rational self-interest even when they have no genuine knowledge of what that might consist in. Now, in E5p10s, Spinoza makes clear gestures toward this same conception of “doctrines” as a way of guiding the imagination. Regarding the “doctrine of life” according to which “hate is to be conquered by love, or nobility,” he thus explains that

in order that we may always have this rule of reason [rationis praescriptum] ready when it is needed, we ought to think about and meditate frequently on the common wrongs of men, and how they may be warded off best by nobility. For if we join the image of a wrong to the imagination of this doctrine [dogmatis], it will always be ready for us ... when a wrong is done to us.³

In sum, we are here confronted with an excellent example of how the appropriate translation of a term depends on the choice of relevant context—in this case, whether one believes Spinoza’s use of the term dogma in E5p10s is best understood in relation to Descartes’s Discours, or in relation to Spinoza’s own TTP. Both clearly play a role, but I think the latter is the most important. Accordingly, I modify Curley’s translation of dogmata from “maxims” to “doctrines.”

Second, in the passage from E5p10s, Curley gives recta ratio as “correct principle,” whereas he gives the exact same expression as “right principle” just a few lines further down in a passage where Spinoza reminds the reader that “the highest satisfaction of the mind stems from the right principle of living [ex recta vivendi ratione summa animi acquiescentia oritur].”⁴ Curley gives no explanation for this discrepancy in translation of the adjective recta, but presumably it is because the provisional nature of the first ratio recta vivendi makes for an odd fit with the “satisfaction of the mind” associated with

¹ TdIE §17, G II.9|C I.11–12.

² Descartes, *Dissertatio de methodo*, III, in *Opera philosophica*, III, p. 20: “atque ut ab illo tempore vivere inciperem quam felicissime fieri posset, Ethicam quandam ad tempus mihi effinxi, quæ tribus tantum aut quatuor regulis continebatur; quas hic non pigebit adscribere.” See also, in the margin of p. 19, the title of part III: *Quædam Moralis scientiæ regulæ, ex hac Methodo depromptæ*. As Russ Leo notes, “we can safely assume that the Latin edition of Descartes’s *Opera Philosophica* was among his most valuable resources as Spinoza polished his drafts of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Ethica*” (Leo, “Affective Physics,” p. 35; see also Mignini, Filippo, “Fictio/Verziering(e),” p. 44 n. 38).

³ E5p10s, G II.287–8|C I.601–2; trans. modified.

⁴ E5p10s, G II.288|C I.602.

the second. I am not convinced, however, that the variation in translation is warranted. Here as well, it tends to obscure a genuine point of contact between the argument of the Ethics and the argument of the TTP regarding the salvation of the ignorant. The point is that, regardless of the motives one has for adopting such a “right way of living”—be it provisionally through the adoption of binding doctrines or freely from rational self-interest and intellectual love of God—it will bring satisfaction of the mind, even though, Spinoza admits, the commitment will be firmer and more constant in the second case.¹ The Hebrews, for example, had to be “constrained to live well [bene vivere] by the command of the law. So the principle of living well, or the true life [ratio bene vivendi, sive vera vita], and the worship and love of God, were to them more bondage than true freedom.”² Consequently, in the translation of E5p10s, I have changed “correct” to “right.”

In any case, as Bernard Rousset has shown, the notions concerned with sound reason, right reason, and rules of living together form the terminological parameters for Spinoza’s understanding of a kind of “practical rationality.”³ They circumscribe a domain of rationality less strict than deductive knowledge which is not about demonstrating whether a given proposition is absolutely or certainly true but about identifying grounds for accepting it as true or, as Spinoza puts it, grounds for embracing it as true. The TTP is somewhat sparing in explaining what this practical rationality consists in and what bearing it has on Spinoza’s exegetical method. After its publication, however, he realized the need for some clarification. In view of the planned second edition, he thus added a note to TTP VII in order to explain how, and with what kind of certainty, sound reason can perceive the foundations of Scripture:

By things one can perceive I understand not only those legitimately demonstrated, but also those we’re accustomed to embrace with moral certainty and hear without wonder, even if they can’t be demonstrated in any way. Everyone grasps Euclid’s propositions before they’re demonstrated. Thus I also call perceptible and clear those stories of things, both future and past, which don’t surpass human belief, as well as laws, institutions and customs (even if they can’t be demonstrated mathematically).⁴

The annotation reaches back to Spinoza’s discussion of prophecy in TTP II where he discusses a particular kind of certainty qualified as “moral” as opposed to “mathematical.”⁵ By moral certainty, Spinoza—following a long tradition—understands a kind of certainty that, contrary to mathematical certainty, is grounded not in the thing itself, but in external factors drawn from experience and testimonies. He associates it specifically with “prophetic certainty,” i.e., the certainty with which the prophets grasped the divinity of their revelations. Spinoza says that moral certainty requires “vivid experience” and “signs.” He moreover adds a properly moral element—not necessarily implied by the traditional understanding of the notion—by requiring that the person who gives testimony should have “a heart inclined only to the right and the good.”⁶

In TTP XV, Spinoza extends these considerations to concern not only the prophet’s reception of divine revelation, but also our reception of prophecy, thus associating the question of prophetic certainty with the question of the authority of Scripture, in a passage we have already encountered earlier:

¹ See TTP V, G III.78 | C II.149.

² TTP II, G III.42 | C II.107.

³ Rousset, “La Recta ratio,” p. 225.

⁴ TTP VII, Annotation VIII, G III.253 | C II.185.

⁵ TTP II, G III.30–1 | C II.117: “Prophecy is inferior to natural knowledge, which needs no sign, but of its own nature involves certainty. Indeed, this prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral, as is evident from Scripture itself”; TTP II, G III.31 | C II.96: “the prophet’s certainty was only moral, because no one can justify himself before God, or boast that he is the instrument of God’s piety”; TTP II, G III.32 | C II.97: “Because the certainty the prophets had from signs was not mathematical—i.e., a certainty which follows from the necessity of the perception of the thing perceived or seen—but only moral, and the signs were given only to persuade the prophet, it follows that the signs were given according to the opinions and capacity of the prophet.”

⁶ TTP II, G III.31 | C II.96. In sum, “the whole of prophetic certainty ... is founded on these three things: 1) That the prophets imagined the things revealed to them very vividly, in the way we are usually affected by objects when we are awake; 2) That there was a sign; 3) And finally—this is the chief thing—that they had a heart inclined only to the right and the good” (TTP II, G III.31 | C II.96). See also Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 30–48; Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*, pp. 209–25

I maintain unconditionally that the natural light cannot discover this fundamental tenet of theology [that men are saved by obedience]. ... Nevertheless, I maintain that we can use our judgment [judicio], so that we embrace [amplectamur] what has already been revealed with at least moral certainty. I say with moral certainty, for we should not expect to be able to be more certain of it than the prophets were.¹

As it appears, the use of sound and right reason goes beyond the natural light—here clearly to be understood in terms of reason in the strict sense, as the inference of adequate ideas from certain principles—to include also such “perceiving” that allows us to affirm something to be true with just moral certainty. And while this does not bring truth, it does bring acceptance. Or, as Spinoza also puts it, it is the kind of reasoning that leads us to “embrace” an opinion; that is to say, to internalize it and act in accordance with it.² It is in this sense that sound reason and right reason are functions of a practical rationality.

Conclusion

We are now finally in a position to draw some conclusions about Spinoza’s conception of “philosophizing” and the kind of intellectual activity with which it is associated. What we have seen, most importantly, is that “free philosophizing” cannot be reduced to the sole construction of adequate ideas.³ So what is it? Just how broadly should we define “philosophizing” in the relevant sense? In approaching Scripture, Spinoza invites us to distinguish between the following three aspects of exegetical investigation.

(1) First, we must determine the meaning of Scripture through historical inquiry into the origins, reception, and transmission of the book. Reason and the natural light have no role to play here in the evaluation of content: the original meaning of the prophetic narratives is indissociably steeped in experience and imagination and must be understood as such. Some rational procedures—philology and textual critique—still play an instrumental role in discovering the original meaning, but reason does not assign any restrictions upon what that meaning can amount to.

(2) Second, we must determine the truth claims of Scripture—or what Scripture as a whole claims to be true doctrine—by extracting, by a method similar to the rational study of nature, the common foundation of its narratives, or the global message that Scripture conveys. It is in this context that the use of the “natural light,” understood in the sense of rational investigation, plays a significant role. Rational investigation consists in establishing the common features of things, “as [when] from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things.”⁴ In this case, it means inferring the global message related by all the narratives that make up the whole of Scripture. And, as we shall see in Chapter 9, the common message we can extract from the biblical narratives through rational investigation takes the form of doctrines designed to promote certain moral lessons, or “rules of living.”

(3) Third, we must inquire into the authority of Scripture by asking what should motivate us to accept those moral lessons as being, in fact, God’s command. In relation to this inquiry, Spinoza invites us to use our sound or right reason to determine whether these lessons amount to something we should “embrace” and, consequently, obey. Hence, in considering the conditions of acceptability we must exercise “sound judgment,” which includes a number of considerations about probability,

1 TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278; trans. modified. Curley has “accept” for amplectamur.

2 For more on this notion of “embracing” an opinion, see Chapter 4, sect. “The Epistolary Style.”

3 This constitutes another point on which Spinoza differs from Meyer’s *Philosophia S. Scripturae* interpretes. For Meyer, “right reason” and “true philosophy” are one and the same: “Now we by no means think it unworthy of the letters, words, syllables and sentences which must come under the title of Scripture when its interpretation is discussed, that they should be subject to sound reason or philosophy. Right reason and true philosophy, as we have shown above and as will not be denied by any man of sound mind, are excellent and remarkable gifts granted by God to the human race” (Meyer, *Scripture*, XVI, p. 222). On Meyer’s discussion of right reason and how his position differs from that of the Arminians, see *Scripture*, XVI, pp. 211–21. Meyer primarily complains that “they do not clearly explain whether in their interpretations of the Scriptures they use only reason as the means and instrument for tracing and eliciting the meaning of the Holy Writings, or whether they use reason additionally as a norm according to which all interpretation must be directed and decided” (*Scripture*, XVI, p. 217; see also Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, p. 97).

4 TTP VII, G III.98|C II.171; see also TTP VII, G III.99|C II.172.

trustworthiness, and moral rectitude that Spinoza gathers under the traditional notion of “moral certainty.”

My suggestion is that when Spinoza defends the freedom of philosophizing, “philosophizing” includes all three kinds of investigation: historical inquiry into meaning; rational analysis of truth; sound judgment regarding authority. This, of course, has the entirely welcome implication that Spinoza’s argument in the TTP in favor of the freedom of philosophizing—based on all three kinds of investigation—will itself qualify as free philosophizing. It also implies, however, that neither of the two styles of discourse described—on the one hand, the individual styles in which revelation is communicated in Scripture, reflecting the diverging mentality of the prophets; and on the other, the neutral, universal style of geometrical demonstration, reflecting the very structure of the divine intellect—are appropriate for defining the style of free philosophizing. The prophetic style is inappropriate because it is based on command and too tied up with the structures of the imagination. The geometrical style, however, is also inappropriate because it is far too restrictive in scope and incapable of accommodating all the forms of reasoning that pertain to moral certainty. So in what style, exactly, should free philosophizing be conducted? This will be the topic of Chapter 4.

The Apostolic Styles

Preaching from Revelation and Knowledge

Let us return to the same notion with which we began Chapter 3, but from another angle, namely that of style. Spinoza is not only interested in the difference between the particular styles of prophetic speech and the neutral style or lack of style of geometrical demonstration. He also envisages yet a third style, which is, exactly, the style of free philosophizing. This style is at the heart of a chapter of the TTP which is rarely the center of attention, but which is, literally, right in the middle of Spinoza's treatise, namely TTP XI. It is the last in a block formed by the chapters VIII to XI where Spinoza, as he sums up the contents of that set of chapters in the preface, aims at "showing what prejudices have arisen from the fact that the common people, enslaved to superstition and loving the remnants of time more than eternity itself, worship the books of Scripture rather than the word of God itself."¹ It stands out in Spinoza's treatise as the only chapter exclusively dedicated to the interpretation of the New Testament; more precisely, to the Letters of the Apostles. It is often ignored by commentators, in whole or in part.² As for those commentators who do study it, they most often consider the last two thirds of the chapter. In these last parts, focusing on the content of the Letters, Spinoza argues that because the Apostles did not all base their teaching of the Christian religion on the same "foundations," their differing teachings "gave rise to many disputes and schisms, which have tormented the church incessantly from the time of the Apostles to the present day."³ I shall return to this reflection regarding the diverse foundations of the Christian religion in Chapter 9. Here, I want to focus instead on the first third of TTP XI which is concerned with the form of the Apostles' Letters and which conveys a considerably more positive image of their teaching.⁴

In TTP XI, Spinoza discusses two ways of preaching the Gospel suggested by Saint Paul in 1 Cor 14:6, one "from revelation" (*ex revelatione*), the other "from knowledge" (*ex cognitione*). Those forms of preaching constitute different "ways of speaking" (*modi loquendi*) or two different "styles" (*styli*). They are used for very different purposes. One is for transmitting revelation in the form of commands; the other is for teaching and giving advice in the form of arguments.⁵ The first style is attributed to the prophets, including the Apostles when they prophesize; the other style is specifically attributed to the Apostles in their Letters. I shall refer to these styles as the "prophetic style" and the "epistolary style," respectively. My main concern is with the epistolary style, the conceptualization of which I believe is of crucial importance for understanding the nature and form of free philosophizing. But let us first, for the sake of comparison, take a very brief look at the prophetic style.

¹ TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.73.

² For a striking example in an otherwise outstanding work, see Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology*, pp. 59, 63.

³ TTP XI, G III.157–8|C II.247. Steven B. Smith dedicates a few pages to the chapter, noting that the differences in "method and style" between the Apostles' teachings became "the cause of the schisms and quarrels within the early church" (Spinoza, pp. 110–11). Verbeek provides an analysis of how the "apparent doctrinal diversity among the Apostles is also the cause of numerous schisms and disputes in the Church" (Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, pp. 81–5). Susan James also focuses on Spinoza's idea that the teachings of the Apostles were at the root of religious disaster (Spinoza, pp. 179–83). Alexander Douglas stresses how diversity in the Apostles' teachings, their "conflicting statements," was at the root of "divisions between the churches and confessions that so plagued his own age" (Douglas, *Spinoza and Dutch Cartesianism*, pp. 103–4). Finally, according to Curley, the argument regarding the disagreements among the Apostles is "the most interesting point" in TTP XI ("Resurrecting Leo Strauss," pp. 148).

⁴ Steven Nadler, Atsuko Fukuoka, and Edwin Curley are among the few contemporary commentators who take note of this point in Spinoza, but Fukuoka only uses it to establish the contrast to "prophetic authority," Nadler declares Spinoza's position on the Apostles "disingenuous," and Curley sees Spinoza's reflections on the epistolary style as principally designed to "weaken the authority of the Apostles" (Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, p. 202; Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, pp. 171–3; Curley, "Resurrecting Leo Strauss," pp. 147–8, here 147). For a 1680 reading of TTP XI arguing that Spinoza's global reading of the Apostles' Letters leads to "pure, unadulterated atheism [*purus putus Atheismus*]," see Kortholt, *De tribus impostoribus*, p. 159.

⁵ TTP XI, G III.151|C II.262; see also Cor 14:6: "Now brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I speak to you in some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?" Taking only the side concerned with knowledge and teaching seriously, Ronald Beiner argues that TTP XI presents an analysis of apostolic teaching, "the net effect of which is to present Christianity basically as a religion that has cast off prophecy" (Beiner, *Civil Religion*, p. 108). I find this analysis particularly careless.

The Prophetic Style

In TTP VI, dedicated to miracles, Spinoza explains the fact that Scripture sometimes presents ordinary laws of nature as if they were divine commands by appealing to the “method and style” of Scripture:

the purpose of Scripture is not to teach things through their natural causes, but only to relate those things which fill the imagination, and to do this by that method and style [methodo et stylo] which serves best to increase wonder at things, and consequently to impress devotion in the hearts of the common people.¹

The point applies to the Old Testament but also to the New Testament when the Apostles preach as prophets, ex revelatione, i.e., when they “spoke in public assemblies” as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles.²

Now, according to a definition given in TTP I, “prophesy, or revelation, is the certain knowledge of some matter which God has revealed to him.”³ Prophesy or revelation is a form in which God communicates knowledge, as opposed to natural knowledge which is another such form. Spinoza, however, refuses to distinguish prophetic knowledge from natural knowledge by reference to content. There is no supernatural domain of divine things corresponding to some supernatural light.⁴ Moreover, true prophesy, revelation, and natural knowledge have the same source, namely God: “We can call natural knowledge divine with as much right as anything else,”⁵ but “nothing prevents God from communicating to men in other ways the same things we know by the light of nature.”⁶ Hence, what separates prophetic knowledge or revelation from natural knowledge is only that the former takes the form of commands and doctrines of faith, while the latter takes the form of natural principles and rational argument. Those who communicate divine knowledge to others in the form of commands and doctrines are called prophets: “A prophet is someone who interprets God’s revelations to those who cannot have certain knowledge of them, and who therefore can only embrace what has been revealed by simple faith.”⁷

A prophet “does not reason but decides”;⁸ he “speak[s] pure doctrines [pura dogmata], whether decrees or statements.”⁹ The prophets stipulate laws that require obedience and not understanding and, as such, the way they communicate divine knowledge is directly opposed to rational argumentation: “The authority of the prophet is not subject to reasoning.”¹⁰ Consequently, “the greatest of the prophets, Moses, did not make any argument in due form.”¹¹ Whatever Moses says in the Pentateuch that might resemble argumentation is in fact just “ways of speaking he used to express God’s decrees more effectively and imagine them vividly.”¹² Conversely, those to whom prophesy is communicated do not embrace it from reason, but “rely only on the authority of the prophet.”¹³ Prophets, in sum, adopt a commanding style as opposed to an argumentative style.

They do not, however, communicate their divine commands directly, but in a doubly adapted form—adapted to the mentality of the prophet himself and to that of his audience.¹⁴ And this gives rise to variations and differences in style of their command. As Spinoza writes, the prophets “embellished

¹ TTP VI, G III.90|C II.162.

² TTP XI, G III.151|C II.240; I owe this distinction to personal correspondence with Pierre-François Moreau.

³ TTP I, G III.15|C II.76.

⁴ TTP VII, G III.112|C II.186.

⁵ TTP I, G III.15|C II.76–7.

⁶ TTP I, G III.16|C II.77.

⁷ TTP I, G III.15|C II.76.

⁸ TTP XI, G III.152|C II.241.

⁹ TTP XI, G III.153|C II.242; trans. modified.

¹⁰ TTP XI, G III.152|C II.241.

¹¹ TTP XI, G III.153|C II.242.

¹² TTP XI, G III.153|C II.242.

¹³ TTP I, Annotation II, G III.252|C II.72; TTP VII, G III.14–15|C II.189.

¹⁴ For the Apostles, see TTP I, G III.28–9|C II.93: “those who were with Christ saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove, but the Apostles saw it as fiery tongues [Acts 2:3], and finally ... Paul, when he was first converted, saw a great light [Acts 9:3]. For all these [visions] agree completely with the common ways of imagining God and spirits.”

these things in that style, and confirmed them with those reasons, by which they could most readily move the mind of the multitude to devotion toward God.”¹ Even Christ, when addressing his disciples, “accommodated his reasonings to the opinions and principles of each one.”² Many among Spinoza’s first readers seized upon these arguments as proof that he conceived of the prophets, at best, as ignoramuses peddling their own imaginations as divine revelations; at worst, as duplicitous impostors using religion only as a means of dissimulation and deception. As we shall see in Chapter 9, Spinoza rather aimed at showing how the efficacy of prophetic teaching relies crucially on such variations in the style of command, and at showing how the prophets and Apostles had to “teach justice and charity according to the capacities [captum] and opinions of those to whom [they] were accustomed to preach this word of God.”³

The Epistolary Style

The Acts of the Apostles recount their preaching in public assemblies as prophets. Prophets, however, do not always preach as prophets. Sometimes, Spinoza contends, they adopt another style when addressing their interlocutors, speaking “as private persons, or teachers.”⁴ When using that style, they do not speak *ex revelatione* and on God’s authority. They speak *ex cognitione*, i.e., from knowledge and on their own authority.⁵ And, according to Spinoza, this is the discursive mode we encounter specifically in the Apostles’ Letters.

This firm distinction between a revelation-based prophetic style in the Acts and a knowledge-based epistolary style in the Letters is somewhat unusual. Spinoza bases it on a specific verse in Paul, namely 1 Cor 14:6: “Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine.”⁶ How to read this verse, the exact meaning of the four terms it lists, and how they should be distinguished from each other was and remains a matter of controversy among theologians. Calvin admitted that he, as others, had nothing but a conjecture to propose: “[Paul] mentions, however, four different kinds of edification—revelation, knowledge, prophesying, and doctrine. As there are a variety of opinions among interpreters respecting them, let me be permitted, also, to bring forward my conjecture.”⁷ John Locke’s (not very helpful) later attempt at explicating the verse in his Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of Saint Paul was accompanied by a similar disclaimer, testifying to the difficulties it posed for early modern interpreters:

But whether this or any other, precise meaning of these words can be certainly made out now, it is perhaps of no great necessity to be over curious; it being enough, for the understanding [of] the sense and argument of the apostle here, to know that these terms stand for some intelligible discourse, tending to the edification of the church, though of what kind each of them was, in particular, we certainly know not.⁸

I shall not attempt to retrace the reception of 1 Cor 14:6 throughout the enormous corpus of biblical commentary produced by both orthodox and Cartesian-leaning theologians in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. We can, however, get a good sense of what is at stake simply by comparing

1 TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.72.

2 TTP III, G III.43|C II.110.

3 TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.73; trans. modified; Curley has “power of understanding” for *captum*. As we shall see, however, the capacities in question are crucially related to the structures of the imagination.

4 TTP XI, G III.151|C II.240.

5 TTP XI, G III.151|C II.240.

6 I give the King James Version, well aware that it is not necessarily the most appropriate choice. Spinoza owned a 1569 edition of Tremellius’s New Testament (Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-folio no. 2, pp. 120–1) and a copy of the Bible including the Junius-Tremellius edition of the Old Testament Bible and Theodore Beza’s translation of the New Testament (see *Inventaire*, vol. in-quarto no. 5, pp. 138–9; it is hard to know which printing of this very common version of the Bible Spinoza owned, but I have consulted one candidate, a 1651 edition printed by Johannes Blaeu). He most often used Tremellius; also sometimes the Vulgate. For his commentary on this particular verse, however, he used Beza, as is apparent from his use of the expression *ex cognitione*. For the second half of 1 Cor 14:6, Beza thus has “*vobis loquar aut ex revelatione, aut ex cognitione, vel prophetando, vel docendo.*” Tremellius has “*vobis loquar aut per revelationem, aut per cognitione, aut per prophetiam, aut per doctrina*”; the Vulgate has “*vobis loquar aut in revelatione, aut in scientia, aut in prophetia, aut in doctrina.*”

7 Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles*, p. 438.

8 Locke, *A Paraphrase*, p. 176.

the conjectural interpretations proposed by Calvin and Erasmus, respectively. In sorting out the four terms in his commentaries on the Epistles, Calvin allows that revelation and prophecy should be put in one class, while knowledge and doctrine should be put in another. Predictably, however, he is also very eager to avoid distinguishing too strongly between revelation and knowledge, but puts some effort into reducing the latter to be merely a reflexive version of the former, “for we have said that prophesying does not consist of a simple and bare interpretation of Scripture, but includes also knowledge for applying it to present use—which is obtained only by revelation, and the special inspiration of God.”¹ By contrast, if we turn to Erasmus’s Paraphrases, he distinguishes between the terms as follows: revelation “immediately discloses the secret message”; knowledge “eruditely explains matters that pertain to the apprehension of the faith”; prophecy “discloses hidden meanings”; doctrine “explains something pertinent to good moral behavior.”² We note in particular how Erasmus’s understanding of knowledge in terms of “erudite explanation” differs sharply from Calvin’s attempt, in the final analysis, to subsume knowledge under revelation and divine inspiration.

Spinoza’s use of the four terms from 1 Cor 14:6 in TTP XI carries echoes of Erasmus and the Erasmian tradition. Still, I have not come upon any precedent for his use of the verse to distinguish between different styles or modes of apostolic discourse. Instead, we find an example of an exact contrary use of first Corinthians in Spinoza’s immediate context, namely in Lodewijk Meyer’s 1666 *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres*. Meyer refers to Saint Paul’s style in the Letters—and the First Letter to the Corinthians in particular—in order to argue how, regardless of Paul’s proclamation in 1 Cor 1:19 that he will “destroy the wisdom of the wise,” he did not condemn or repudiate human wisdom but instead held, as Meyer quotes Cajetan, that “no part of philosophy or of science is contrary to the Gospel, for nothing that is true is contrary to another thing that is true.”³ Hence, Meyer contends,

That this is the meaning of St. Paul is confirmed by what he himself says about his style of speaking [stylo ... dicendi]. In chapter 2, v. 4, he says that his speech and his preaching did not take the form of persuasive words of human wisdom, and in verse 13 he says that he speaks not with words that are taught by human wisdom. In thus attacking and criticizing the vain eloquence of the Corinthian doctors he shows that he himself has not had recourse to ostentatious words, long-winded oratory, grandiloquence and rhetorical ornamentation, devices needed by human and apparent wisdom for the purpose of recommending its erroneous dogma and thrusting it on the credulous.⁴

Clearly, for Meyer, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul did not write *ex cognitione* as a private person: that his words were “not taught by human wisdom” rather seems to suggest that he was writing *ex revelatione*. Moreover, on Meyer’s reading, the remarks Paul makes about his own “style of speaking” only serve to confirm, reflexively, the status of apostolic discourse as uniformly distinct from the teachings of ordinary human wisdom. As on the Calvinist view, there is for Meyer no essential difference in style or status between Paul’s teachings in the Letters and the revelations he communicates elsewhere, such as when he gives his sermon on the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34). They are of one piece, and confirm the status of all apostolic discourse as a distinct—and distinctly better—source of true knowledge and revelation than the merely apparent wisdom thrust upon the credulous by sophists and rhetoricians.

Spinoza, by contrast, breaks this continuity in style, mode, and status of apostolic discourse when highlighting the difference between preaching *ex revelatione* and *ex cognitione*. He does not, however, contest that the Apostles’ Letters form a proper part of the apostolic teaching. Distinguishing between the prophesying and the teaching of the Apostles is not about distinguishing what pertains to their apostolic mission from what does not. The Apostles *qua* Apostles sometimes express themselves as prophets and sometimes as teachers; they sometimes speak from revelation and sometimes from

¹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles*, p. 438.

² See Erasmus, *Paraphrases on the Epistles*, p. 164.

³ Meyer, *Philosophia*, VII, §3, p. 52, trans. Shirley, p. 126.

⁴ Meyer, *Philosophia*, VII, §3, p. 52, trans. Shirley, p. 127.

knowledge; but in any case they relate something divine so that “in virtue of their office as Apostles, they were not only prophets, but also teachers.”¹ Contrary to what Edwin Curley asserts, highlighting the specificity of the epistolary style is thus not an attempt to “weaken the authority of the Apostles.”² Spinoza merely holds that the Letters rely on another kind of authority than does the prophetic preaching of the Apostles, namely an authority to teach and advise as opposed to an authority to command.³ We shall have the opportunity to return in Chapter 5 to the nature and sources of this peculiar authority to teach and advise which is central for understanding what Spinoza means by free philosophizing. Here, we should focus on how this difference in kind of authority also calls for differences in how to exercise it. For this will explain why, in the Letters, the Apostles adopt a “style ... most unlike that of prophesy,”⁴ an entirely different “way of speaking.”⁵ So what are the characteristics of this epistolary style?

First, the epistolary style is argumentative, i.e., based on reasoning. In the Letters, the Apostles “seem to debate, not to prophesy”;⁶ they “are always reasoning”⁷ and Paul in particular proposes “long deductions and arguments.”⁸ Spinoza also describes this “reasoned” character of the Letters by saying that the “Apostles composed their letters only according to the natural light.”⁹ Hence, “what [the Apostles] taught simply, without using any signs as witnesses, whether in writing or orally, they spoke or wrote from knowledge (i.e., natural knowledge).”¹⁰ Moreover, “the more the prophets argue in due form, the more the knowledge they have of the matters revealed approaches natural knowledge.”¹¹ By holding this, however, Spinoza does not imply that whatever the Apostles wrote in their Letters necessarily conforms to reason. The difference is stylistic, concerned with form only, not with content. He wants to emphasize how, contrary to the prophetic style which is commanding, the epistolary style aims at persuading an interlocutor by giving reasons and providing arguments.

Second, the Apostles speak with candor and sincerity. Hence, says Spinoza, Paul speaks “according to his own opinion.”¹² Or, as Paul himself puts it in 1 Cor 7:25, he “give[s] advice as a man, who, by God’s grace, is trustworthy.”¹³ The Apostles present their case sincerely and candidly, *ex vero animo*, to the “natural judgment” of others.¹⁴ Paul thus writes to the Romans, in a passage that Spinoza quotes: “I have written a bit more boldly to you, brothers [audacius scripsi vobis, fratres].”¹⁵ When using the epistolary style, one thus seeks to express one’s own mind and one’s whole mind, without deception or dissimulation. Here, by constructing Paul’s audacia in the image of the classic Greco-Roman ideal of *parrhesia*, candor or frankness, Spinoza picks up on a long tradition of political rhetoric going as far back as Plato and the image of Socrates as the original model of the bold free-speaker.¹⁶ We shall return to this issue in more detail in Chapter 6.

1 TTP XI, G III.157 | C II.246. See also TTP III, G III.50 | C II.118: “the function of the prophet was to teach [docere] men, not the special laws of their native land so much as true virtue, and to advise [monere] them about that.” One passage in TTP XI, however, gives rise to slight inconsistency. Hence, at one point, Spinoza references 1 Tim 2:7: “I have been appointed a preacher and an Apostle” as a “confirmation of each status [utrumque donum]: being an Apostle and being a teacher” (TTP XI, G III.156 | C II.246). The formulation could suggest that being an Apostle is different from being a teacher.

2 Curley, “Resurrecting Leo Strauss,” p. 147.

3 The idea of the Apostles as (mere) teachers is also an important theme in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, the key point for Hobbes being that the idea of a commanding “ecclesiastical power” that he finds abusive and seditious cannot be traced back to the Apostles, because “there was then no government by Coercion, but only by Doctrine, and Perswading” (*Leviathan*, XLII, p. 842).

4 TTP XI, G III.151 | C II.240.

5 TTP XI, G III.153–4 | C II.243–4.

6 TTP XI, G III.152 | C II.241.

7 TTP XI, G III.152 | C II.241.

8 TTP XI, G III.153 | C II.242.

9 TTP XI, G III.155 | C II.245.

10 TTP XI, G III.155 | C II.244.

11 TTP XI, G III.153 | C II.242.

12 TTP XI, G III.151 | C II.240.

13 1 Cor 7:25 as cited in TTP XI, G III.151 | C II.241.

14 TTP XI, G III.153 | C II.243; see also TTP VII, G III.97 | C II.170: “if men were sincere in what they say [ex vero animo dicerent] about Scripture, they would live very differently.”

15 Rom 15:15 as cit. in TTP XI, G III.153 | C II.243. On the reference to audacity, see Lærke, “Leibniz et Diderot,” pp. 73–87.

16 See Miqueu, Spinoza, Locke, et l’idée de citoyenneté, pp. 71–2; see also Momigliano, “Freedom of Speech”; Foucault, *Fearless Speech*.

Third, the apostolic epistolary style is non-apodictic or falsifiable. It reflects a state of mind that is “undecided and perplexed.”¹ By the same token, it is thoroughly dialectical. The Apostles present their opinion—their interpretation of the Gospel²—to the free judgment of their interlocutors: “For whoever would confirm his doctrines [dogmata] by reason thereby submits them to the discretionary judgment of anyone. This Paul seems to have done, because he reasons, saying (1 Corinthians 10:15) I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.”³ The certainty that such speech aspires to is essentially dependent on the assent of the interlocutor.

Fourth, the Apostles seek to establish a sense of equality. The point is suggested by a telling misquotation first noted by Fokke Akkerman, Pierre-François Moreau, and Jacqueline Lagrée in their edition of the TTP. Spinoza studied the New Testament mostly (but not exclusively) in the Latin version by Tremellius, translated from the Hebrew and Aramean rather than the Greek.⁴ On Spinoza’s rendering of 1 Cor 7:6, Paul assures his recipients that, he “say[s] this as someone weak, not as a command [hoc autem dico ego, tanquam infirmus, non autem ex mandato].”⁵ However, the Tremellius translation does not have *infirmus* in the singular nominative, but *infirmis* in the plural dative.⁶ Paul is thus not speaking “as someone weak” but “as to the weak,” suggesting weakness on the part of the Corinthian Christians, not Paul himself!⁷ Specifically, in the biblical context of 1 Cor 7, where Paul is allowing for sex between married couples, he emphasizes in this verse how his own unmarried status makes him unequal, indeed superior, to his allegedly weaker interlocutors.⁸ However, on Spinoza’s conveniently mistaken rendering, Paul puts himself on a par, even beneath those to whom he addresses himself, seeking to establish a relation of equality between himself and his interlocutors.

Fifth, the aim of the epistolary style is to persuade others to “embrace” a doctrine. Spinoza uses the verb “to embrace” (*amplecti*) frequently in the TTP when describing how people accept both true and false religious doctrines. In his analysis of prophecy, he thus explains how common men “can only embrace what has been revealed by simple faith”⁹ and how, with regard to God’s decrees, “in embracing them, [common men] rely only on the authority of the prophet.”¹⁰ In a more polemical vein, he deplores “how stubbornly the mind retains those prejudices the heart has embraced under the guise of piety”¹¹ and entreats people to “stop recklessly embracing men’s inventions as divine teachings.”¹² Embracing a doctrine implies both an emotional charge and a practical application. In the preface to the TTP, Spinoza thus explains how, in adapting “the simple concept of the divine mind” to the “capacities and opinions” of their audience, the “prophets and Apostles” taught true religion in such a way “so that men would embrace the word of God without any conflict and with their whole heart.”¹³ In TTP V, he considers two ways in which this can be achieved:

If someone wants to persuade or dissuade men of something not known through itself, to get them to embrace [*amplectantur*] it he must deduce it from things which have been granted,

1 TTP XI, G III.151|C II.240.

2 TTP XI, G III.152|C II.241: “the Apostles hand down the Gospel teaching in these Letters.”

3 TTP XI, G III.152|C II.241–2; trans. modified.

4 Spinoza often uses this edition of the New Testament because he thought—probably wrongly—that the Greek version was not the original, but that the language of the Apostles was “Syriac”; that is to say, Aramean. See TTP XVI, Annotation XXVI, G III.264|C II.292–3, and the introduction by Edwin Curley in C II, pp. 63, 65 n. 1, 241 n. 4.

5 1 Cor 7:6, quoted at TTP XI, G III.151|C II.214; trans. modified. Curley translates Spinoza’s (mistaken) *infirmus* as “without authority” which strictly speaking creates a contradiction because Spinoza shall go on to speak of this kind of discourse as being in fact associated with an “authority to teach” and an “authority to advise.” Lagrée and Moreau translate more literally *infirmus* as “en raison de ma faiblesse.”

6 Tremellius, *Novum Testamentum*, p. 498. Beza gives 1 Cor 7:6 as “hoc autem dico ex concessione, non ex imperio.” The Vulgate has: “Hoc autem dico secundum indulgentiam, non secundum imperium.”

7 See notes by Moreau and Lagrée in their edition at p. 413 and p. 755 n. 6. See also note by Curley at C II.241.

8 1 Cor 7:7: “For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.” I am grateful to Clare Clarlisle for highlighting this point.

9 TTP I, G III.15|C II.76.

10 TTP I, Annotation II, G III.251|C II.77.

11 TTP Preface, G III.14|C II.75. For very similar formulations, see also TTP VIII, G III.118|C II.192.

12 TTP VII, G III.99|C II.171.

13 TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.73; trans. modified.

and convince them either by experience or by reason, viz., either from things they have experienced through the senses as happening in nature, or from intellectual axioms known through themselves.¹

Persuading men “by reason” does, however, require qualities “rarely found in men,” such as extreme caution, mental perceptiveness, and restraint, and therefore “spiritual things” must be “prove[n] solely by experience.”² So the Apostles adapted their reasonings to the imagination and experience of their audiences in such a way that, without being clearly and distinctly understood, they could “teach and enlighten men enough to imprint obedience and devotion on their hearts.”³ This is also why, while still being argumentative and reasoning in character, the epistolary style is not exactly demonstrative, but a kind of mixed style, appealing both to reason that it does not contradict and to the imagination that it engages through narratives of common experience and sentiment. It vacillates between demonstration and experience, explaining narratives by reasoning and exemplifying reasoning with narratives, constantly appealing both to rational notions common to all and to individualized testimonies with particular appeal, thus relying simultaneously on reasoning and signs.⁴ It does not aim at absolute certainty, but only moral certainty. This mixed style was used not only by the Apostles when teaching others, but also by Christ when teaching the Apostles: “We should maintain the same thing about the reasonings by which Christ [rationibus Christi] ... exhorted his disciples to the true life: he accommodated his reasonings [rationes] to the opinions and principles of each one.”⁵

But why, exactly, is it necessary to incorporate experience and narratives in order to produce the desired response? Embracing a doctrine implies living and thinking in accordance with it, incorporating it *integro animo*, or “wholeheartedly,” as Curley most often translates the expression.⁶ And Spinoza is keenly aware that, with the common man, rational demonstration and philosophy is not the best way to obtain such a practical result. Teaching him religion—even true religion, which for Spinoza consists in justice and charity—by appealing to reason alone is not practically efficacious. Certainly, no one embraces a doctrine without reason, for “why then do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, like blind men, then we too act foolishly and without judgment.”⁷ Moreover, it is impossible to embrace any doctrine against reason: “I ask you, who can embrace something in his mind in spite of the protests of reason? What else is denying something in your mind but the fact that reason protests against it?”⁸ Still, that does not mean that some doctrine’s agreement with reason is sufficient to embrace it. Indeed, on Spinoza’s reading, the entire Jewish tradition—including even Maimonides, whose position otherwise represents for Spinoza the paradigm of a philosopher who subjects faith and religion to reason and philosophy⁹—denies that a merely rational assertion of a doctrine is sufficient to live according to it:

[The Jews] maintain that true opinions [and a true manner of living contribute nothing to blessedness so long as men embrace them only by the natural light [ex solo lumine naturali amplectuntur] and not as teachings revealed prophetically to Moses.¹⁰

And on this point, Spinoza agrees: a religious belief has no practical efficacy if it is not accompanied by the kind of personal sentiment that only the imagination can procure. Consequently, piety, understood as obedience to true religion, requires a contribution from our own experience and imagination: each

1 TTP V, G III.76|C II.147.

2 TTP V, G III.77|C II.148.

3 TTP V, G III.77–8|C II.148–9.

4 TTP III, G III.43|C II.110.

5 TTP III, G III.43|C II.110.

6 As we shall see, Spinoza will also associate this expression with a fundamental virtue of the free man, namely integrity or self-possession. See Chapter 6, sect. “Integrity and Rational Self-Contentment.”

7 TTP XV, G III.185|C II 278.

8 TTP XV, G III.182|C II 275.

9 TTP V, G III.80|C II.151.

10 TTP V, G III.79|C II.150–1. Spinoza is presumably referring to the command that we be “wholehearted with the Lord your God” in Deuteronomy 18:13. In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides quotes this text as the foundation of religion, as opposed to idolatry and false prophecy.

person must “judge of these things as he thinks best for himself, for the purpose of entering wholeheartedly into the worship of God and religion.”¹ Any genuine embrace of religion—as opposed to a merely intellectual grasp of its basic principles—requires rewriting it according to one’s own mentality, giving it an emotional charge which alone allows accepting it wholly, and living according to its precepts. We shall return in greater detail to this question in Chapter 9 when discussing Spinoza’s attitude toward the so-called *adiaphora*, or things indifferent, in doctrines of faith.

Brotherly Advice and Free Philosophizing

We have seen that the apostolic epistolary style is argumentative, candid, non-apodictic or falsifiable, equal, and aimed at moral certainty. In their Letters, the Apostles seek to make their audience truly embrace the doctrines they teach so that may live wholeheartedly in conformity with them. And in order to achieve that, they employ a mixed style that dialectically combines narration with reasoning.

These stylistic features all come with deep historical and textual connotations. Spinoza draws heavily on a long tradition from Antiquity, received via humanism. His conception of the epistolary style is essentially modeled upon the Greco-Roman understanding of genuine counsel, characterized by equality, frankness, and, above all, friendship. As Spinoza writes, the Letters “contain nothing but brotherly advice [*fraternas monitiones*], mixed with a politeness which prophetic authority is completely opposed to.”² As we shall see in Chapter 6, the reference to “brotherly advice” is central to understanding the long heritage from ancient philosophy and humanism that Spinoza draws on, from Cicero’s *On Friendship* to Erasmus’s *Education of the Christian Prince*.

From the internal perspective on the TTP, the reference to “brotherly advice” is, however, also crucially important for understanding how Spinoza’s chapter on the Apostles’ Letters fits into the broader argument of his treatise. For he already employs this expression earlier in a passage of TTP VII concerned with the interpretation of Scripture and the teaching of religion:

[Religion is] not instilled in men by the command of laws or by public authority, and absolutely no one can be compelled by force or by laws to become blessed. For this what is required is pious and brotherly advice [*pia et fraterna monitio*], good education, and above all, one’s own free judgment. Therefore, since each person has the supreme right to think freely even about religion, and it’s inconceivable that anyone can abandon his claim to this right, each person will also have the supreme right and the supreme authority to judge freely concerning religion, and hence to explain it and interpret it for himself.³

When seen in the light of this passage, it becomes clear that the importance of brotherly advice goes far beyond the mere stylistic status of the Apostles’ Letters. It has deep implications for Spinoza’s general conception of the freedom of philosophizing. Indeed, in the TTP, there is a very clear associative path, identifiable for anyone with a standard seventeenth-century education in the classics, going from his description of the epistolary style of the Apostles, via the classical values of philosophical friendship and the humanist ideals of a liberal mentality,⁴ to the conception of the freedom of philosophizing. Indeed, via the humanist ideals that Spinoza associates it with, the description of the epistolary style of the Apostles appears to constitute a kind of blueprint or paradigm of how to engage in free philosophizing, namely that it is argumentative, candid, and falsifiable; that it presupposes equality among interlocutors; and that it is aimed at persuasion and practical efficacy. It is the totality of these qualities that are packed into the notion of “friendly advice.”

Free philosophizing, then, takes place among friends. Alongside the very complex intellectual context just mentioned, it is an idea we must also see in the systematic light of Spinoza’s own treatment of friendship in the *Ethics* where it figures as one of the principal virtues. Friendship is closely associated with the virtue he terms “nobility” (*generositas*), which he defines as “the desire by which each one

¹ TTP VI, G III.96|C II.169.

² TTP XI, G III.153|C II.243.

³ TTP VII, G III.116–17|C II.191.

⁴ On this latter notion, see the conclusion of this chapter.

strives, solely from the dictate of reason, to aid other men and join them to him in friendship.”¹ According to Spinoza’s classification of the affects, “nobility” is one of two expressions of “strength of character” (*temperantia*), whereas the other is “tenacity” (*animositas*). These are both affects that are “related to the mind insofar as it understands.” Tenacity, however, is associated with actions that “aim only at the agent’s advantage,” whereas nobility is specifically related to actions “which aim at another’s advantage,” such as courtesy and mercy.² Now, a man who lives under the guidance of reason, i.e., a free man, acknowledges that he has a rational self-interest in communing with other minds, so that they may learn from each other. In a well-known passage in the first letter to the merchant Willem van Blijenbergh, Spinoza even goes as far as to speak of the sharing of knowledge in a “pact of friendship” in terms of a veritable union of minds:

To me, of the things outside my power, I esteem none more than being allowed the honor of entering into a pact of friendship with people who sincerely love the truth; for I believe that of things outside our power we can love none tranquilly, except such people. Because the love they bear to one another is based on the love each has for knowledge of the truth, it is as impossible to destroy it as not to embrace the truth once it has been perceived. Moreover, it is the greatest and most pleasant that can be given to things outside our power, since nothing but truth can completely unite different opinions and minds.³

This is why “a free man strives to join other men to him in friendship,”⁴ because “it is especially useful to men to form associations, to bind themselves by those bonds most apt to make one people of them, and absolutely, to do those things which serve to strengthen friendships.”⁵ Strictly speaking, of course, this only applies to free men, i.e., human beings who have acquired sufficient self-knowledge to in fact recognize their own advantage: “Only free men are very useful to one another, are joined to one another by the greatest necessity of friendship.”⁶ And yet, Spinoza argues, even with more ordinary companions who offer their friendship without always seeing the rationality of doing so, the benefits of accepting it will always be greater than the harm that follows from their occasional lapse into patterns of action that are less than rational. Or, as Spinoza puts it, “it is better to bear men’s wrongs calmly, and apply one’s zeal to those things that help to bring men together in harmony and friendship.”⁷

Conclusion

Through his analysis of the epistolary style of the Apostles, Spinoza elaborates a complex definition of free philosophizing. This definition is not merely an abstract ideal. It provides concrete guidelines for how to engage with other “free philosophizers” and is everywhere operative in Spinoza’s writings. Moreover, when outlining the features of free philosophizing, Spinoza also describes the intellectual community for which the TTP—indeed, I think all his work—is destined, and indicates the relationship

1 E3p59s, G II.188|C I.529. “Nobility” (*generositas*) is also very closely associated with “honorability” (*honestas*). See E4p37s1, G II.236|C I.567–8: “The desire by which a man who lives according to the guidance of reason is bound to join others to himself in friendship, I call being honorable.” Nobility does, however, have an absolute, nonrelative character to it that honorability does not. See E3def.aff.37exp, G II.198|C I.537: “what among some is holy, among others is unholy; and what among some is honorable, among others is dishonorable. Hence, according as each one has been educated, so he either repents of a deed or exults at being esteemed for it.”

2 See E3p59s, G II.188|C I.529–30. On nobility, see also Rosenthal, “Toleration as a Virtue,” pp. 546–52.

3 Spinoza to Blijenbergh, December 12, 1664, Letter 18, G IV.86|C I.357. See also Spinoza to Oldenburg, September 1661, Letter 2, G IV.7|C I.165: “friends must share in all things, especially spiritual things.” Spinoza moreover quotes Thales of Miletus in a letter to Jelles: “All things ... are common among friends” (Spinoza to Jelles, March 27, 1665, Letter 24, G IV.228–9|C II.391). On Spinoza and friendship, see also Lagrée, *Le Débat religieux*, pp. 235–6; Lucash, “Spinoza on Friendship”; Van Reijen, “Amicitia.”

4 E4p70d, G II.263|C I.585.

5 E4app12, G II.269|C I.589; see also E4app26, G II.273|C I.592: “Apart from men we know no singular thing in nature whose mind we can enjoy, and which we can join to ourselves in friendship, or some kind of association.”

6 E4p71d, G II.263|C I.586. Not coincidentally, Spinoza shares this conception of the nobility of the wise with Adriaan Koerbagh whose distinction between the “noble” and the “ignoble” runs like a red thread through his entire political philosophy. As he writes in his 1668 *Bloemhof*: “A distinction is made among men, some being called noble, others ignoble. But I need to explain briefly who in my opinion is noble or ignoble. Ignoble is he who is without learning and understanding, even if he were born of the greatest king; noble is he who is wise and learned, even if he were born of the poorest beggar” (Koerbagh, *Bloemhof*, p. 346, trans. in Van Bunge, *Spinoza Past and Present*, p. 62).

7 E4app14, G II.270|C I.590; see also E5p10, G II.288|C I.602, where Spinoza explains how “the common wrongs of men” may “be warded off best by nobility” and extols “the good which follows from mutual friendship and common society.”

he wants to establish with his own readership. At the end of the TTP's preface, Spinoza thus addresses his audience exactly in the way that Paul addresses the Corinthians, speaking to them "as to wise men," leaving them to judge what he says for themselves, but also excluding those who are not capable of partaking in the conversation on the required terms: "These, philosophical reader, are the things I here give you to examine As for those who are not philosophers, I am not eager to commend this treatise to them. ... Indeed, I would prefer them to neglect this book entirely."¹ He is asking his readers to engage with the work as a piece of friendly advice for them to evaluate, and nothing else, while imploring those incapable of doing so, and who "would rather ... make trouble by interpreting it perversely," to simply abstain.²

This relatively sharp distinction between philosophical friends and prejudiced foes is very present in Spinoza's personal exchanges. The long passage from the letter to Blijenbergh quoted earlier is one good example. It was written before Spinoza realized that he was not exchanging with a "philosophizing" interlocutor. Spinoza's mistake is understandable. Blijenbergh first presented himself with all the attributes of a true philosophical friend, as someone who wanted to "plant his feet firmly in knowledge," who was seeking "neither honor nor riches, but only truth, and peace of mind as an effect of truth," and someone whom Spinoza would "be able to know better ... if willing to oblige him so much as to help open and pierce through his tangled thoughts."³ However, Blijenbergh's two rules of philosophizing, as both a "lover of truth" and a "Christian philosopher," stated at the beginning of his second letter, put Spinoza on his guard. In particular, Blijenbergh affirmed as his first rule that whenever his "natural knowledge" contradicted or proved irreconcilable with God's word, he would discard the former rather than the latter.⁴ At this point, Spinoza realized he had come upon exactly such a reader who would "stubbornly ... retain those prejudices the heart has embraced under the guise of piety." So he chose to interrupt the correspondence:

When I read your first Letter, I thought our opinions nearly agreed. But from the second, which I received on the 21st of this month, I see that I was quite mistaken, and that we disagree not only about the things ultimately to be derived from first principles, but also about the first principles themselves. So I hardly believe that we can instruct one another with our letters.⁵

Spinoza and the members of his circle were of course not alone in entertaining the conceptions of philosophical friendship described earlier. They were woven into the general discursive fabric of the seventeenth-century Republic of Letters. Spinoza himself sometimes refers to the freedom of philosophizing as a general intellectual ethos. For example, when writing to Oldenburg in July 1663, he describes the way he understood—or, as it happens, misunderstood—certain remarks in Robert Boyle's *Certain Physiological Essays* as follows: "I thought the noble author was criticizing Descartes, which he has certainly done elsewhere, by the freedom of philosophizing [libertate philosophandi] granted to anyone, without any harm to the nobility [nobilitate] of either."⁶ Oldenburg himself, who was not a member of Spinoza's inner circle of Dutch friends but an international scholar based in England, frequently appealed to similar notions when writing to Spinoza: "I entreat you, by the friendship we have entered into, to deal openly and confidently with me in this matter";⁷ "excuse my prolixity and frankness; in particular, I ask you to take in good part, as is the custom between friends, the objections I have freely put to you, without any glossing over or courtly refinements";⁸ "so by the compact of friendship between us, and by every duty of increasing and spreading [knowledge of] the truth, I adjure you not to begrudge or deny us your writings on these matters."⁹ Most importantly, in

¹ TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.75.

² TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.75.

³ Blijenbergh to Spinoza, December 12, 1664, Letter 18, G IV.80|C I.355.

⁴ Blijenbergh to Spinoza, January 16, 1665, Letter 20, G IV.98|C I.361–2.

⁵ Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665, Letter 21, G IV.126|C I.375.

⁶ Spinoza to Oldenburg, July 17/27, 1663, Letter 13, G IV.66|C I.210; trans. modified. In fact, as Boyle pointed out to Oldenburg, the criticisms in question were not addressed to Descartes, but to Gassendi (Oldenburg to Spinoza, April 3, 1663, Letter 11, G IV.50|C I.198).

⁷ Oldenburg to Spinoza, September 27, 1661, Letter 3, G IV.11|C I.188.

⁸ Oldenburg to Spinoza, September 27, 1661, Letter 3, G IV.12|C I.189.

⁹ Oldenburg to Spinoza, April 3, 1661, Letter 11, G IV.51|C I.200.

a 1676 letter to Spinoza, Oldenburg openly chastised Spinoza for doing “his best to undermine the whole truth of the Gospel narrative,” but justified this harsh critique by insisting that he only “wanted to convey these few remarks to you again, in accordance with my freedom of philosophizing [philosophandi libertate], which I earnestly beseech you to take in good part.”¹

Freedom of philosophizing thus refers to a normative rhetorical framework for candid, intellectual exchange that both Spinoza and his interlocutors knew and lived by. Most of that framework was not specifically Spinozist. It was part of the common humanist heritage of the early modern Republic of Letters. In fact, when thinking about free philosophizing in terms of mutual teaching and open sharing of knowledge among noble minds, Spinoza was simply giving systematic expression to common, classical ideals of intellectual friendship. It can be felt in his correspondences down to the minutest details. It comes through, for example, in his use of the notion of “liberal mentality” (*liberale ingenium*) in a letter to Herman Schuller. Responding to a request that Leibniz be allowed to consult a manuscript copy of the *Ethics*, Spinoza wrote back that he remembered Leibniz from earlier correspondence—i.e., the 1671 correspondence of which we only know the first two letters—and that the German philosopher “seemed to [him] to be a man with a liberal mentality [*homo liberalis ingenii*], and well-versed in every science.”² Incidentally, Spinoza uses this same expression in TTP XX, in passage where he praises those “who have a liberal mentality [*quia liberalis ingenii sunt*].”³ Now, putting to one side the unknown suspicions that ultimately prompted Spinoza to decline Schuller’s request,⁴ when using this particular expression—a “liberal mentality”—he gave clear and easily recognizable indications of the character traits he was looking for in his interlocutors. The expression is drawn from Terence’s *Adelphoe* and, as Fokke Akkerman observes, “some of the generosity and the frankness associated with these Greco-Roman words are attributed to Leibniz.”⁵ To forge such a “liberal mentality” was a central component of a humanist education, a central goal of learning the liberal arts.⁶

Similar remarks can be made about Spinoza’s insistence on Paul’s “speaking boldly” to his “brothers” in Rom 15:15. According to classical distinctions stemming from Cicero’s *On Friendship* and Plutarch’s *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, candor is the character trait that distinguishes a “true friend” from the “flatterer.”⁷ These are fundamental texts that formed the basis for an entire rhetorical tradition from Erasmus onwards, focused on the virtue of frankness, or *parrhesia*—a tradition that remained very strong among the Dutch republican writers of Spinoza’s time. For example, as Arthur Weststeijn has shown in an elaborate analysis of the rhetorical aspects of the writings by Pieter de la Court, this author claimed status for himself as an outspoken truth-teller and appealed widely to the rhetoric of *parrhesia* in order to give additional weight to his arguments. It comes very clearly through, for example, in the preface to the *True Interest of Holland* of 1662:

1 Oldenburg to Spinoza, February 11, 1676, G IV.330|C II.483.

2 Spinoza to Schuller, November 18, 1675, Letter 72, G IV.305|C II.466.

3 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.350; modified. Curley has “a mind worthy of a free man” for *liberale ingenium*, so I correct for consistency. Spinoza also describes such men as *ingenii* or *virii ingenii*, translated by Curley as “people who act like free men” or “men who act like free men” (TTP XX, G III.244–5|C II.349–50).

4 On reflection, Spinoza “judge[d] it ill-advised to entrust [his] writings to him so quickly” (Spinoza to Schuller, November 18, 1675, Letter 72, G IV.305|C II.466). He may have nurtured suspicions that Leibniz operated as a German spy in Paris. It should, however, be noted that, at the time of their initial correspondence in the fall of 1671, Spinoza offered to send Leibniz a copy of the TTP, thus at that point trusting him sufficiently to divulge his authorship of the book (see Spinoza to Leibniz, December 8, 1671, Letter 46, G IV.234|C II.395). Leibniz, of course, had already obtained the information elsewhere long before that, from Daniel Morhof in October 1670 and again from Johann Georg Graevius in April 1671. Indeed, when he wrote Spinoza in October 1671, it was arguably with the intention to eventually discuss the TTP (Lærke, *Leibniz and Spinoza*, pp. 10–11).

5 See Akkerman, “La pénurie des mots,” p. 14. For Terence, see *Adelphoe*, act 6, sc. 5, in *Comædiæ sex*, p. 140: “By Hercules I believe you; for I know you to be of liberal mentality [*Credo hercle; nam ingenium novi tuum Liberale*].” A 1625 Latin-French dictionary translates the Latin *liberale ingenium* by “a forthright courage and good nature [*un franc courage, & bonne nature*]” (AA.VV, *Le Grand Dictionnaire François-Latin*, p. 332). A French-Latin dictionary from 1635 proposes *liberale ingenium* as one among other possible Latin translations of “candor, frank nature, sincerity [*candeur, franchise de nature, sincérité*].” Other suggestions include *candor animi*; *ingenitas animi*; *sincerus animus*; *liberalis indoles*; *ingenium*; *liberale ingenium* (Monet, *Inventaire des deus langues, françoise, et latine*, p. 164). The Dictionary of *syr Thomas Eliot knight of 1538* gives *liberale ingenium* as “free courage” (*Addicion*, unpaginated).

6 See e.g. Vergerio, *The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth*, in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, esp. the section entitled “The Signs of a Liberal Temper [*Signa liberalis ingenii*],” pp. 8–11.

7 Erasmus published a Latin translation from the Greek of Plutarch’s *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* in his widely read *Education of a Christian Prince* of 1516. For more on this, see Chapter 6, sect. “Flattery.”

At least I may justly say, that in all that I have written either for myself, or my friends of the magistracy and others, touching these weighty matters, I have always avoided and abhorred the flatteries of some writers, which I think not only destructive to nations, but to reason itself; and could never offer violence to my judgment, or slavishly lay aside my pen. For a good man ought in due time and place to speak the truth in the cause of his country, tho' with the hazard of his life.¹

When making such remarks about his own intentions, De la Court was making a more general point regarding the importance of sincerity and good faith for a healthy public sphere. Hence, as Weststeijn concludes, "in being outspoken and singing the praise of such outspokenness, the De la Courts aimed to show that candor offers the key to a constructive public debate."² Clearly, if Spinoza's use of the Apostles' Letters as a model of candid exchange of "brotherly advice" was perhaps original, he was certainly not alone in appealing to classical notions of intellectual friendship and parrhesia when defining the rules of public speech and free philosophizing.

¹ De la Court, *True Interest*, preface, p. x.

² Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 105.

Authority

The Forms of Authority

As already briefly noted in Chapter 4, the notion of “authority to teach and advise” is centrally important for grasping what free philosophizing consists in and determining the conditions under which it can be exercised. The main aim of this chapter is to gain a better grasp of this curious form of authority. In order to bring out its specificity, however, we will have to consider it not in isolation, but as one component in a broader theory of authority that includes a whole range of forms. This theory is only discernible through a systematic reconstruction based on the passages and texts where Spinoza uses the notion. And the first thing we note in that context is that Spinoza’s conception of “authority” (*authoritas* in the TTP; *auctoritas* in the TP) is almost entirely comprised within the political writings. The Ethics contains only one occurrence of the term, in the appendix of the first part, in a passage concerned with the relation between ignorance and abusive religious authority.¹ The term is not part of the technical vocabulary or deductive apparatus of the Ethics. Spinoza’s conception of authority is thus one instance where his metaphysics is of little immediate help in grasping the systematic construction of his theological-political argument, although, as we shall see, some of the forms of authority he discusses—including the authority to teach and advise—have important metaphysical underpinnings. Moreover, he provides no definition of authority in any of the political texts or ever thematizes the notion as such. He simply employs it, in some contexts very often. This means that any reconstruction of Spinoza’s theory of authority, to the extent that he has one, must to some degree be conjectural, exclusively based on his use of the term and on whatever systematic distinctions can be inferred from that use. The following is an attempt at such a conjectural, systematic reconstruction. Intellectual context shall, however, also afford us much additional help in completing this task. *Authoritas* is, of course, a notion with deep roots in the history of both theology and political thought and Spinoza clearly draws on both.

Prophetic and Scriptural

The first kind of authority Spinoza studies in the TTP is prophetic authority.² He provides no firm definition, but it is possible to infer one from his discussion of its function and from his understanding of prophecy more generally. Prophecy has authority to the extent that it is a vehicle of divine law. For example, “the law of Moses, although not universal, but accommodated for the most part to the mentality and special preservation of one people, can still be called God’s law, or divine law.”³ As a prophet, Moses presents God’s law in the form of decrees: “Prophecies ... contain only bare doctrines [dogmata] and decrees, because in them God is introduced as speaking, and he does not reason, but decides in accordance with the absolute sovereignty of his nature.” This is why “the authority of the prophet is not subject to reasoning.”⁴ It is important to emphasize, though, that a prophet does not command on the basis of an authority grounded in his person. His authority is entirely predicated on his role as mouthpiece of God. It belongs to him only to the extent that what he says is recognized as

¹ E1app, G II.81|C I.444: “[those whom the people honor as interpreters of nature and the Gods] know that if ignorance is taken away, then foolish wonder, the only means they have of arguing and defending their authority [*auctoritas*] is also taken away.” The passage can be compared with Spinoza’s denunciations of “divine” and “priestly” authority in the TTP. See sect. “Divine and Priestly,” this chapter. We also find a few occurrences in the letters. Most of them address topics also discussed in the TTP, such as the authority of Scripture (Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 28, 1665, Letter 21, G IV.132|C I.380); the excessive authority of the preachers (Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. October 1, 1665, Letter 30, G IV.166|C II.15); and the authority of the (Roman) church (Spinoza to Burgh, late 1675 or early 1676, Letter 76, G IV.322–3|C II.477). A notable exception is a response to Boxel, where Spinoza deplures how philosophy can degenerate into—or be reduced to—a battle for “authority” among philosophers (presumably, as opposed to a search for truth): “To me the authority [*authoritas*] of Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates is not worth much ... But it’s no wonder that the people who invented occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms, and a thousand other trifles contrived ghosts and spirits, and believed old wives’ tales, to lessen the authority [*authoritatem*] of Democritus” (October/November 1674, Letter 56, G IV.261|C II.423).

² For this expression, see TTP XI, G III.151|C II.241 and G III.153|C II.243.

³ TTP IV, G III.61|C II.129.

⁴ TTP XI, G III.152|C II.241; trans. modified.

faithfully communicating God's commands, even though a prophet may be communicating them in another form than the one in which God originally communicated them to him.¹ Consequently, in relation to prophetic command, the question of authority converges with that of authenticity or, at any rate, perceived authenticity. The authority of the prophets—i.e., the authenticity of their prophecy—is established on the basis of them having a “vivid imagination,” receiving a “sign,” and, most importantly, “having a heart inclined toward the right and the Good”: “The certainty and authority the prophets themselves had were not based on any other reasons. So they could not demonstrate their authority by any other reasons.”² Authority is here a function of the degree to which what is said can reliably be said to convey the thought of the author—in this case, that what the prophet says reliably conveys God's law and command.

In the same context, Spinoza operates with a notion of the authority of Scripture which directly prolongs prophetic authority since “the authority of the Bible depends on the authority of the prophets.”³ He constantly demonstrates the nature of Jewish or Christian doctrines by the authority of Scripture, by which he means finding passages in the Bible where those doctrines are explicitly asserted.⁴ In order to have this authority, Scripture itself does, however, require authentication in terms of both form and content.

In terms of form, the authority of Scripture is a function of the historical authenticity of the text, to be established by historical criticism and biblical philology which aim at restoring the text to its original state, as closely as possible to the original prophetic revelation. It is in this context, for example, that Spinoza stresses that the punctuations and accents of the Hebrew Bible “have been devised and established by men of a later age, whose authority ought to be worth nothing to us,”⁵ or that he chooses not to discuss the apocryphal books of the Hebrew Bible, “since they are of greatly different authority.”⁶ The original, truly authentic text is, however, not recoverable. The obscurity of ancient Hebrew and the uncertain transmission of the text render precise reconstruction impossible.⁷ Moreover, by showing how the Hebrew Bible is probably a collection of texts stitched together by some scribe—Spinoza suggests Esdras—long after their composition, he sows considerable doubt about whether it even makes sense to maintain the notion of an original, authoritative version of the Bible. In this respect, as shown by Jetze Touber, Spinoza's position represents an extreme historicist view in the protracted Dutch controversies about biblical philology at the time, originally prompted by discussions around the establishment, use, and possible correction of the 1637 States' translation of the Bible.⁸ When understood along these lines, someone like Leibniz was not exactly mistaken when he complained that, in the TTP, Spinoza “develops a critique which is indeed erudite, but also scattered with venom against the very antiquity, authenticity and authority of the sacred writings of the Old Testament.”⁹

In terms of content, the authority of Scripture rests on the consideration of the divine origin of what it says, i.e., it has authority to the extent that it communicates God's word or gives voice to divine law, in whatever form. When understood in this sense, Spinoza affirms the authority of the Scripture by showing that it everywhere teaches a doctrine that conforms to the divine law as it is also taught by the natural light, namely the simple message that our salvation depends on “good works,” i.e., the practice of justice and charity.¹⁰ Scripture as a whole is said to be divine only to the extent that this

1 TTP XI, G III.152|C II.242: “Why don't I say that Moses spoke these things on his own authority, to make his prediction probable to the people, and not as a prophet, in accordance with a revelation? Because Deuteronomy 31:21 relates that God revealed this very thing to Moses in other words.”

2 TTP XV, G III.186|C II.279.

3 TTP XV, G III.185|C II.279.

4 See TTP III, G II.53|C II.120; TTP V, G III.69|C II.139, G III.73|C II.143, G III.76|C II.147, G III.80|C II.152; and TTP VI, G III.87|C II.159.

5 TTP VII, G III.108|C II.181.

6 TTP VII, G III.111|C II.184; see also TTP X, G III.141|C II.226.

7 TTP VI, G III.106–8|C II.180–1.

8 Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology*, pp. 183–8; see also Van Miert, “Making the States' Translation.”

9 Leibniz to Spitzel, February 1672, *Sämtliche Schriften*, I, i, p. 193; see also Lærke, “Leibniz's Two Readings,” pp. 115–19; Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 301–2.

10 See TTP XV, G III.187|C II.281.

simple lesson is equally taught in all of the different books and narratives. This is why “those who want to demonstrate the authority of Holy Scripture are bound to show the authority of each book; proving the divinity of one is not enough to establish the divinity of all.”¹

Finally, following an annotation Spinoza intended for the planned second edition of the TTP, the Annotation II, we should distinguish the authority of prophets and the authority of Scripture (which is a direct extension of prophetic authority) from the derivative authority of the “interpreters,” i.e., the authority claimed by priests as shepherds to the faithful: “an interpreter of God is one who interprets God’s decrees to others to whom they have not been revealed, and who, in embracing them, rely only on the authority of the prophet.”² For Spinoza, this question of authoritative interpreters of God’s word is—as we shall have ample opportunity to see in what follows—completely tangled up with the political question of *ius circa sacra*, or the right concerning sacred matters.

Divine and Priestly

Next, we can turn to two related notions of illegitimate authority, or forms of authority that Spinoza considers to be false, namely divine and priestly authority.

Spinoza has no positive concept of divine authority. On this point, his position is aligned with classical Roman thought where authority (as opposed to power) is seldom attributed to the gods.³ When he uses the expression “divine authority,” it is exclusively in the context of abuse. He thus complains that “theologians have mainly been anxious to twist their own inventions and fancies out of the sacred texts, to fortify them with divine authority,”⁴ that schismatics “prop up [their] own inventions by abusing divine authority,”⁵ and that opportunist prophets in the late Hebrew Republic “were prepared for everything” and “could easily use their divine authority ... to take legal control of the state.”⁶ Rather than to represent, as one would otherwise expect, the ultimate form of true authority, divine authority is thus associated with those who “hawk human inventions and fancies as divine teachings, and abuse the authority of Scripture,”⁷ and with those “private men [who] are prepared to defend divine right seditiously”⁸ rather than, as they ought to, “teach the people piety by the authority of the supreme powers, as it’s been accommodated, by their decree, to the public advantage.”⁹

Priestly authority, in turn, is a reflexive version of such seditious assertion of divine authority which is less concerned with private men stipulating laws in God’s name than with private men interpreting God’s laws in illegitimate and self-serving ways. Spinoza addresses the issue mostly via a discussion of the development of the Hebrew Republic after the death of Moses. Moses deployed all the means available to secure the continued integrity of his legislative legacy, including putting into place a political construction where he remained the *de jure* ruler even after his death.¹⁰ Still, Spinoza shows, he “was not able to escape murmuring and perverse interpretations.”¹¹ Why? Moses had established a political regime where high priests were not authorized to make laws but only to enforce already existing legislation: “Moses did not choose any successor to the sovereignty, but distributed all his functions so that his successors seemed to be his deputies, who were administering the state as if the king were absent, not dead.”¹² Indeed, by establishing and maintaining the Hebrew Republic as a theocracy, Moses attempted to ensure that, even in his absence, the laws would remain in place under

1 TTP XIV, G III.175–6|C II.266–7; see also TTP X, G III.150|C II.238; TTP XIII, G III.172|C II.263.

2 TTP I, Annotation II, G III.251|C II.77.

3 See Pollmann, “Christianity and Authority,” p. 170; Heinze, *Auctoritas*, pp. 359–60. The notion of divine authority first appears with Tertullian.

4 TTP VII, G III.97|C II.170.

5 TTP XII, G III.166|C II.256.

6 TTP XII, G III.220|C II.321.

7 TTP XIV, G III.173|C II.264.

8 TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.341.

9 TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.342.

10 See TTP XVII, G III.211|C II.310; TTP XIX, G III.234|C II.339.

11 TTP XX, G III.239|C II.345.

12 TTP XIX, G III.234|C II.339; see also TTP XVII, G III.211|C II.310.

the auspices of a public authority which was perpetually held to abide by the original commands given by God. For this reason, even after Moses died,

no [religious] decree could derive its validity from the high priest, since they had no right to make [religious] decrees, but only to give God's answers when asked to do so by the rulers or the councils. And for that reason they could not then have any urge to decree novelties, but only to administer and defend familiar and accepted decrees. The only way they could safely preserve their own freedom when the rulers were opposed to them was to preserve the laws uncorrupted.¹

This cunning political artifice did, however, prove insufficient in the long run to avoid corruption of the laws. This was because high priests, while operating nominally as deputies to their departed sovereign, quickly usurped control, not over the laws and their promulgation, but over their interpretation:

But after they had acquired the power to handle the affairs of the state, and had joined the right to rule to that of priesthood, each one began to seek the glory of his own name both in religion and in other matters, determining everything by priestly authority and daily issuing new decrees, concerning ceremonies, the faith, and everything else, decrees they wanted to be no less sacred and to have no less authority than the laws of Moses. The result? Religion declined into a deadly superstition and the true meaning and interpretation of the laws was corrupted.²

All those who have later claimed divine authority for their own interpretations of Scripture act in the same way as these high priests in the declining Hebrew Republic who attempted to assert their priestly agenda by usurping public authority. Orthodox Calvinists are clearly the contemporary target of Spinoza's critique. Indeed, as Steven Nadler notes, "it would have taken a particularly dim wit for a contemporary predikant not to recognize himself in Spinoza's depiction of the Jewish high priests."³

Moving to the systematic side of Spinoza's argument, it is not difficult to identify the basic reason underlying his rejection of divine and priestly authority as legitimate notions of authority. It is because it is only through the intermediary of the prophets that divine law is imposed by authority. In themselves, divine laws are not imposed by authority at all, because they do not follow from a divine will. Divine laws follow from the necessity of the divine nature and "always involve eternal necessity or truth."⁴ In fact, speaking improperly of the necessity of divine law in terms of an irresistible "authority" is the first and most important adaptation of the truth in religious discourse; an anthropomorphic conception of divine rule that represents natural necessity as the will of God.⁵ If, however, we are to grasp more precisely how such accommodation of the divine law provides an opening for abusive forms of religious authority, we need to go a little deeper into the details of Spinoza's reasoning.

The position of Hobbes provides an instructive contrast. With regard to the transmission of the divine law, both Hobbes and Spinoza are, as has been argued at length by Atsuko Fukuoka, deeply concerned with a question of mediation when it comes to the transmission of divine law in religion and theology.⁶ For both, in prophecy and Scripture, divine law is never communicated directly. For Hobbes, this framework of mediation, to use Fukuoka's expression, is inescapable, on account of his conception of God and his pessimistic assessment of our prospects of gaining knowledge of God's nature and will:

men that by their own meditation, arrive to the acknowledgement of one Infinite, Omnipotent, and Eternal God, choose rather to confesse he is Incomprehensible, and above their

¹ TTP XVIII, G III.223|C II.324; trans. modified.

² TTP XVIII, G III.222|C II.324; see also TTP XVIII, G III.222|C II.323–4: "if we attend to the course of Hebrew history, we'll find ... that ... there were no sects in their religion until after the high priests in the second state had the authority to make decrees and to handle the affairs of the state. To make this authority permanent, they took for themselves the right to rule, and in the end wanted to be called kings."

³ Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, p. 284; see also Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology*, p. 155.

⁴ TTP IV, G III.63|C II.131.

⁵ E1p17s, G II.62–3|C I.426–8; and E1p32&c1–2, G II.73|C I.435–6.

⁶ Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 50–2; see also Preus, *Spinoza*, p. 30.

understanding; than to define his Nature By Spirit Incorporeall, and then Confesse their definition to be unintelligible: or if they give him such a title, it is not Dogmatically, with intention to make the Divine Nature understood; but Piously, to honour him with attributes, of significations, as remote as they can from the grossnesse of Bodies Visible.¹

All we can know about God and his nature is that he exists; all the properties traditionally associated with him express not his nature, but are merely “honorific,” i.e., they express the relation of subordination we entertain with him and the worth we bestow upon him.² In short, whatever we affirm about God is not of the order of science, but of the order of worship.³

Spinoza differs sharply from Hobbes on this point. He does not believe that unmediated communication with God is impossible: “God can communicate himself immediately to men, for he communicates his essence to our mind without using any corporeal means.”⁴ This is because he thinks that both the nature of God and the principles of divine law are accessible to reason. If we turn to the Ethics, he even asserts that “the human mind has adequate knowledge of God’s eternal and infinite essence” and that “God’s infinite essence and his eternity are known to all.”⁵ Moreover, to the extent that “the universal laws of nature are nothing but decrees of God, which follow from the necessity and perfection of the divine nature,”⁶ whatever we perceive to follow from these laws amounts to exploring the will or intellect of God. And the universal laws of nature are not just the physical laws, like the laws of motion, but all such laws as can be deduced from the consideration of the essences of things, including laws regarding the human passions and the “principles of living” contained in “universal ethics.”⁷ The principles of human passion and action, bondage and freedom, that he develops throughout the Ethics are, of course, nothing but this universal ethics.

The question is, however, whether divine law is intelligible qua law, properly understood. Although Spinoza acknowledges that we can employ the word “law” to describe something that “depends either on a necessity of nature or on a human decision,”⁸ he still cautions that

the word law seems to be applied figuratively to natural things, and commonly nothing is understood by law but a command which men can either carry out or neglect ... for that reason law seems to need to be defined more particularly: that it is a principle of living man prescribes to himself or to others for some end.⁹

When truly understood, divine law is only said to be law figuratively, because it is properly grasped by the understanding as a natural necessity.

Strictly speaking, then, for Spinoza, there is no rational and proper conception of divine law, but only an imaginary and figurative one. Correlatively, to the extent that the notion of authority is a theological and political one associated with the implementation of laws in the proper sense, there cannot be any proper notion of divine authority, for understanding natural necessity cannot pass for obedience to authority. For this reason, no one can claim divine authority in any proper sense, for “if anyone says he has a spirit other than [reason] which makes him certain of the truth, he’s making a false boast. He’s speaking only from a prejudice stemming from his affects.”¹⁰ Rather than speaking on the authority of God that he claims to possess, such a false prophet “says these things on his own

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XII, p. 168.

2 See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, X, p. 136: “The manifestation of the Value we set on one another, is that which is commonly called Honouring, and Dishonouring”; and “To obey, is to Honour; because no man obeyes them, whom they think have no power to help, or hurt them.”

3 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLV, p. 1028: “the inward thoughts of men, which appeare outwardly in their words and actions, are the signes of our Honoring, and these goe by the name of Worship, in Latine, Cultus. Therefore, to Pray to, to Swear by, to Obey, to bee Diligent, and Officious in Serving: in summe, all words and actions that betoken Fear to Offend, or Desire to Please, is Worship, whether those words and actions be sincere, or feigned: and because they appear as signes of Honoring, are ordinarily also called Honor.”

4 TTP I, G III.20–1|C II.84.

5 E2p47&s, G II.128|C I.482–3; see also Lærke, “Prejudices, Common Notions, Intuitions.”

6 TTP VI, G III.82–3|C II.154.

7 TTP IV, G III.60|C II.128.

8 TTP IV, G III.57|C II.125.

9 TTP IV, G III.58|C II.126–7.

10 TTP XV, G III.188|C II.281.

authority.”¹ And whoever does this is necessarily engaged in an attempt to usurp power that is not his by right, i.e., he is engaged in sedition.² This is, for example, the case when priests seek to gain public authority or usurp power from a sovereign under the pretext that they represent and can directly exercise a divine authority that supersedes civil authority; when they seek to either divide sovereignty, or to subject the sovereign power to a higher, supranational power.³ Those two forms of sedition—the collateral division of public authority between church and state envisaged by the orthodox Calvinists or the subordination of the state to the church envisaged by the Church of Rome—represent the kind of usurped authority that Spinoza characterizes as “priestly authority.” Divine authority and priestly authority are thus like two sides of the same deceitful strategy.

Public and Private

In relation to the sovereign power, Spinoza speaks of public authority. For example, in TTP VII he explains how the Hebrew Republic required “a certain public authority” to uphold Mosaic Law, because “if each person had the freedom to interpret the public legislation according to his own will, no republic could survive.”⁴ The principle applies generally: “no society can continue in existence without government and force [imperio, & vi], and hence, laws which moderate and restrain men’s immoderate desires and unchecked impulses.”⁵ The meaning of this notion of public authority partly overlaps with, but is not identical to, the meaning of the complicated term imperium, which most often means “state” or “sovereignty,” but also sometimes “command,” “government,” or “control,” depending on context.⁶

In the text quoted above, the notion of public authority is directly related to the question of who holds the right to interpret the divine law. Public authority is an authority to promulgate laws.⁷ It demands obedience, which “consists in someone’s carrying out a command solely on the authority of the person who commands it [ex sola imperantis auctoritate].”⁸ Public authority is, moreover, a right of interpretation: it is not only tied to laws promulgated by the sovereign power, but also extends to edicts or decrees representing the sovereign power’s interpretation of those laws: “the sovereign powers are the interpreters of the law of their state, because the laws they pass are preserved only by their authority and depend only on their testimony.”⁹ Importantly, this right of interpretation includes the *ius circa sacra*, or right of the sovereign power over sacred matters: “those who have sovereignty are the defenders and interpreters, not only of civil law, but also of sacred law.”¹⁰ One should, however, not confound this right of interpretation of sacred matters with prophetic authority. With the exception of Moses, who was unusual in both his capacities,¹¹ Spinoza does not regard sovereigns as prophets. The sovereign power is the legitimate interpreter of how to implement the divine law revealed by the prophets within society. But, even for the sovereign power, the authority and

1 TTP XVI, G III.182|C II.275.

2 TTP XX, G III.242|C II.348.

3 TTP XIX, G III.234|C II.339; TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.341.

4 TTP VII, G III.116|C II.190.

5 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144; trans. modified. Curley has “authority” for imperium.

6 On the term imperium in Spinoza, see Akkerman, “Mots Techniques”; M. Terpstra, “Imperium,” in Van Bunge et al., *The Continuum Companion*, pp. 232–3; and Curley’s glossary at the entries “Republic” (C II.654) and “Sovereign(ity), supreme power, sovereign powers” (C II.658–9). Curley most often translates imperium by “state,” sometimes by “sovereignty,” and sometimes by “authority.” It also sometimes overlaps with the meaning of the term regnum, “rule” or “government.” For a good paragraph illustrating some of the difficulties involved, see e.g. TP II.17, G III.282|C II.512.

7 See TTP XVI, G III.196|C II.290: “the civil law, or ... edict of the supreme power”; TTP XVI, G III.199|C II.294: “civil law depends only on [the supreme power’s] own decree.” See also TP IV.5, G III.294|C II.527: “the civil law depends only on the decree of the commonwealth, which is not bound to conduct itself according to anyone’s wishes but its own, if it is to remain free.”

8 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144.

9 TTP I, Annotation II, G III.251|C II.77; see also TP IV.6, G III.294|C II.528: “by the civil law only the sovereign is left to be the interpreter of those laws.”

10 TTP Preface, C III.12|C II.74.

11 Moses was an unusual sovereign, because the theocratic set-up of his regime in principle established him as a deputy of God. It was—again, in principle—God to whom the Hebrews transferred their power and therefore God “alone ... had sovereignty over the Hebrews” (TTP XVII, G II.205–6|C II.302). Moses was an unusual prophet because, unlike the other prophets, he heard God’s true voice (TTP I, G II.17|C II.79).

authenticity of prophecy itself stem from an assessment of the prophet's credentials, which relies on factors independent from the sovereign will.¹

We can turn to the TP for some additional determinations regarding public authority.² The term *auctoritas* is absent from the first, systematic chapters. We do, however, hit upon some occurrences in TP VIII–X, dedicated to aristocracy. Most of them are concerned with technicalities of aristocratic government.³ One instructive passage can, however, be found at TP VIII.44 where Spinoza discusses the status of “plebeians,” i.e., citizens who are not patricians or eligible for the general council. He argues that they “should be excluded both from the councils and from voting” and that “the supreme power of the state should rest with all the patricians, whereas authority should rest with the syndics and the senate.”⁴ Conflict will necessarily arise if power is granted to agents not eligible to exercise authority, in this case the mass of plebeians.⁵ Spinoza's determinations echo Cicero's famous distinction in *De Legibus* between the power of the people and the authority of the senate.⁶ For Cicero, the source of political action ultimately lies with the people, while the execution of such action lies with the senate in charge of administering it. Authority is what gives form and direction to power and guides its execution. Without power, authority has no efficacy; without authority, power is shapeless and without direction. Authority is power shaped by laws.

These general terminological lessons from the TP are helpful for understanding the role that, in the TTP, Spinoza believes the sovereign powers in a free republic should play in the management of religion: they must use their monopoly on public authority to ascertain that the powerful religious passions of people are directed and shaped so as to avoid conflict. In such a well-managed republic, “provided they harm no one, give each person his due, and live honorably, there is absolutely no sect so hated that its followers are not protected by the public authority of the magistrates and their forces.”⁷ In a less well-managed republic, by contrast, these same religious passions can also be reshaped and redirected for the worse by people who “dare to usurp the authority and right”⁸ of the sovereign powers and “who ... by a certain grim authority, easily change the devotion of a seditious mob to madness, and rouse it against whomever they wish to.”⁹ Spinoza's immediate target here is, of course, religious leaders, the orthodox Calvinists of the Dutch public church in particular. He wants to establish firmly that only “those people are ministers of the word of God who teach the people piety by the authority of the supreme powers, as it's been accommodated, by their decree, to the public advantage.”¹⁰ Still, the fundamental principle of his position is that the integrity of public authority is a crucial condition for harnessing the power of the multitude, in accordance with the most basic conceptions of classic republicanism.

1 On this point, Spinoza differs from Hobbes who, in the *Leviathan*, speaks of kings as “sovereign prophets” (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXVI, pp. 668, 676; XLI, p. 764). On this notion in Hobbes, see Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 80, 108–9, 256, 260–2.

2 The text is a little difficult to navigate terminologically in Curley's English translation on this point because of his translation of *imperium* by “political authority” or sometimes just “authority” (see TP III.3, G III.285|C II.517–18; TP IV.2, G III.291|C II.525; TP IV.4, G III.293|C II.527). It gives the impression that “authority” properly speaking is more of a central issue throughout the text than it actually is.

3 Generally, in an aristocracy, the supreme council of patricians holding the sovereign power should be elected so that the “equal authority” of the patricians is ascertained (TP VIII.27, G III.334–5|C II.575). Specifically, it belongs to the “authority of the supreme council” to confirm decisions of the senate—a kind of subordinate council—about war and peace (TP VIII.29, G III.335|C II.577). The senate does, however, have “the authority to settle disputes between ... cities” (TP IX.5, G III.348|C II.590). As for the syndics—patricians without voting rights charged with oversight of the other patricians—their “authority can only see that the form of the state is preserved,” but they cannot alter the state or participate in the promulgation of new laws (TP X.4, G III.355|C II.598).

4 TP VIII.44, G III.344|C II.586.

5 Spinoza returns to the topic in TP X.3, where he explains how the Roman Republic declined because “the authority of the tribunes against the patricians was defended by the support of the plebeians,” and “whenever they called upon the plebeians, they seemed to promote sedition rather than convene a council” (G III.355|C II.598).

6 Cicero, *De Legibus*, III.28.

7 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352; trans. modified. Curley has “live honestly” for *honeste vivere*. Spinoza is, of course, listing the three basic precepts of justice in Roman law (see the *Institutes*, 1.1.3: “*Juris praecepta sunt haec: honeste vivere, alterum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere*”). Most English translations of Justinian's *Institutes* will, as Curley, give *honeste vivere* as “to live honestly.” As pointed out by Thomas Glyn Watkin, the translation is, however, not in itself without its problems (see Watkin, “*Honeste Vivere*,” pp. 117–18). Moreover, in the internal logic of translation of Spinoza's terms adopted by Curley, *honestas* is given as “honorability,” whereas “honesty” translates *generositas*.

8 TTP XX, G III.247|C II.353.

9 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.350.

10 TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.341–2.

Next, in opposition to public authority, Spinoza also operates with an individual kind of authority that he associates with the notion of the “private”—with “private persons,” “private men,” and “private right.” Although he does not use this exact expression—perhaps because of the slight awkwardness involved in speaking of an authority that one grants oneself—it can be conveniently described as private authority. The difference between private authority and public authority lies in the kind of authorization they each involve: whatever is said or done with public authority by someone is authorized by the sovereign power; whatever is said or done with private authority is authorized by the speakers or agents themselves. Spinoza’s key example of the latter occurs in TTP XIX, where he explains how all those “who first taught the Christian religion” did so as

private men who were accustomed for a long time—against the will of those who had sovereignty and whose subjects they were—to address meetings in private Churches, to establish and administer sacred offices, to manage everything by themselves, and to make decrees without any concern for the sovereign.¹

The early Christian teachers authorized themselves to exercise their religion and teach it to others. Even against the express command of the public authorities, they assumed a private authority for themselves that Spinoza nonetheless does not condemn or declare illegitimate. The question is: why? Providing an answer requires taking a closer look at how he understands the nature and domain of application of those early Christian teachings.

Now, when private persons exercise their private authority as if it was public authority, interfering with government or even “criticiz[ing] the kings themselves,”² it is not legitimate. Spinoza raises the issue with regard to Hebrew prophets who meddled with the enforcement of civil law: “the prophets, as private men, aggravated people more than they corrected them by the freedom with which they warned, reproached, and censured them. On the other hand, when these same people were warned or criticized by their kings, they were easily set right.”³ Spinoza denounces in even more virulent terms such private citizens who authorize themselves to pass judgment upon the sovereign powers—and in particular those who do so under the banner of religion—when arguing in TTP XIX that “everything will deteriorate ... far more quickly if private men are prepared to defend divine right seditiously.”⁴ Indeed, in the extreme, if public authority is subordinated to private interests, it tends to the destruction of the state altogether, “for if each person had the freedom to interpret the public legislation according to his own will, no republic could survive. It would immediately be dissolved by this very fact, and the public legislation would be private legislation.”⁵ These same worries also explain why the only private right that Spinoza explicitly operates with is a civil one, a *jus civile privatum* which, as such, falls entirely under public authority. It is defined as “the freedom each person has to preserve himself in his state, which is determined by the edicts of the supreme power, and is defended only by its authority.”⁶

Spinoza, however, clearly does not want to imply that the early teachers of the Christian religion engaged in private usurpation of public right when “making decrees without any concern for the sovereign” in “private churches.” They did not interfere with government or set themselves up as judges of the public authority. Still, they authorized themselves to teach the Gospel without the blessing of the public authorities. In this context, Spinoza thus appears to operate with a private right different from the *jus civile privatum*, a private right that does not fall under the civil right of the sovereign power, but still draws power and legitimacy from another source. Now, as we shall see in the next section, one reason why these early Christian meetings in private churches were not, in fact, seditious gatherings of potential rebels is because they did not claim any authority of the kind that

¹ TTP XIX, G III.237|C II.342.

² TTP XVIII, G III.223|C II.325.

³ TTP XVIII, G III.223|C II.325; see also TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.341: “though the prophets themselves were endowed with a divine virtue, still, because they were private men, the freedom they showed in warning, chiding and reproaching people aggravated them more than it corrected them.”

⁴ TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.341.

⁵ TTP VII, G III.116|C II.191.

⁶ TTP XVI, G III.196|C II.290.

characterizes public authority, which includes coercive power . They recognized that “absolutely no one can be compelled by force or by laws to become blessed.”¹ Spinoza, however, also highlights a difference in domain of application of authority. The early Christian teachers were concerned with teaching internal virtues which “consist not so much in external actions as in simplicity and truthfulness.” And these virtues, he continues, are “not the domain of any public legislation or public authority.”² Indeed, “each person is his own master with respect to the internal worship of God and piety itself.”³ In other words, for Spinoza, the early Christians’ teaching applied to an internal domain that by right falls under the authority of the self. This is exactly what Spinoza means by describing these teachings and meetings as “private.” They fall under what one can rightfully authorize oneself to do.

It is thus because it is a private matter that “each person will also have the supreme right and the supreme authority to judge freely concerning religion, and hence to explain it and interpret it for himself.”⁴ The conviction represents Spinoza’s version of what was traditionally described in the Netherlands as “freedom of conscience,” the latter an expression he strikingly enough never employs.⁵ It can be instructively contrasted with the orthodox Calvinist conception of “Christian liberty.” In the *Institutes*, III, chap. 19, Calvin explains how, as the first part of this Christian liberty, “believers renouncing the righteousness of the Law, look only to Christ” and how, as the second part, “conscience, freed from the yoke of the law, voluntarily obeys the will of God,” and finally, as the third and final part, how it grants “the free use of things indifferent.”⁶ The notion of Christian liberty is correlated with the fundamental Calvinist tenet that one is not saved by works or by obedience to the law: “the consciences of believers, while seeking the assurance of their justification before God, must rise above the law, and think no more of obtaining justification from it.”⁷ For “impostors instilled into the people the most pernicious opinion, that this obedience was sufficient to merit the grace of God,” whereas, in fact, “believers shall not imagine that they can obtain justification before God by any works.”⁸ Instead, consciences are free when they do not “obey the law ... as if compelled by legal necessity,” but are “free from the yoke of the law itself, [and] voluntarily obey the will of God.”⁹ On the orthodox Calvinist understanding, then, Christian liberty is only the freedom from the law that each Christian has so as to better submit to the divine will by faith. It cannot, in any sense, be conceived as an individual authority. It is an individual obligation, a liberty of faith that each Christian has a duty to exercise. From that perspective, Spinoza’s conception of freedom of conscience as a “private authority” certainly belongs among those conceptions which, on Calvin’s view, “under pretext of this liberty, shake off all obedience to God, and break out into unbridled licentiousness.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, as we shall see later, Spinoza, too, has his own peculiar conception of the duties associated with the exercise of our private authority over our internal worship, and indeed explicitly stresses in the TP the importance that everyone must “worship God in accordance with true religion, and look out for himself, which is the duty of a private man.”¹¹ This has an important bearing in particular on Spinoza’s understanding of the so-called *adiaphora*, or “things indifferent,” which, unlike most other

1 TTP VII, G III.116|C II.191; trans. modified.

2 TTP VII, G III.116|C II.191; trans. modified.

3 TTP XIX, G III.229|C II.333.

4 TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191. See also, on the same page: “the supreme authority to explain religion, and to judge about it, will be in each person’s hands, because it is a matter of each person’s right.” As we shall have occasion to see in the following sections, further complications will arise with regard to these otherwise seemingly clear-cut correlations between, on the one hand, private authority and the domain of internal worship and, on the other, public authority and the domain of external action.

5 Also noted in Henry, “Freedom of Conscience,” p. 8.

6 Calvin, *Institutes*, III, chap. 19, sect. 2–8.

7 Calvin, *Institutes*, III, chap. 19, sect. 2, p. 131.

8 Calvin, *Institutes*, III, chap. 19, sect. 3, p. 132.

9 Calvin, *Institutes*, III, chap. 19, sect. 4, p. 132. For a brief, helpful discussion of the Lutheran and Calvinist conceptions of Christian liberty, see Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, pp. 22–4.

10 Calvin, *Institutes*, III, chap. 19, sect. 1, p. 131. On the Calvinist interpretations of Christian liberty in the Dutch political circumstances of the late sixteenth century, see Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought*, pp. 237–9.

11 TP III.10, G III.289|C II.522.

tolerationist thinkers, from Coornhert to Locke, he does not consider optional, but in a sense obligatory for the practice of true religion.¹

The Authority to Teach and Advise

Finally, Spinoza operates with a notion of an authority to teach and advise. This is closely related to the private authority described in the previous section. Indeed, they are to some extent best understood as two aspects of one and the same kind of authority. They are both exemplified by the apostolic epistolary style.

In TTP XI, we recall, Spinoza argues that, in their Letters, the Apostles express themselves not as prophets, but as “private persons, or teachers [privati, vel doctores].”² This private teaching is associated with a particular kind of authority that Spinoza distinguishes from the prophetic authority associated with their speaking in public assemblies. Let us first return briefly to the latter. When spreading the Gospel in public assemblies, *ex revelatione*, the Apostles’ preaching came with the power of divine command.³ They were authorized to preach the Gospel—often against the will of the public authorities—in virtue of the mission confided to them by Jesus Christ: “By what right could Christ’s disciples, who were private men, preach religion? I say they did this by right of the power they’d received from Christ over unclean spirits.”⁴ The Apostles thus preached publicly with neither public nor private authority, but with prophetic authority.

Spinoza’s conception here resonates with traditional conceptions of apostolic authority. Traditionally, this authority is based on the notion that the Apostles “owned” the Christian doctrine. In one Roman usage, *auctoritas* was a legal term designating legal ownership, liability, and authorship. This legal conception was reappropriated by the Christian tradition to signify that the Apostles acquired religious *auctoritas* to the extent that they were called upon by Jesus Christ himself to bear witness to the Christian faith, taking responsibility for its authentic transmission, thus assuming “ownership” or “authorship” of it. The Apostles were authorized to spread the Gospel because they had been granted ownership of the Christian doctrine by Jesus Christ himself.⁵ Later, in the history of Christianity, apostolic succession guaranteed the uninterrupted transmission of this spiritual authority to bishops and popes in the Roman Catholic church. This was why the theological battles of the Reformation played out importantly through opposing claims to apostolic authority, the Roman Catholic church seeing themselves as representing an uninterrupted tradition, and the Protestants often seeing themselves as reconnecting with the original apostolic teachings of the early Christian communities, the primitive church, before Roman Catholicism led it astray. Spinoza, for his part, rejects the notion of inherited prophetic authority altogether. As for the Roman Catholics, he deems their “arguments ... so frivolous they don’t deserve to be refuted.”⁶ More generally, he also cautions that “the authority Christ gave his disciples he gave to them only, and that others cannot take them as an example.”⁷ The Apostles’ prophetic authority was not transferred to any subsequent Christian teachers, not even to the primitive church or to “those who first taught the Christian religion,” as Spinoza refers to them.⁸

However, the Apostles “were granted not only the power to prophesy, but also the authority to teach [authoritas ad docendum]”;⁹ they “received not only the power to preach the story of Christ as prophets, confirming it with signs, but also the authority to teach and advise [authoritatem docendi & monendi] in the way each one judged best.”¹⁰ The question is: what is the source and status of this second authority that Spinoza grants the Apostles, i.e., the authority to teach and advise? He explains

1 See Chapter 9, sect. “De reliquis, or, On Things Indifferent.”

2 TTP XI, G III.151 | C II.240.

3 TTP XI, G III.155 | C II.244; TTP XI, G III.156 | C II.246.

4 TTP XIX, G III.233 | C II.338.

5 See Pollmann, “Christianity and Authority,” pp. 161–4.

6 TTP XIX, G III.234 | C II.339.

7 TTP XIX, G III.234 | C II.339.

8 TTP XIX, G III.237 | C II.342.

9 TTP XI, G III.155 | C II.244.

10 TTP XI, G III.156 | C II.245–6.

his position via the example of Paul who, according to Spinoza, claimed an “authority to advise whomever and whenever he wished ... a freedom to advise, which was his as a teacher [libertate monendi, quae ipsi tanquam Doctori ... erat], and not as a prophet.”¹ Paul not only preached as a prophet independently of the sovereign power in the name of Christ. He also taught as himself and even, in a sense, independently of Christ. For he authorized himself to teach the Gospel freely according to his own interpretation and to anyone he wanted. It is in this sense that the Apostles’ Letters generally qualify as their “private” teachings. They contain the part of their apostolic mission that was self-authorized, as opposed to their prophetic preaching authorized by Christ, recorded mostly in the Acts of the Apostles.

Now, contrary to their prophetic authority, Spinoza says nothing to the effect that the Apostles’ private authority to teach the Gospel belonged to them alone, or that their “freedom” to teach the Gospel as they “judged best” did not also belong to subsequent teachers of the Christian religion. In fact, as we already saw in the previous section, Spinoza argues that those “who first taught the Christian religion” also did this as “private men,” so that they, too, authorized themselves to teach.² With respect to teaching the Gospel, i.e., interpreting it and adapting it to the circumstances and the interlocutors, he thus makes no difference between the private authority of the Apostles and the private authority of early teachers of Christianity. And yet, we should not understand this in the sense that he extends an apostolic privilege—i.e., authority to teach the Gospel—so that it includes the early teachers of the Christian religion as well, or that he is in any way edging closer to the veneration of the early church characteristic of the Reformed tradition. Instead, Spinoza aims at showing how, when teaching the Gospel as private men, both the Apostles and the early teachers of Christianity laid claim to a common authority which belongs to everyone, and which concerns not just the teaching of Christianity, but in fact the teaching of any topic whatsoever. In fact, when pointing to the shared private authority to teach of the Apostles and the early teachers of the Christian religion, he is not making a theological point about religious authority within the Christian tradition, but rather a philosophical point about common human nature.³

How can we reach that conclusion? For Spinoza, freedom of judgment is not a power that can be directly suppressed. No one will ever “be able to stop men from making their own judgment about everything according to their own mentality.”⁴ However, he claims, this irrepressible use of our power of judgment is always accompanied by some external expression of that judgment, for “not even the wisest know how to keep quiet, not to mention ordinary people.”⁵ Spinoza’s evidence for this point is not merely anecdotal, but metaphysical. Indeed, it is grounded in his most basic conceptions of the relations between mind and body. In E3p2s, while explaining how the mind and body cannot determine each other, Spinoza responds to a fictive adversary who claims, as a counterexample, that “it is in the mind’s power [mentis potestate] alone to speak and to be silent.”⁶ Spinoza deems the example contrary to fact: “human affairs, of course, would be conducted far more happily if it were equally in man’s power [in hominis potestate] to be silent and to speak. But experience teaches all too plainly that men have nothing less in their power than their tongue.”⁷ There is no exception: the

¹ TTP XI, G III.156|C II.246.

² TTP XIX, G III.237|C II.342.

³ The question of whether Spinoza is entitled to any strong conception of “human nature” is much discussed among commentators, especially those who have taken an interest in the “model of human nature” that Spinoza introduces in E4preface (G II.208|C I.545; for two recent contributions that also summarize the debates, see Youpa, “Spinoza’s Model”; Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, pp. 162–78). I shall not get into these discussions, but simply state the aspects of my own view relevant for the present purposes. What Spinoza, thoroughly nominalist, certainly does not allow is that human nature forms an essence in and by itself. He also stresses the imaginary character of many previous philosophical conceptions of human nature, as an upright animal, a featherless biped, and so on. What he does allow for, however, is a so-called proper common notion of human nature that adequately expresses such properties as pertain to all human beings and without which they would not be human. For more on Spinoza’s theory of universal and proper common notions, see Chapter 9, sect. “Doctrines of Universal Faith.”

⁴ TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345.

⁵ TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345.

⁶ E3p2s, G II.142|C I.495.

⁷ E3p2s, G II.143|C I.496.

aptitude to judge is necessarily, metaphysically, correlated with the aptitude to express judgments.¹ This is also why Spinoza maintains that “from what we’ve ... established about the dispositions of human nature, it follows that laws made concerning opinions ... are completely useless.”² It makes little sense to ban by law what it is not in the power of people to abstain from doing.

The upshot is this: judgment is an activity we cannot relinquish without ceasing to be human beings; by the same token, however, expressing our judgment is also “an essentially human action.”³ This does not imply that the relation between internal judgments and their external expression is always a direct and straightforward one; indeed, far from it. Human beings can be alienated from their free judgment in many ways and manipulated into expressing the judgments of others as if they were their own. It does not imply, either, that deception, insincerity, or dissimulation become impossible: people will, on some level, always speak their minds, but their minds may well be set on deception and their intent will receive an accordingly deceitful expression. I shall dedicate an entire chapter—Chapter 6—to these various ways in which what we say can be out of tune with what we think. Nonetheless, there is no internal judgment of the mind that does not receive some external expression, because judgment and the expression of that judgment are two distinct aspects, mental and corporeal, of a single action flowing from a natural power that human beings necessarily exercise because they can.

It is the power to speak one’s mind—the external corporeal aspect of an aptitude whose internal mental aspect is our judgment, be it free or not—that eventually translates into a natural authority to teach and advise that all human beings possess in virtue of their common nature. It is this common, natural authority that both Apostles, in their Letters, and the early teachers of the Christian religion lay claim to when teaching the Gospels as “private men.” Moreover, in accordance with the analogy that Spinoza established between the apostolic epistolary style and free philosophizing, to philosophize freely just is to use that common, natural authority in a particular way, namely, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, with integrity and nobility, with full control over one’s own free judgment, without intention to deceive, and with a view to the benefit of others.

The authority to teach and advise thus emerges naturally from within every human being and is grounded in their natural aptitude to judge and express judgments. If it belongs equally to the Apostles and to the early teachers of Christianity, it is not in virtue of some specific privilege they share, but because this authority belongs equally to all human beings in virtue of their humanity. Human beings can, and always do, authorize themselves to speak their minds because it is in their power and therefore their right to do so. By contrast to the “private civil right” explicitly discussed by Spinoza, which remains entirely subjected to sovereign control, the authority to teach and advise is thus something like a private natural right not unlike the one that, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant shall later speak of as an “innate” natural right “which belongs to everyone by nature, independently of any act that would establish a right,” and which is “internally mine.”⁴

Freedom and Permission

As we saw in Chapter 4, Spinoza establishes a systematic analogy between the epistolary style of the Apostles and the general style of free philosophizing. What we have learned in the previous section of this chapter, however, is that the analogy sticks even deeper, and encompasses also the kind of authority that governs these modes of speaking, both described in terms of giving “brotherly advice”: both these modes of speaking rely on a common human authority to teach and advise. Indeed, to

¹ See Moreau, Spinoza. *L’expérience et l’éternité*, pp. 370–5; Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics*, pp. 46–47, 52; Garber, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” pp. 166–7; Jaquet, *Spinoza à l’œuvre*, pp. 122–3; Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*, p. 158.

² TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

³ Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics*, p. 43.

⁴ See Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, pp. 393–4. Kant allows for only one such right, namely freedom, and—not unlike Spinoza’s freedom of judgment and expression of judgment—it is “the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity,” but it includes as “authorizations, which are not really distinct from it” also “innate equality,” “a human being’s quality of being his own master (*sui iuris*),” “being beyond reproach (*iusti*),” and “his being authorized to do to others anything that does not in itself diminish what is theirs, so long as they do not want to accept it—such things as merely communicating his thoughts to them, telling or promising them something, whether what he says is true and sincere or untrue and insincere.”

philosophize just is to use this authority, and to philosophize freely is to use it in a particular way, namely in accordance with the rules and principles exemplified by apostolic epistolary style as described in TTP XI; that is to say, to use it in a way that is argumentative, candid, non-apodictic or falsifiable, equal, and aimed at moral certainty.¹

Now, in TTP XX, Spinoza shall go on to argue how “in a free republic everyone is permitted to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks [sentire, quae velit, & quae sentiat, dicere licere].”² He thus operates both with a notion of “freedom of philosophizing,” a *libertas*, and with a “permission to think and say what one thinks,” a *licentia*. These two notions are frequently conflated in the commentaries. More precisely, the freedom of philosophizing is often, even routinely, reduced to the permission to think and say what one thinks, with the consequence that the deep connection between the freedom of philosophizing and the account of brotherly advice and the apostolic epistolary style is overlooked. In this section, we shall explore in more detail the difference and relation between these two notions of freedom (*libertas*) and permission (*licentia*).

By “permission” (*licentia*), when used in the political context, Spinoza generally refers to something that is allowed by decree, a legal right granted by an external authority, typically the public authority of the state.³ This is, for example, how the Hebrews “when they first left Egypt ... were no longer bound by the legislation of any other nation; so they were permitted [*licebat*] as they wished, to enact new laws or to establish new legislation.”⁴ It is also how, in the Hebrew Republic, “it was not at their own pleasure, but according to a fixed and determinate command of the law, that they were permitted [*licebat*] to plow, to sow, to reap. Likewise, they were not permitted [*licebat*] ... to do absolutely anything, except according to the orders and commandments prescribed in the laws.”⁵ By contrast, Spinoza argues in TTP XX, in a republic that, unlike that of the Hebrews, is for free men, citizens must be “permitted” to speak their minds. In other words, the legislative framework of such a republic does not put restrictions upon what content—judgments, opinions, arguments, and so on—citizens can communicate to each other and to the public authorities, including about religious matters. As Van Velthuysen summarizes Spinoza’s position in his letter to Jacob Ostens, “it is right for the magistrate to permit his citizens to think and speak about religion as their hearts and minds tell them to.”⁶

Occasionally, Spinoza constructs this permission to speak and to think by opposition to a permission to act:

Each person ... surrenders only his right to act according to his own decision, but not his right to reason and judge. So no one can act contrary to the decree of the supreme powers without infringing on their right. But anyone can think, and judge, and consequently also speak, without infringing on their right.⁷

Following this line of argument, a citizen living in a free republic always retains the right to speak his mind, but has relinquished “his right of living according to his own judgment”⁸ when promising to act

¹ On all these rules and principles, see Chapter 4, sect. “The Epistolary Style.”

² TTP XX, Title, G III.239|C II.344.

³ Spinoza’s use of the term *licentia* and its cognates is, I think, relatively consistent within the context of politics and conforms to my analysis. Two remarks are, however, in order. First, some caution toward Curley’s translation should be exercised when reconstructing this lexical field, because he occasionally uses the term “to permit” to translate other notions, such as *concedere* or *patere*. I have modified his translations when I felt it was an issue. Second, it should be noted that Spinoza himself also uses the terms *licentia* and *licere* for other purposes in the exegetical context. For example, regarding the means by which the prophets perceived revelations, i.e., words and images, Spinoza cautions that “we’re not permitted [*licet*] to feign any others” (TTP I, G III.28|C II.92). When discussing prophetic knowledge, he argues that “we are permitted [*nobis ... licet*] to maintain ... without any hesitation” that Isaiah had never thought of *parhelia* when reporting a backward movement of the shadow in Isaiah 38:7–8 (TTP II, G III.36|C II.101). Similarly, even if freedom of the will is clearly implied in Cain’s revelation at Gen 4:6–7, “we are permitted [*nobis ... licitum est*] to think the will is not free, since those words and reasonings were only accommodated to Cain’s power of understanding” (TTP II, G III.43|C II.109). By contrast, he also objects to Maimonides who, according to Spinoza, “presupposes that we’re permitted [*nobis licere*] to explain and twist the words of Scripture according to our preconceived opinions,” arguing that “this license [*licentiam*] is diametrically opposed to the things we’ve demonstrated” (TTP VII, G III.115|C II.190).

⁴ TTP V, G III.74–5|C II.145.

⁵ TTP V, G III.75|C II.146; see also TTP XVII, G III.216|C II.316.

⁶ Van Velthuysen to Ostens, January 24, 1671, Letter 42, G IV.212|C II 379.

⁷ TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

⁸ TTP XX, G III.242|C II.347.

in accordance with the laws of the republic.¹ In sum, “the right of the supreme powers concerning both sacred and secular matters should relate only to actions. For the rest, everyone should be granted the right to think what he wants and to say what he thinks.”²

Some commentators—perhaps most prominently Steven Nadler—have argued that this distinction between speech and action represents Spinoza’s best hope for a globally coherent theory of free speech.³ The distinctions between thought, speech, and action are, however, often so blurred that it seems as if Spinoza introduces them only to problematize them. For example, he deems certain mere thoughts to be condemnable “by the very fact that [one] thinks such a thing,” arguing that their seditious character “isn’t so much because of the judgment and opinion as because of the action such judgments involve.”⁴ Such condemnable beliefs include, among other things, the belief that one need not keep promises or the belief that one can live according to one’s own decision. Or, as another example, while discussing the circumstances under which state control of public discourse may be justified, Spinoza stresses “that majesty can be harmed by words as well as deeds.”⁵ Judging from these passages, Spinoza acknowledges that no clear-cut separation between thought and action exists, as he also acknowledges that speech can be considered a kind of action.⁶ When separating thinking and speaking from acting, both thinking and speaking thus remain on the fence, so to speak: Spinoza’s distinctions seem to be designed to separate not just thought and speech from action, but also what in thought and speech is action from what is not.

Reasoning along similar lines, Michael Rosenthal suggests that, according to Spinoza, “certain kinds of speech ... are intimately tied to actions in ways that other kinds of speech are not.”⁷ Chantal Jaquet has adopted a similar interpretive strategy.⁸ I am not convinced, however, that this is the right way to gauge the difference. Spinoza’s point is not, I think, that some utterances imply action while others do not. His position is better understood in terms of two distinct aspects of speech—namely, communicating a content and performing an action—which both in principle pertain to all utterances but which are emphasized differently depending on context. On this interpretation, the context of the given utterance will then specify whether it should be evaluated in terms of the content it communicates or the action it entails; in terms of what it says or what it does, what it represents or what it causes.⁹ If we interpret Spinoza’s position along these lines, his position is the following. From the perspective of its content or what it represents, an utterance can be considered the expression of a mental judgment that all individuals can, indeed necessarily will, authorize themselves to utter as a matter of inalienable natural right. From the perspective of what it causes or the behavior it entails, that same utterance can, however, also be considered an action with a societal impact which, as such, is subject to state control. Whether some utterance should be evaluated in terms of the content it communicates or in terms of the action it entails depends entirely on its context.

These distinctions can help better explain why and in what sense the permission to speak one’s mind recommended by Spinoza is not unrestricted; why he even cautions that it would be “disastrous to grant it completely.”¹⁰ It must be restricted, not in terms of content (what is said), but in terms of appropriate context (where and when it is said). If utterances are uttered in contexts where they must

1 See TTP XX, G III.242|C II.347: “it’s ... impious to do something from your own decision contrary to the decree of the supreme power to whom you’re a subject. If this were permitted to everyone, it would necessarily lead to the downfall of the state.”

2 TTP XX, G III.247|C II.353.

3 Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, pp. 213–14; Nadler, “Spinoza’s Vision”; Pitts, “Spinoza and Freedom of Expression,” pp. 32–5.

4 TTP XX, G III.242|C II.348.

5 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345–6.

6 See Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, pp. 26–7; Jaquet, *Spinoza à l’œuvre*, pp. 121–8.

7 Rosenthal, “Toleration and the Right to Resist,” p. 115.

8 Jaquet, *Spinoza à l’œuvre*, pp. 124–5.

9 The difference between speech as representation and speech as causation of course resonates strongly with the distinction between the propositional content and the illocutionary force of utterances in contemporary speech act theory. I would, however, resist an accusation of anachronism. The difference can be reconstructed with almost equal ease in terms of a Cartesian distinction between objective and formal reality, as applied to utterances. Spinoza’s immediate intellectual context thus provides him with the conceptual resources to make the relevant distinction.

10 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345.

be evaluated according to the actions they entail, they should not always be permitted. If, by contrast, they are uttered in contexts where they are evaluated exclusively according to the content they communicate, they should always be permitted. An argument along these lines governs Spinoza's reasoning in a central passage of TTP XX that we shall have the opportunity to return to several times:

if someone shows that a law is contrary to sound reason, and therefore thinks it ought to be repealed, if at the same time he submits his opinion to the judgment of the supreme power (to whom alone it belongs to make and repeal laws), and in the meantime does nothing contrary to what that law prescribes, he truly deserves well of the republic, as one of its best citizens. But if he does this to accuse the magistrate of inequity, and make him hateful to the common people, or if he wants to nullify the law, seditiously, against the will of the magistrate, he's just a troublemaker and a rebel.¹

The permission to speak one's mind should be legally restricted to a context of public speech specifically dedicated to that purpose. This context has two basic characteristics. First, within it, citizens submit their opinions but do not act upon them. This implies not only separating utterances from actions but also separating what in utterances entails action from what does not. Within that dedicated context, the emphasis is exclusively on the content of utterances, while action that in other contexts is entailed by those same utterances is bracketed, neutralized, or deferred. Second, it is a sphere of public speech that systematically includes the sovereign power as an interlocutor, explicitly or implicitly. Whatever is said is always and in principle addressed to the sovereign power and subject to its evaluation. Those two characteristics are not unrelated. Citizens who object to a given law will be illegitimately acting like rebels if they vent their grievances only privately to fellow citizens. For, by doing so, they violate the sovereign power's prerogative of public action by encouraging civil disobedience to that law. But those same citizens will be legitimately speaking up if they complain publicly about that same law, thus implicitly or explicitly addressing the sovereign power who alone maintains the authority to act upon the complaint.

Should we then understand Spinoza to argue that only petitions addressed by individual citizens directly to the sovereign power pertain to the context of permitted public speech? Should we imagine each citizen showing up at the government's doorstep with their private grievances and suggestions, simply leaving it to the sovereign power to sort out which ones among them are to the public advantage and which ones are not? Certainly not: Spinoza clearly proscribes a situation where someone uses his individual "right to reason and judge" only with "an intention to introduce something into the republic on the authority of his own decision."² Whenever citizens address the sovereign power publicly, they are understood to do so with the intention to speak on behalf of the collective body of citizens. Some process of deliberation regarding possible universalization is presupposed to precede the submission of a given opinion to sovereign appraisal. It should always and in principle be presented as if it reflects the position of all, and must be evaluated as such.

Does Spinoza then propose that citizens should submit only opinions to the sovereign power that they believe are commonly agreed to by all? I think this is closer to the truth, but in reality he does not think that citizens will ever collectively agree about which laws to suggest or complain about, for "it can't happen that they all think alike and speak with one voice."³ Rather, what he has in mind is something like a sphere of public discourse where citizens collectively address the sovereign power with petitions that emerge organically from agreements and disagreements, conversations, discussions, and disputes taking place among them. Within the dedicated context of public speech, they are thus all to use their "right to reason and judge"⁴ to confront their various opinions in a collective process of public deliberation, all vying for the ear of the sovereign power. Later, we shall have the opportunity to explore in more detail one possible principle that will eventually allow a determinate collective opinion

¹ TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.347.

² TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.347.

³ TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.346.

⁴ TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.346.

to emerge from such public deliberation, namely a principle of collegiality or majority rule which, according to Spinoza, is also the basis of all democratic processes.¹ Here, we only need to grasp how, within the context of permitted public discourse, citizens are constantly deliberating and agreeing and disagreeing with each other while addressing the sovereign power. Such deliberation and exchange of free judgments among citizens, taking place under the gaze of a sovereign power who permits them to speak their minds, is nothing but the free philosophizing that Spinoza has set out to defend in his treatise. And ideally, all citizens should have equal access to the context of its permitted exercise. It is in this sense that Spinoza—here making the only explicit reference to the “freedom of philosophizing” that we find in chapter XX—maintains that “the best republic concedes to everyone the same freedom to philosophize.”²

Permitted speech and free philosophizing are thus not unrelated. Still, it is important to realize that creating and protecting a designated context for permitted public speech does not in itself constitute the freedom of philosophizing. As Spinoza establishes in TTP XI through the example of the epistolary style of the Apostles, free philosophizing is a collective form of argumentation and reasoning governed by rules of candor, equality, and falsifiability, where interlocutors seek to persuade each other to embrace their respective opinions by appealing to the natural light common to all. None of these components can be secured by legal protection or the absence of legal restrictions. Free philosophizing is governed by a form of authority—the authority to teach and advise—that Spinoza considers an inalienable natural right entirely beyond the grasp of civil law. Whether philosophizing is free or not depends on factors about which laws cannot be made, namely on the way that people use their natural authority to teach and advise—whether they use it to advance the collective freedom of themselves and others by engaging with them candidly and in view of mutual benefit, or whether they use it to confirm their own submission to prejudices or to deceive others into submitting to their own authority, as we shall explore in more detail in Chapter 6. Permitted speech only becomes free philosophizing on condition that people use that permission to speak their minds to advance their collective freedom rather than the contrary. This is why, in a free republic, “anyone can think, and judge, and consequently also speak, without infringing on [the right of the supreme powers], provided just that he only speaks or teaches, and defends his view by reason alone, not with deception, anger, hatred, or an intention to introduce something into the republic on the authority of his own decision.”³ All the provisions or conditions that Spinoza here attaches to the permission to say what one thinks express his worry that a permission to speak one’s mind can be used for purposes that are in fact averse to the freedom of philosophizing and, by the same token, the freedom of the republic, for a republic is only truly free if its citizens use whatever permission to speak they have to speak their minds freely.

We must therefore distinguish carefully between the permission to speak one’s mind and the freedom of philosophizing. Their confusion underlies all associations of Spinoza’s *libertas philosophandi* with contemporary conceptions of “free speech.” Free philosophizing consists in the exchange of brotherly advice based on sound reason, the collective exercise of our natural authority to teach and advise; it does not consist in legally permitting people to say whatever they want. Still, or so Spinoza argues, while a republic obviously cannot allow people to act on their own decision, still permitting them to say what they want facilitates such free philosophizing. Providing a legally protected context for the public exercise of people’s natural authority to teach and advise will “enable them to use their reason freely.”⁴ The freedom of philosophizing and the permission to speak one’s mind are thus not unrelated—the latter facilitates and enables the exercise of the former—but they are certainly not identical.

1 Consider in particular the following passage, where Spinoza explains that “because not all men can equally think the same things, they agreed that the measure which had the most votes would have the force of a decree, but that meanwhile they’d retain the authority to repeal these decrees when they saw better ones” (TTP XX, G III.245 | C II.351). For my discussion of collegiality, see Chapter 7, sect. “Consensus and Collegiality.”

2 TTP XX, G III.243 | C II.348.

3 TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.346–7.

4 TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.346.

As a final remark, we should note the deep consequences this has for the way we should consider the overall structure and organization of Spinoza's treatise. For, on this reading, the central chapter in the TTP that explains what is the freedom of philosophizing is not TTP XX, which is dedicated to the permission to think and speak. It is TTP XI. This is where Spinoza establishes what free philosophizing is, namely the candid exchange of brotherly advice between equals. TTP XX, by contrast, is concerned with the limits of licensed or permitted speech or with where and when free philosophizing should take place, or with how to establish the legally protected context within which free philosophizing should be allowed to flourish.

Violent Rule

One general aim in the TTP is to show that it is in the interest of the state to secure and maintain a legally protected context for the citizens' free philosophizing. Still, the collective body of citizens is not always equally capable of engaging in such philosophizing, or to the same degree. This is why the recommended scope of the permission also does (and indeed should) vary from one kind of republic to another, especially with regard to philosophizing about religion. In the ancient Hebrew Republic where divine government and civil authority merged into one, political laws and religious ceremonies becoming of one piece, the permission to philosophize about religion only extended to the embrace of the one religion of the state: "the Jews believed that the religion God chose for himself required a special worship of God, completely different from that of other regions—indeed that it could not put up with [nec posse pati] the worship of other Gods, which was proper to other regions."¹ This theocratic regime was highly restrictive, regulating every aspect of the citizens' lives by means of laws, doctrines, and ceremonies:

This, then, was the object of the ceremonies: that men should do nothing by their own decision, but everything according to the command of someone else, and that they should confess, both by constantly repeated actions and by meditations, that they were not their own master in anything, but were completely subjected to someone else's control.²

This, however, does not prompt Spinoza to declare the Hebrew Republic intolerant, violent, or repressive. Unlike other radical thinkers, such as Adriaan Koerbagh, Spinoza does not merely denounce Moses as a power-greedy tyrant or a fraudulent religious politician,³ even though later readers, both opponents and followers, often read him in that way.⁴ He does occasionally describe Moses as a "cunning"⁵ ruler who "terrified [the Hebrews] with threats."⁶ But he also casts him in a more complex role, as someone who aimed at bringing salvation to the ignorant, or bringing an unfree people to live freely nonetheless.⁷ On Spinoza's account, confronted with a Hebrew people largely deprived of sound reason, entirely steeped in prejudice and superstition, Moses had to find a way to "bind them more to the worship of God, in accordance with their childish capacities [puerili captu]."⁸ If they were to be oriented toward the "right way of living," he had to do this

not as a philosopher, so that they might eventually live well from freedom of mind, but as a legislator, so that they were constrained to live well by the command of the law. So the

¹ TTP II, G III.39|C II.105; trans. modified. Curley has "could not permit" for nec posse pati.

² TTP V, G III.76|C II.146.

³ See Koerbagh, *A Light Shining*, "On Oracles," pp. 390–5 (section entitled "Moses's fraud was not religious but political"); see also Koerbagh, Bloemhoef, "Sabbath," pp. 577–81, esp. 579: "De rustdag van der Jooden is een insetting van Mosche, de welke de selve met dese insigten heeft ingestelt: eerst om sik self geagt en angenaam te maaken bij dat slaafsche volk." See finally Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 192.

⁴ Perhaps the most striking example is the famous *Traité des trois imposteurs*, or *Esprit de Spinoza* (the first known manuscript version dates from 1678; it was not published until 1719) which takes up the old idea, stemming from the Middle Ages, according to which the three great monotheistic religions were created by three impostors—Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed—for political purposes. The author, or rather authors, defended the thesis by means of passages drawn from contemporary authors such as Gabriel Naudé, Thomas Hobbes, and Spinoza, skillfully edited to accentuate their anti-Christian spirit. On Moses in particular, see Le "Traité des trois imposteurs", chap. III, §10. See also Popkin, "Spinoza and the Three Impostors," esp. pp. 351–3; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 694–700; and the extensive commentary in Françoise Charles-Daubert's critical edition of the text.

⁵ TTP XVII, G III.219–20|C II.319.

⁶ TTP II, G III.41|C II.107.

⁷ See Popkin, "Spinoza and the Three Impostors," p. 352; Van Bunge, *Spinoza Past and Present*, pp. 79–80.

⁸ TTP II, G III.45|C II.112; trans. modified.

principle of living well, or the true life, and the worship and love of God, were to them more bondage than true freedom.¹

Moses was not a philosopher. His greatest virtue as a prophet consisted in practical, general knowledge of government and in knowledge of the special nature of the Hebrew people. Deeply insightful about the mechanisms governing the common religious imagination of the Jews, he thus “perceived the way the people of Israel could best be united in a certain region of the world, and could form a whole society, or set up a state. He also perceived the way that people could best be compelled to obedience.”² He knew the divine law. But this, in itself, was not exceptional. After all, for Spinoza, that law is exceedingly simple: it consists in the practice of charity and justice alone. But Moses’s knowledge of the Jewish people was exceptional: he knew exactly what particular laws—namely, complex religious laws—should be established in order to bring the Jews to live according to the divine law, and to do so voluntarily rather than out of fear:

he took the greatest care that the people should do their duty, not so much from fear, as voluntarily. That’s why Moses, by divine power and command, introduced religion into the republic, so that the people would do their duty not so much from fear as from devotion. He also placed them under obligation with benefits, and in the name of God promised them many things in the future. Moreover, the laws he enacted were not very severe.³

It was thus through his exceptional insight into the common nature of the Hebrews, his knowledge of the workings of their collective imagination, that “Moses had gotten the greatest prior control of the judgment of his people, not by deception, but by a divine virtue.”⁴ And it was exactly because Moses used that special knowledge to instill the simple precepts of divine law in the Jews by means of an extensive and complicated set of rules that “the law of Moses, although not universal, but accommodated for the most part to the mentality and special preservation of one people, can still be called God’s law, or divine law.”⁵

Rather than being simply a violent tyrant or a deceptive political fraud, Moses was an exceptional lawgiver who responded to the needs of a particular people that did not yet philosophize freely but were entirely subjected to their own prejudices and therefore incapable of taking possession of their own free judgment or acquiring any level of rational self-determination: “in order that the people, who were not capable of being their own masters, should hang on the words of its ruler, [Moses] did not concede it to [concessit] these men, accustomed as they were to bondage, to act just as they pleased.”⁶ Deeply steeped in superstition when coming out of bondage to Egypt, a pagan nation, the Hebrews were in no condition to reclaim possession of their own judgment or practice their freedom. When given the opportunity, they immediately returned to superstitious beliefs similar to those of their former masters, the Egyptians, outsourcing their judgment to a new, invented pagan divinity. The narrative of the golden calf in Exodus 32:4 demonstrates the point:

Even though God was revealed to the Israelites, they knew almost nothing about him. They showed this abundantly when, after a few days, they gave to a calf the honor and worship due to God, and believed that the calf was the Gods which had brought them out of Egypt. And certainly it is not credible that uneducated men, accustomed to the superstitions of the Egyptians, and worn out by the most wretched bondage, would have understood anything sensible about God, or that Moses would have taught them anything other than a way of living—and that not as a philosopher, so that they might eventually live well from freedom of

1 TTP II, G III.41|C II.107.

2 TTP IV, G III.64|C II.132; trans. modified.

3 TTP V, G III.75|C II.145–6.

4 TTP XX, G III.239|C II.345.

5 TTP IV, G III.60|C II.129.

6 TTP V, G III.75|C II.146; trans. modified. Curley has “permit” for concessit.

mind, but as a legislator, so that they were constrained to live well by the command of the law.¹

The strictly theocratic regime of the Hebrew Republic did not suppress the freedom of philosophizing because there was not yet any free philosophizing to suppress. When proscribing the practice of any other religion than Judaism within the borders of the republic, Moses was only preventing the people in his care from engaging in the only kind of thinking they, after generations of wretched subjection, were capable of if given permission, namely prejudice and superstition. He did not deprive them of any freedom, but only prevented them from “becom[ing] like the other nations,” i.e., the pagan societies surrounding the Hebrew Republic.² For Spinoza, in sum, the Hebrew Republic was not a free republic and the laws of Moses regulated their lives in every respect. We should, however, not infer from this that the Hebrews were unfree because their lives were regulated by the laws of Moses. It is the other way round. Moses did not provide the Hebrews with any dedicated context for engaging in free philosophizing exactly because—prudently, on Spinoza’s account—he deemed them insufficiently free to make good use of such a permission.

As Jetze Touber has shown how, with this analysis, Spinoza touched upon several intermingled controversies among Dutch and English theologians at the time.³ One such controversy, doctrinal and philological in nature, concerned the degree to which the religious organization of the Jews in the Hebrew Republic was influenced by, or even modeled upon, the pagan societies surrounding them and, in particular, the one from where they came, namely the Egyptian one. The issue was just how many of the religious commands in the Hebrew Republic described in the Old Testament should be considered authentic divine law, how many were accommodations of that law to the culture of a particular historical people, and how many were merely the expression of pagan influences to be entirely done away with in the doctrinal appropriation of the text. Another, closely related, political controversy concerned whether the Hebrew Republic should be seen as a kind of blueprint for the establishment of a state, as orthodox Calvinists attached to the letter of Holy Scripture argued, or whether it should be taken only as a historical narrative, certainly teaching valuable political lessons, but without any necessary or inherent exemplarity, as more historically and philologically oriented theologians tended to think.

Spinoza must, of course, be placed on the philological and historical side of these debates. He considered the Hebrew Republic a historically situated political construction from which important lessons could be learned, but also realized that it was established in accordance with specific historical circumstances and thus not to be emulated.⁴ Moses’s theocratic strategy was adapted to the particular circumstances of the Hebrew people. Enforcing religious uniformity in the way Moses did—and as Spinoza’s contemporary orthodox Calvinists wanted to do in the Dutch Republic—was not for Spinoza an appropriate way to create peace and security in a society in an advanced state of education and development such as his contemporary “flourishing republic” whose citizens had already tasted “the fruits of ... freedom.”⁵ On Spinoza’s view, the benefits of a public sphere where citizens can openly express their opinions, including about religion, are directly proportional to the level of actual freedom those citizens have achieved. The Hebrew Republic included no such public sphere because Moses correctly deemed that it would do more harm than good to freedom, given the wretched state of the people. If, however, freedom begins to emerge in a republic, i.e., if pockets of free philosophizing begin

1 TTP II, G III.40–1|C II.106–7. For more on this particular episode, see also TTP VI, G III.83|C II.159; TTP XII, G III.161|C II.251; TTP XVII, G III.218|C II.318.

2 TTP II, G III.40|C II.106: “because the Israelites had worshipped the calf, they had become like the other nations.”

3 Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology*, pp. 124–76.

4 See Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, pp. 132–4. As I understand them, it also in this sense that both Michael Rosenthal and Susan James analyze Spinoza’s use of the Hebrew Republic as a model or “exemplar”: not as an example to emulate but as a biblical commonplace from which we can learn essential lessons about human nature. See Rosenthal, “Why Spinoza Chose the Hebrews,” pp. 231–40; James, *Spinoza*, pp. 261–89, esp. 265. For further discussion, see also Beiner, *Civil Religion*, pp. 121–46, esp. 125; and below, in the conclusion of Chapter 11.

5 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.350–1; trans. modified. Curley has “fruits of liberty” for *fructus libertatis*, presumably to conform to the standard translation of this fixed expression in republican discourse (out of Livy’s *History of Rome*). But it tends to obscure the direct connection to the *libertas iudicandi* mentioned a few lines earlier and to which it directly refers, translated by Curley as “freedom of judgment.”

to form, they must be accommodated by the state, not suppressed. Indeed, the state does not have much of a choice. For once people have begun to take possession of their own power of judgment and engage in free philosophizing, they cannot really be deprived of that authority, but will resist it fiercely: “The more the authorities try to take away this freedom of speech, the more stubbornly men will resist,” especially those “whom a good education, integrity of character, and virtue have made more free.”¹ This is why, once a people has begun to come out of bondage, progress toward freedom becomes irreversible. Or more precisely, it becomes reversible only by means of violence because the process cannot be effectively stopped or reversed by means of legislation.

We thus here, finally, hit upon Spinoza’s conception of “violent rule.” This amounts exactly to a situation where the public authorities try to suppress a freedom of philosophizing already achieved by the people. A violent ruler—as opposed to a moderate one—is not defined by the number of corporeal punishments he metes out, but by the degree to which he seeks to criminalize opinions and induce fear of persecution in matters of conscience, and thus to control what people think.² Spinoza repeats it again and again: “rule over minds is considered violent”;³ “that government which makes it a crime to hold opinions—which each person has a right to hold, a right no one can surrender—is the most violent of all”;⁴ “a government which denies everyone the freedom to say and teach what he thinks will be most violent”;⁵ “the less we grant men this freedom of judgment, the more we depart from the most natural condition, and the more violent the government.”⁶

On a first analysis, such violence does not infringe upon any given right since the right of the sovereign power is determined exactly by what it is in its power to do, and nothing else. Spinoza acknowledges that “by right [the rulers] can consider as enemies anyone who doesn’t think absolutely as they do in every matter and rule with the utmost violence.”⁷ Yet, that right is relative to their actual possession of sovereign power, or to their capacity to actually enforce it and to the people’s actual submission. And Spinoza states as a matter of fact, “human nature does not allow itself to be compelled in everything. As the tragic poet, Seneca, says, no one has sustained a violent rule for long.”⁸ Spinoza does, however, reach this conclusion not only by way of experience, but also through a more principled consideration of human nature. Violent rule involves a kind of performative contradiction, or logical inconsistency, because it aims at controlling human beings by depriving them exactly of that in virtue of which they are human, namely the use of their natural light. For, “if someone ... does not know anything by the natural light, ... he is devoid of human feeling, and almost a beast.”⁹ Rulers who attempt to curb the free judgment of their subjects by violence are thus literally attempting to “turn men from rational beings into beasts, since they completely prevent everyone from freely using his judgment and from distinguishing the true from the false, and seem deliberately designed to put out the light of the intellect entirely.”¹⁰ A perfectly implemented violent rule thus implies the dissolution of human society.

To the extent, however, that human beings are not beasts and thus to some degree—no matter how minimally—have taken possession of their own free judgment, they will necessarily exercise that judgment even if the sovereign attempts to put physical constraints on its exercise. Certainly, Spinoza argues, “if it were as easy to command men’s minds as it is their tongues, every ruler would govern in safety and no rule would be violent. Everyone would live according to the mentality of the rulers.”¹¹ But any such attempt at commanding people’s minds through commanding their tongues, i.e., any

1 TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

2 Moreau, Spinoza. *L’expérience et l’éternité*, pp. 373–4.

3 TTP XX, G III.239|C II.344.

4 TTP XVIII, G III.225|C II.327.

5 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345–6.

6 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351.

7 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345.

8 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144; see also TTP XVI, G III.194|C II.288. For discussion of Spinoza’s use of this quotation, see Sharp, “Violentia.”

9 TTP V, G III.78|C II.149.

10 TTP Preface, G III.8|C II.70.

11 TTP XX, G III.239|C II.344.

attempt at changing people's judgments by physically constraining their expression, will never produce the intended alignment between the ruler's will, public discourse, and the citizens' private thoughts. Instead, it will be experienced by citizens as a double violence: as a physical violence perpetrated on their bodies which are constrained in their expressions,¹ but also, and importantly, as a kind of metaphysical violence perpetrated on the relation between the body and the mind, because such measures run counter to a correlation between (mental) judgments and their (corporeal) expression that, as we have seen, form an integral part of human nature.

Consequently, people will necessarily perceive any attempt at depriving them of their freedom of judgment or of their means to express it as unbearable, as repugnant to their very nature as human beings. For this reason alone, in a human society, a violent ruler will necessarily face resistance, for "no one can so deprive himself of his power to defend himself that he ceases to be a man."² Absolutely speaking, then, rulers can maintain neither the power nor the right to rule violently, because violence necessarily produces effects of resistance which will undermine the very power by which they rule: "because they can't do these things without great danger to the whole state, we can also deny that they have the absolute power to do such things."³ This also illuminates why "the end of the republic ... is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata."⁴ When writing this, Spinoza is not so much proclaiming his moral indignation as stating a philosophical principle: it simply cannot consistently be the aim of any state to engage in violent suppression of people's freedom of judgment. Like suicide in individuals, such self-harming violence must stem from some alienation of the state from itself.⁵

Conclusion

We can now conclude this investigation into Spinoza's general theory of authority, permission, and freedom. We can isolate two distinct, general contexts in Spinoza's general theory of authority: one theological and the other political.

In the theological context, Spinoza is first of all concerned with prophetic and Scriptural authority which is inseparable from questions regarding the truthful mediation or transmission of God's word in the form of law (as opposed to the unmediated transmission through reason of God's word in the form of natural necessity, or natural "laws" in the figurative sense). The words of both the prophets and Scripture have authority to the exact extent that they are perceived to be authentic, or to the extent that they are perceived to genuinely transmit the word of God. Scriptural authority prolongs prophetic authority. From one to the other, however, the question of authentication undergoes a displacement from being about the signs that authenticate prophecy to being about the interpretation of prophecies that are already considered sufficiently authenticated by signs. In this context Spinoza moreover operates with two notions of abusive authority, namely divine and priestly authority. They are associated with both inauthenticity (false prophesy and false exegesis) and the usurpation of political power by priests (sedition).

In the political context, Spinoza is concerned with public and private authority, and with how they relate. Public authority emanates from the sovereign power (*summa potestas*). It is concerned only with external speech and action. It refers to the way that the collective power of all citizens—the power of the multitude (*potentia multitudinis*) following the expression of the TP—is structured and

1 See Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, p. 28.

2 TTP Preface, G III.12 | C II.74. See also TTP XVII, G III.201 | C II.296: "No one will ever be able to transfer to another his power, or consequently, his right, in such a way that he ceases to be a man"; and TP VII.25, G III.319 | C II.557: "men endowed with reason never give up their right so much that they cease to be men and may be considered as no more than cattle."

3 TTP XX, G III.240 | C II.345.

4 TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.349.

5 See E4p20s, G II.224 | C I.557: "No one, I say, avoids food or kills himself from the necessity of his own nature. Those who do such things are compelled by external causes, which can happen in many ways."

redirected throughout the state by means of civil law.¹ By contrast, freedom of conscience, or private authority, is an inviolable natural right that transcends civil law. It belongs to all human beings qua human beings, as an essential feature. It is, however, only inviolable in the logical sense that the very notion of a human being whose freedom of conscience or private authority has been denied involves a kind of contradiction. For Spinoza, the free conscience or private authority of human beings cannot be violated, not because no means to do so exist, but because deploying those means deprives them of their very humanity.

Finally, and most importantly, Spinoza operates with a notion of authority to teach and advise that he associates with free philosophizing. From the political viewpoint, this authority is necessarily exercised externally in relation to other people. In this respect, it differs from private authority which is individual and concerns only the internal relation people entertain with their own conscience. The authority to teach and advise is an authority necessarily exercised in public. And yet, it is not an extension of public authority because it does not fall under the control of the sovereign power. It is thus best understood as a private authority exercised in public. The historical situation of the apostolic teachings illustrates this point. By contrast to Moses and the Hebrew kings and prophets, the Apostles taught and advised at a time and under political circumstances in which their (Christian) teachings did not correspond to those of the (Roman) sovereign powers. Their teachings were expressly designed to transcend the laws of particular nations, for they “were called to preach to absolutely everyone and to convert everyone to religion.”² Moreover, they did not ask for authorization to teach from the sovereign powers, but authorized themselves: Paul authorized himself to “advise whomever and whenever he want[ed].”³

This conception of a specific “authority to teach and advise” forms the background for the distinction Spinoza makes between a permission to say what one thinks and the freedom of philosophizing. Free philosophizing is an inalienable natural right to teach and advise that all human beings as such will necessarily claim to the extent that they can.⁴ Attempting to deny them that authority is what Spinoza describes as “violent rule.” Such a regime will necessarily encounter resistance because it seeks to deprive citizens of something that, in fact, is not really in their power to relinquish. By contrast, moderate rulers will accommodate free philosophizing by creating a legally protected but also clearly delimited context wherein citizens are permitted to exercise their natural authority to teach and advise. Such rulers will not seek to violate any natural right by clamping down on free philosophizing. Prudently, however, they will still regulate the context of its exercise and not permit citizens to engage in it anywhere or at any time. In this way, when Spinoza argues that a free republic grants a permission to think and to say what one thinks, it means that the public authorities in such a republic enable free philosophizing by ensuring and securing the existence of an extended context for its public exercise.

It is, however, one thing to be granted a permission to philosophize freely and quite another to have the ability to employ that permission to philosophize freely. It is not a given that a people, if given permission to philosophize freely, will in fact engage in the candid exchange of friendly advice based

¹ TP VII.31, C III.232|G II.563. This is perhaps the context in which the best argument can be made in favor of a systematic distinction between potestas and potentia in Spinoza’s political philosophy. For some general remarks on these notions, see above in “A Note on Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations.”

² TTP XI, G III.154|C II.244; see also 2 Timothy 1:11, as quoted at TTP XI, G III.156|C II.246: “For this [Gospel] I have been appointed a preacher and an Apostle and a teacher of the nations” and TTP V, G III.72|C II.142: “after the Gospel began to be preached also to other nations, who were bound by the legislation of another republic, the Apostles set aside ceremonies”; TTP XII, G III.163|C II.253: “before the coming of Christ the prophets were accustomed to preach religion as the law of their Country and by the power of the covenant entered into in the time of Moses; but after the coming of Christ the Apostles preached the same [religion] to everyone as a universal law, solely by the power of the passion of Christ.”

³ TTP XI, G III.156|C II.246.

⁴ Spinoza’s argument offers a striking (but doubtless coincidental) parallel to a similar right defended in the twelfth century by John of Salisbury: “Therefore, man is to be free and it is always permitted to a free man to speak to persons about restraining their vices. Thus, there is even a legal right according to which it is permitted to express the truth in speech ... it is not necessary to obtain confirmed permission for such remarks which serve the public utility and which are acceptable to your will” (John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, xxv, p. 180). To the extent that it serves the public interest, speaking the truth is an inalienable right that all people have and it must for that reason be permitted. The right pertains even to slaves to the extent that they speak truthfully. John argues the point mostly on the basis of examples drawn from experience, seeing a universal permission to give counsel as necessary for maintaining the harmony and well-being of the body politic (Nederman, *Worlds of Difference*, pp. 41–5).

on sound reason which defines free philosophizing. Such a people may very well consist of individuals who have not taken sufficient possession of their own free judgment to be able to engage in such exchanges. A people can thus be permitted to philosophize freely without actually being able to, with potentially very harmful consequences. For Spinoza, the story of the golden calf in the Exodus is, essentially, a story about what happens when unfree people—i.e., people who have not yet taken possession of their own free judgment—are given permission to think and express whatever they think: they will almost immediately subject themselves to a new and foreign authority.

Conversely, people who do have the ability to philosophize freely will do so even if they live in a republic where the public authorities do their best to prevent them from it. Indeed, as Spinoza writes in Annotation XXXIII: “No matter what state a man is in, he can be free. For certainly a man is free just insofar as he is led by reason.”¹ In fact, if people have the ability to do so, it is even impossible for them not to philosophize freely, even if a legally protected context for doing so is absent. For, by nature, people necessarily judge for themselves to the extent that they can and also express that judgment. They will, whenever the slightest opportunity arises, exercise their natural authority to teach and advise. This is why it is impossible for a free person not to resist a violent ruler. To illustrate the point, Spinoza takes up an episode from his favorite history book, Quintus Curtius’s *Historiae Alexandri magni*, which for him illustrates how the “freedom of citizens ... holds in check the leaders of a human state”:

When Alexander had to fight Darius a second time, and he heard Parmenio’s counsel, he didn’t reproach Parmenio, who had given the counsel, but Polypercon, who was taking [Parmenio’s] side. As Curtius says (IV, xiii), he didn’t dare to reprimand Parmenio again, when he had recently criticized him more sharply than he wished, and he could not suppress the freedom of the Macedonians—which, as we’ve said, he was very afraid of—not until after he’d increased the number of soldiers who had formerly been captives far beyond the number of Macedonian soldiers. Then, he was able to indulge his weak character, long restrained by the freedom of the best citizens.²

We shall, in Chapter 7, have occasion to study in more detail the central role that this figure of the “best citizen” occupies in Spinoza’s political philosophy and in his conception of a public sphere of free philosophizing.³ In Chapter 6, we shall, however, first turn to the various ways that such a sphere can be misconstrued, and how the authority to teach and advise can be subject to abuse.

¹ TTP VI, Annotation XXXIII, G III.263|C II.289.

² TTP XVII, G III.213|C II.311–12. I omit a couple of references to Curtius inserted by Curley in brackets.

³ For the second appearance of the “best citizen,” see TTP XX, G III.241|C II.347. See also Chapter 7, sect. “Public Consultation and Political Resistance.”

Prejudice, Deception, Flattery

Unfree Philosophizing

Spinoza understandably thinks that his own philosophy is the true one: “I do not presume that I have discovered the best philosophy; but I know that I understand the true one.”¹ He also thinks that only true philosophy, i.e., his own, can lead to freedom in the sense of true self-knowledge and self-determination, or to true understanding of “the mind’s power over the affects and its freedom.”² By positioning himself in this way, Spinoza is perhaps, as Filippo Mignini has observed, “beyond toleration” when it comes to views diverging from his own.³ However, when recommending that the state should grant a legal permission for citizens to engage in free philosophizing, he clearly does not want to suggest that this permission should extend only to true philosophizing, so that, for example, it would then be fine to prevent a Maimonidean from arguing in favor of an *intellectus agens* because the divine intellect is in fact a mode and not an attribute, or to ban a Cartesian from teaching dualism because only Spinozist monism is true. One could hardly imagine harsher philosophical censorship. The philosophizing the freedom of which Spinoza sets out to defend need not be true.

It does, however, need to be truthful. Interlocutors who engage in it must be sincere and say to each other what they in fact have on their minds. Spinoza speaks of this quality in terms of “honesty,” “trust,” “good faith” (*fides*),⁴ or, less frequently, “simplicity and veracity” (*simplicitas & veracitas*).⁵ Still, truthfulness is not always just a question of sincerity, of people openly saying what they in fact think. It is also a question of them being truly in possession of their own judgment, so that the things they assert or deny are in fact their own judgments, as opposed to simply repeating those of others. As we shall see, Spinoza formulates this quality in terms of being able “to examine with an unprejudiced and free spirit” (*integro et libero animo examinare*)⁶ or of having “integrity of character” (*morum integritas*).⁷ Philosophizing lacking honesty or integrity is not free.

This chapter is dedicated to the various forms such “unfree philosophizing” takes, i.e., to all the different ways that what one says can be out of tune with what one thinks; to all the ways that we can misuse our natural authority to teach and advise to prevent ourselves or others from exercising free

1 Spinoza to Burgh, late 1675 or early 1676, G IV.320|C II.475.

2 E5p42s, G II.308|C I.616.

3 Mignini, “Spinoza: altro l’idea di tolleranza.” See also Lagrée, “Theologie et tolerance,” p. 15; Antognazza, “Truth and Toleration,” p. 39.

4 The term *fides* is highly ambiguous because it sometimes signifies “trust” and sometimes “faith.” The relevant sense here is the first. In the TTP, Curley renders it by “good faith” or “trust”; in the Ethics by “honesty” (see the Glossaries at C II.662 and C I.678). In the systematic context of the Ethics, “honesty” in the sense of *fides* is not to be confused with “honorability” (*honestas*) which is a quality very close to “nobility” (*generositas*), associated with friendship, sociability, and concern for others (for “nobility,” see E3p59s, G II.188|C I.529; for “honorability,” see E4p37s1, G II.236|C I.565–6 and E4app15, G II.270|C I.589; see also Chapter 4, sect. “Brotherly Advice and Free Philosophizing”). Honesty (*fides*) and honorability (*honestas*) are, however, both essential social qualities of the man of reason: “men who are governed by reason ... are just, honest, and honorable [justos, fidos atque honestos]” (E4p18s, G II.223|C I.556). It is one point where, globally, Curley’s translations make it a little difficult to systematically compare the Ethics with the TTP. In the TTP, Curley often translates *honestas* as “honest” and instead associates “honorability” with *decorum* (for the former translation, see TTP XIV, G III.173|C II.264; TTP XIV, G III.176|C II.267; TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.268; TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349; for the latter, see TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.68; TTP Annotation XXXIV, G III.264|C II.292). On one occasion, however, the superlative *honestissimum* is given as “quite honorable” (TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349). Moreover, at TTP XVII, G III.216|C II.316, Curley gives *laetitiae actus honesti, & convivii* as “honorable acts of joy and feasts.” I have chosen to change Curley’s translation whenever necessary, so that *honestas* is everywhere given as “honorability” or “honorable.”

5 See TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191; trans. modified. Curley has “honesty of heart” for *veracitas*. This nonclassical term occurs only twice in the TTP, in contiguous passages. It is, I think, better rendered more literally as “veracity” because “honesty” tends to invite confusion with *honestas* or with *fides* (see note 4). The term *veracitas* never occurs in the Ethics. It occurs in the CM II, chap. 9, G I.267|C I.332 (*veracitas Dei*, here rendered by Curley as “God’s veracity”); the notion is current in Cartesian milieu, see e.g. Clauberg, *Logica vetus et nova*, IV, chap. 10, §89, p. 408). Both occurrences in the TTP are associated with the term *simplicitas* which should be understood not as simplemindedness, but as straightforwardness or directness, as opposed to duplicity.

6 TTP Preface, G III.9|C II.72.

7 See esp. TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349, with its key passage about “those whom a good education, integrity of character [*morum integritas*], and virtue have made more free.” Spinoza also sometimes uses the term *probitas* to describe a similar quality. See TTP II, G III.35|C II.100, where he mentions “matters which concern integrity and morals [res ... quae probitatem, & bonos mores spectant]”; and TTP XVIII, G III.225|C II.328, where he speaks of “men distinguished for their integrity, famous for their virtue [*viros probitate insignes, & virtute claros*].”

judgment. I shall first consider the ways in which human beings can be estranged from their own minds in such a way that they speak opinions that are not really their own. These are submissive uses of our natural authority to teach and advise where we do not exercise our freedom of judgment but on the contrary reinforce our own subjection to the judgment of others. It is a topic Spinoza discusses in terms of “prejudice” and “preoccupation” of the mind. Next, I turn to those situations where we do not say what we think, or dissimulate, lie, or deceive. These are abusive uses of our natural authority to teach and advise that take away the freedom of others by depriving them of the possibility of judging not of what we say but of what we mean by what we say. Spinoza discusses these abusive forms of unfree philosophizing under two headings, each of which will be discussed separately, namely “deception with evil intent” and “flattery.”

Prejudice and the Preoccupied Mind

Let me first turn to the submissive uses of our natural authority to teach and advise, instances of unfree philosophizing where we do not speak up for ourselves but channel the opinions of others. Such submission of our free judgment to a foreign authority must be distinguished from the suppression of speech through violence and coercion which are direct means for someone to “have another in his power.”¹ The submission of our natural authority to teach and advise, by contrast, is always indirect and works through self-subjection. People whose free judgment has been subjected in this way are still “philosophizing” nominally, i.e., speaking in their own name, only they are doing it un-freely; that is to say, in name only. In the preface to the TTP, Spinoza explains how “the greatest secret of monarchic rule and its main interest, is to keep men deceived, and to cloak in the specious name of religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for their salvation.”² Perhaps alluding to Étienne de La Boétie’s famous conception of voluntary servitude,³ he is here accounting for how, through deception, citizens in a monarchy can be tricked into supporting a political regime that is not heeding their best interest. In such cases, citizens do not determine themselves to act, but are manipulated into acting in view of the king’s advantage alone. The example illustrates a general principle that also applies to public speech: people are not speaking freely when defending interests that are foreign to their own. In such cases, people may think that they speak for themselves, but in fact do nothing but speak for someone else as if they were speaking for themselves. Instead of authorizing themselves to speak their minds, as is their inalienable natural right, people can thus be manipulated into authorizing other minds to speak through theirs. Spinoza’s main example is the religious manipulation of people by priests who bring them to embrace conceptions and practices serving only the church’s interest. Writing to Oldenburg in 1665, he thus gives as one of the reasons for undertaking the writing of the TTP that he wishes to defend “the freedom of philosophizing and saying what we think, which I want to defend in every way” because “the preachers suppress it as much as they can with their excessive authority and aggressiveness.”⁴

To understand more precisely how such alienation from one’s own mind comes about, we must return to the somewhat porous boundaries between the inward domain of thought and the external domain of expression. As we have already seen,⁵ for Spinoza, the former will always and necessarily spill into the latter because it is in the nature of human beings to speak their minds. It is, however, not always the case that people can call the mind they speak their own or that the judgment they express is in fact attributable to them alone. Certainly, Spinoza stresses that “no one can surrender his freedom of

1 For Spinoza’s formal analysis of such more direct forms of subjection, see TP II.10, G III.280|C II.512: “One person has another in his power [a] if he has him tied up, or [b] if he has taken away his arms and means of defending himself or escaping, or [c] if he has instilled fear in him, or [d] if he has so bound him to himself by a benefit that the other person would rather conduct himself according to his benefactor’s wishes than according to his own, and wants to live according to his benefactor’s opinion, not according to his own. Someone who has another person in his power in the first or second of these ways possesses only his body, not his mind. If he has him in his power in the third or fourth way, then he has made both his mind and his body subject to his control—but only while the fear or hope lasts. When either of these is taken away, the other person remains his own master.”

2 TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.68; trans. modified. Curley has “for their own survival” for pro salute.

3 The connection between this passage and La Boétie was first suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *L’Anti-Oedipe*, pp. 36–7.

4 Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. October 1, 1665, G IV.166|C II.15.

5 See the conclusion of Chapter 4.

judging and thinking what he wishes, but everyone, by the greatest natural right, is master of his own thoughts.”¹ And yet the mind is not quite the impenetrable fortress that such remarks suggest, for “though hearts cannot be commanded in the same way tongues can, still hearts are to some extent under the control of the supreme power, which can bring it about in many ways that most men believe, love, and hate whatever it wants them to.”² He may thus well declare that “it is impossible to take away from people the freedom to say what they think,”³ but he is much less convinced about the impossibility of taking away their freedom to actually think what they say:

I confess that someone can get prior control of another person’s judgment [judicium ... praeoccupari posse] in many ways, some of them almost incredible. So though that person is not directly under the command of another [sub alterius imperio directe non sit], it can still depend so much on what he says that we can rightly say that to that extent it is subject to his control.⁴

While it is impossible to control people’s judgment directly, by coercion and command, it is not at all impossible to do so indirectly, by manipulation and self-interested counsel. In fact, pre-empting Jonas Proast’s famous objections to John Locke’s conception of freedom of conscience in the Letter Concerning Toleration, Spinoza shows in the TTP just how many “incredible ways” exist to control what people think and what they say, not by denying them their natural right to authorize themselves to speak their minds, but by manipulating the self doing the authorizing.⁵

Spinoza most often expresses such surreptitious takeover of people’s minds by alien intentions by means of the two verbs occupare (“to fill” or “to occupy”) and praeoccupare (“to predispose” or “to preoccupy”). To give just a few examples, he deplores how “most of the time the mind is so filled [occupatur] with greed, love of esteem, envy, anger, etc., that there’s no room for reason.”⁶ He declares that “only those who have a free and minimally preoccupied judgment [judicium ... minime praeoccupatum] can cultivate [the arts and sciences] successfully.”⁷ He cautions that, generally, “unless they take great precautions against their preconceived opinions [praeconceptis opinionibus], [men] will, for the most part, be so preoccupied [praeoccupabuntur] by them that they will perceive something completely different from what they see or hear.”⁸

Both notions—occupare and praeoccupare—appear very frequently in association with the perhaps most important concept in Spinoza’s general critique of religion, namely “prejudice” (prejudicium): “it is completely contrary to the general freedom to fill the free judgment of each man with prejudices [praejudiciis occupant]”;⁹ “those who make reason and philosophy the handmaid of theology are bound to admit as divine teachings the prejudices of the common people [praejudicia vulgi] of long ago, to fill their minds with those prejudices [iisdem mentem occupare], and to blind themselves.”¹⁰ In exegesis, he emphasizes that, by refraining from making any assumptions about the authors of Scripture or about their intentions, we can “determine our thoughts in such a way that we’re not predisposed by any prejudice [ut nullo praejudicio praeoccupemur].”¹¹ Remarkably, in this context, Spinoza even explains in comparable terms how a prejudice of reason can distort our understanding of Scripture: “Indeed, we must take great care, so long as we are looking for the meaning of Scripture,

1 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345.

2 TTP XVII, G III.202|C II.298.

3 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

4 TTP XX, G III.239|C III.344; trans. modified.

5 See Moreau, Spinoza. *L’expérience et l’éternité*, p. 373: Halper, “Spinoza on the Political Value,” pp. 168–9.

6 TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.286.

7 TTP XX, G III.243|C II.249; trans. modified; Curley has “unprejudiced” for minime praeoccupatum. Although I acknowledge that mine makes for a slightly awkward translation and that Curley’s rendering catches the spirit of Spinoza’s statement, I still think we need to heed the scalar implications of minime and the literal connotations of praeoccupare.

8 TTP VI, G III.192|C II.164; trans. modified. For an example, see E2p49s, G II.204|C I.486: “They look on ideas ... as mute pictures on a panel, and preoccupied with this prejudice [praejudicio praeoccupati], do not see that an idea, insofar as it is an idea, involves an affirmation or negation.”

9 TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.68–9.

10 TTP XV, G II.180|C II.271.

11 TTP VII, G III.110|C II.183.

not to be predisposed by our own reasoning [ne ratiocinio nostro ... praeoccupemur], insofar as it is founded on the principles of natural knowledge (not to mention now our prejudices [praejudicia]).”¹ Such prejudice of reason is closely related to the mistaken view, associated with Maimonides, that “we must interpret Scripture so as to make it consistent with reason”² or what he describes as “being insane with reason” (cum ratione insanire).³

The construction of prejudice can be further explained indirectly via Spinoza’s more systematic understanding of reason. According to the Ethics, reason is adequate knowledge through common notions. It consists in “the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things.”⁴ As we shall have occasion to see later,⁵ for a notion to be “common” means several things for Spinoza, but the relevant meaning here is the traditionally Stoic understanding of common notions, or *koinai ennoiai*, which Spinoza appropriates for his own purposes in E2p38c when arguing that some “some notions [are] common to all men.”⁶ This corollary is inferred from E2p38, where Spinoza is concerned with such properties that are common to all things. He then argues that, since these universal properties can only be perceived adequately, and they must be perceived by all, they must be adequately perceived by all. Contrary to the Stoics (or the early modern understanding of them, at any rate), this does not, however, prompt Spinoza to also adopt the converse notion that perceived common agreement about some notion necessarily indicates its adequacy. For, as Spinoza goes on to explain in E2p40s1, some notions that appear to be commonly accepted are in fact “ill-founded.”⁷ Among those ill-founded notions we find, for example, those he calls “universal” or “transcendental.” These are general concepts that are frequently taken to be rationally justified but which are in fact inadequate notions grounded in the imagination.⁸ In the Ethics, Spinoza provides only a few examples, including the “common image of man” as “an animal capable of laughter, or a featherless biped, or a rational animal.”⁹ But the CM, a text globally intended to elucidate “common philosophy” rather than Spinoza’s own,¹⁰ describes a wealth of such shared but mistaken “common” conceptions among philosophers and theologians, speaking, for example, about “the way in which men commonly understand [God’s existence],”¹¹ “what the philosophers commonly understand by life”;¹² “the term personality, which the theologians commonly use”;¹³ or “the common definition of creation,”¹⁴ etc.

Epistemic communities also form around such common but inadequate knowledge, giving rise to what both the Ethics and the TTP describe as “common prejudices.”¹⁵ Such common prejudices get in the way of adequate reasoning and the true common notions, which is why Spinoza stresses that some rational notions are “only clearly perceived by those who have no prejudices.”¹⁶ Part of his reasoning

1 TTP VII, G III.100|C II.173.

2 TTP VI, G III.114|C II.188.

3 TTP XV, G III.180|C II.272.

4 E2p40s2, G II.122|C I.478.

5 See Chapter 9, sect. “Doctrines of Universal Faith.”

6 E2p38c, G II.119|C I.474.

7 E2p40s1, G II.120|C I.476.

8 E2p40s1, G II.120–1|C I.476–7.

9 E2p40s1, G II.121|C I.477.

10 According to the brief preface to CM, this appendix was to account for “the chief things that commonly occur in the general part of metaphysics” and for the nature of “common logic and philosophy” (G I.233|C I.299).

11 CM II, Introduction, G I.249|C I.315.

12 CM II, vi, G I.259|C I.325.

13 CM II, viii, G I.264|C I.329.

14 CM II, x, G I.334|C I.334.

15 E1app, G II.79–80|C I.441–2; TTP I, G III.118|C II.192.

16 E1p40s, G II.120|C I.476. We here encounter a textual difficulty, perhaps already sensed by Spinoza’s first readers. It has deep implications for the interpretation of common notions. In E2p40s1, Spinoza mentions “some axioms, or notions [axiomatum sive notionum] which it would be helpful to explain by this method of ours.” The Nagelate Schriften, presumably by Pierre Balling, adds a “common,” speaking of “some axioms, or common notions [Kundigheden, of gemene stellingen].” However, among these “axioms or notions” Spinoza distinguishes between those “which are common, which are clear and distinct only to those who have no prejudices, and finally, which are ill-founded.” The formulation, of course, could suggest that the two last types of notions are in fact not common in any sense. For Gueroult, this disqualifies Balling’s addition (Spinoza: l’âme, p. 262 n. 79). I agree with Akkerman that Balling is not necessarily mistaken (Akkerman, Studies in the Posthumous Works, pp. 152–3). I think the difficulty can best be resolved by maintaining that, when listing notions “which are common” in the second passage, Spinoza refers to common notions only in the traditional, subjective sense of generally accepted notions described in E2p38c, not in his own objective sense of notions of common properties of things, as developed in E2p37 to E2p40. The alternative would

derives from Descartes. For Descartes, if common notions can be denied by no one of sound reason, this only holds to the extent that people are not blinded by prejudice and pay proper attention, something that they may very well never have occasion to do.¹ Similarly, Spinoza considers prejudice as something that prevents the actualization of rational knowledge that we would otherwise all acquire by the natural light common to all.² This is why, in E1app, Spinoza stresses the importance of rooting out “common prejudices” in order to attain “the true knowledge of things.”³ This is also why he sees it as crucial for any understanding of his own philosophy—mostly conceived as knowledge through reason and common notions—that we “remove prejudices that could prevent [the] demonstrations from being perceived” given that “many prejudices ... could, and can, be a great obstacle to men’s understanding the connection of things in the way I have explained it.”⁴ Indeed, shedding oneself of common prejudices is a principal requirement for being admitted to the circle of philosophical readers for whom Spinoza intended the TTP and, I think, his work more generally.⁵

In the Ethics as well as the TTP, Spinoza describes in considerable detail the genesis of common prejudices, theological in particular. Most often, prejudices come about not by misconception, but by terminological displacement. They “consist in our not rightly applying names to things.”⁶ When prejudices gain foothold, they do so more in the structures of language than in those of the understanding. For example, if people affirm that they have no adequate idea of God, it is only because “they have joined the name God to the images of things which they are used to seeing.”⁷ People would realize that they already possess the idea of God if only they knew how to identify the reference of the term “God” correctly.⁸ But prejudices—in this case, prejudice regarding the nature of God—seep into the ordinary use of words and take residence in the imaginary structures of language, giving rise to a kind of parallel reality where things are turned upside down, or where people “interpret nature in amazing ways, as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are.”⁹ And when prejudices in this way become entrenched in the imagination, and especially in the religious imagination, they give rise to “superstition,” a “deeply rooted” and “longstanding” form of prejudice.¹⁰

Why and how religious prejudice turn into deep-rooted superstition is often a question of how it becomes institutionalized in creeds, ceremonies, and churches, and how it is exploited politically. Given Spinoza’s intellectual context and historical circumstances, one would here expect him to proceed to now press his case against orthodox Calvinism. In this instance, however, he prudently prefers to criticize by proxy and illustrate his point through risk-free examples.

This is arguably why Muslim culture becomes his primary example of how religious prejudice can be used for purposes of political oppression: “the Turks have succeeded so well at this that they consider it a sacrilege even to debate religion; they fill everyone’s judgment with so many prejudices

imply that some clear and distinct notions of reason would not qualify as common notions in any sense, at odds with Spinoza’s definition of reason as “hav[ing] common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things” (E2p40s2, G II.122|C I.478). To forestall further objection, in that last definition, Spinoza must mean adequate ideas of common properties of things, i.e., common notions in the objective sense, because adequate ideas of singular properties would be ideas of intuition, not reason.

1 See Descartes, *Principia*, I, §49–50, AT VIII.23–4|AT IX(2).46; *Regulae*, XII, AT X.419; *Notae in programma*, AT VIII 359–60; *Principia philosophiae*, I, art. 13, AT VIII. 9|AT IX(2).30–1; *Principia philosophiae*, I, art. 49, AT VIII 22–3|AT IX.2 46; *Secundae responsiones*, AT VII 162–3|AT IX.126. See also Descartes to Mersenne, October 16, 1639, AT II.597–8; *Conversations avec Burman*, April 16, 1648, AT V.146; and the *Epistola ad P. Dinet*, AT VII.580. Some of these texts are part of Descartes’s critique of Lord Herbert’s Stoic epistemology of common notions and universal consent in *De veritate* of 1624. Lord Herbert claimed that what was true was “whatever is universally asserted as the truth, for what is universal cannot occur without the influence of the Universal Providence which disposes the movement of events” (Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, trans. Carré, p. 77; see also Lagrée, *Le Salut du laïc*, pp. 32–6; Hutton, *British Philosophy*, p. 110).

2 On the natural light and its potential nature, see Chapter 3, sect. “The Natural Light.”

3 E1app, G II.79–80|C I.441–2.

4 E1app, G II.77|C I.439.

5 See TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.75. See also Letter 70 (November 14, 1675) from Schuller which describes Leibniz as a man “free of the common prejudices of theology” as a reason for letting him see a copy of the Ethics (G IV.302|C II.462).

6 E2p47s, G II.128|C I.483.

7 E2p47s, G II.128|C I.482–3.

8 E2p47s, G II.128|C I.482: “God’s infinite essence and his eternity are known to all.”

9 TTP Preface, G III.5|C II.66. See also E1app, where Spinoza argues that finalist conceptions of nature have “shown only that nature and the Gods are as mad as men” (G II.79|C I.441).

10 See E1app, G II.79|C I.441: “Thus this prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds [in mentibus egit radices]”; “they did not on that account give up their longstanding prejudice [inveterata praejudicia].”

[*praejudiciis occupant*] that they leave no room in the mind for sound reason, nor even for doubting.”¹ Similar views transpire in the TP: “No state has stood so long without notable change as that of the Turks Still, if slavery, barbarism, and being without protection are to be called peace, nothing is more wretched for men than peace.”² The characterizations are entirely focused on what Spinoza—as so many Europeans did in his time—saw as a kind of religious authoritarianism present at the very foundation of Islam (not to mention the systematic identification of the entire Islamic world with the Turkish Empire). As Spinoza writes to Van Velthuysen, “Mohammed ... completely takes away that freedom which the universal religion concedes (by the natural light and by what the prophets revealed), which I have shown by all means ought to be granted.”³ These passages must be read according to the exemplary function they fulfill. I do not think that Spinoza chose the “Turks” because he, in his historical circumstances, felt particularly concerned with or threatened by alleged Muslim authoritarianism. After all, in the Dutch Republic, Muslims were largely limited to a few merchants in Amsterdam, none of them resident, and these were not perceived as a threat and generally tolerated.⁴ And internationally, the Netherlands were not in conflict with the Muslim world; they had established treaties early in the seventeenth century with Morocco, the Ottoman Empire, and Algiers.⁵ One can allow oneself to think that Spinoza’s harsh characterizations of the “Turks” simply reflect popular conceptions—indeed, common prejudices—that were particularly useful for illustrating his point, and nothing else. He may very well have embraced those prejudices himself but they are of no deeper relevance for the philosophical point he uses them to illustrate.

Another example of political exploitation of religious prejudice rolled out by Spinoza is Roman Catholicism. Indeed, as he writes to the young convert Albert Burgh about the “Roman Church,” he does “not believe there is any order more suitable for deceiving ordinary people and controlling men’s minds, unless it would be the order of the Mahomedan Church, which surpasses it by far.”⁶ As with his remarks on the Turks, the exchange with Burgh should, however, not lead us to overstate Spinoza’s concern with the Church of Rome. Whenever he addresses it, his characterizations are picked out from a common protestant stock of objections. They mostly serve as illustration for some abstract position or as a foil for orthodox Calvinism. For example, he sees the Roman Pontiff as a “paradigm for all” when it comes to priestly usurpation of authority from the sovereign powers.⁷

Integrity and Rational Self-Contentment

Spinoza’s general analysis of prejudice and preoccupation of the mind prolongs a modern tradition that reaches back at least to Francis Bacon’s critique of the idols of the mind. It also owes a great debt to Descartes and to the Cartesian philosophical program. The critique of religion associated with it is clearly indebted to the Galilean and, later, Cartesian defense of the freedom of philosophizing and the separation of natural philosophy from theology.⁸

Spinoza, however, distinguishes himself within this broad field of philosophers by partly separating the question of prejudice from that of falsity and ignorance. What worries him about prejudices is less that they prevent us from making true judgments than that they prevent whatever judgments we do make, be they true or false, from being our own. Prejudices are, as we shall see, an obstacle to the “integrity” (*integritas*) of our free judgment. And because of that, they not only stand in the way of gaining true

1 TTP Preface, G III.7 | C II.68.

2 See also TP VI.4, G III.298 | C II.533.

3 Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671, Letter 43, G IV.226 | C II.389.

4 See e.g. Stoupe, *La Religion des Hollandois*, pp. 32–3: “il n’y a des Turcs & des Persans qu’en Amsterdam ou peut estre encore dans quelque autre Port de Mer.” See also Jean Brun’s 1675 rebuttal of Stoupe, *La Veritable religion de Hollandois*, pp. 122–3: “On auroit bien de la peine d’en voir ailleurs qu’à Amsterdam, & quelque fois à Leyden & à Rotterdam. C’est là où j’ai veu quelquesfois des gens, avec leur longues vestes & couverts d’un Turban, à la Turquesque ... On les laisse aller & venir faire leur negoce librement sans les demander de quelle Religion ils sont.” For commentary, see Kaplan, *Muslims in the Dutch Golden Age*, pp. 6–8.

5 Kaplan, *Muslims in the Dutch Golden Age*, pp. 14–19.

6 Spinoza to Burgh, end of 1675 or early 1676, Letter 76, G III.323 | C II.477.

7 TTP XIX, G III.235 | C II.340–1; see also TTP VII, G III.105 | C II.179; TTP VII, G III.116 | C II.190; TTP VII, G III.117 | C II.191; TTP XIX, G III.237 | C II.342.

8 See Chapter 2, sect. “Academic Freedom.”

knowledge, but also, and I think more importantly, prevent us from ever experiencing ourselves as the adequate cause of our own knowledge. They stand in the way of rational self-knowledge and, consequently, also of the joyful affect called “self-contentment” (*acquiescentia in se ipso*) that Spinoza associates it with. This is of importance in our context because that particular affect, i.e., the rational self-contentment that comes from contemplating ourselves gaining knowledge, constitutes the basic affective engine of free philosophizing. It is what drives it forward, and the reason why people engage in it. And this is why free philosophizing requires the absence of prejudice: it is required in order to experience the self-contentment or intellectual joy associated with the use of our own natural authority to teach and advise and with taking possession of our own free judgment.

Let me spell out in more detail how to reach that conclusion. *Acquiescentia in se ipso*, i.e., self-contentment, is a central affect in Spinoza’s Ethics.¹ When rational, it is even the “highest good” or “really the highest thing we can hope for.”² It is defined as “a joy born of the fact that man considers himself and his power of acting.”³ Self-contentment as such is not always rationally justified. For example, pride is “self-contentment, insofar as it so affects a man that he thinks more highly of himself than is just.”⁴ It is “empty” when “encouraged only by the opinion of the multitude.”⁵ Still, Spinoza explains, “self-contentment can arise from reason, and only that self-contentment which does arise from reason is the greatest there can be.”⁶ For, “when the mind considers itself and its power of acting, it rejoices.”⁷ The mind’s power of acting consists in entertaining adequate ideas.⁸ Rational self-contentment is thus the joy the mind experiences when contemplating its own rational activity, when perceiving itself as the adequate cause of its own knowledge.⁹

This reflexive joy is, eventually, what motivates all free and rational inquiry and, by extension, also collective free philosophizing. If free philosophizing did not bring us the joy of rational self-contentment, we would have no incentive to engage in it. When people sincerely submit their doctrines to the discretionary judgment of others, as when Paul asks the Corinthians to judge for themselves of what he says, they do so because they seek and desire the truth. But they seek and desire the truth because, when they learn to recognize it for themselves, it brings them joy. This joy, however, is not as such grounded in knowledge of things, but reflectively in self-knowledge. It ensues not from knowing as such, but specifically from knowing that I myself have produced whatever I know, by the power of my own mind. Rational self-contentment is thus not directly tied to epistemic competence or science, i.e., to what I do and do not know about the world around me. It is tied to self-knowledge, to adequate self-assessment, and to the acknowledgment of myself as the cause of knowledge. In short, it is the joy we all experience when perceiving the exercise of our own free judgment.

In the TTP, rational self-contentment, *acquiescentia in se ipso*, is not explicitly thematized, or at least not in the same terms. Spinoza fleetingly engages with a closely related notion in TTP VII when explaining how “true salvation and blessedness consists in true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*], and we truly find peace only in those things we understand very clearly.”¹⁰ He occasionally addresses the empty kind of self-contentment called *gloria*, or love of esteem, which

1 On the translation of the expression, see the preliminary Note on Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations.

2 E4p58s, G II.253|C I.578; E4p52s, G II.249|C I.575.

3 E4p52&d, C II.248|C I.575; see also E3p30s, G II.163|C I.510, and E3def.aff.25, G II.196|C I.536.

4 E3def.aff.28, C II.197|C I.537; trans. modified.

5 E4p58, G II.253|C I.578.

6 E4p53, G II.249|C I.575; trans. modified.

7 E3p53, G II.181|C I.524.

8 See E4p1, G II.140|C I.493: “Our mind does certain things [acts] ... insofar as it has adequate ideas”; E4p52d, G II.248|C I.575: “Man’s true power of acting, or virtue, is reason itself”; E5p20s, G II.293|C I.605–6: “the power of the mind is defined by knowledge alone.”

9 Rutherford, “Salvation,” p. 447.

10 TTP VII, G III.111|C II.185.

excludes reason¹ and makes us disdain equals² and desire all goods for ourselves alone.³ But the notion of *acquiescentia in se ipso* is absent.

Spinoza does, however, have much to say about the value of adequate self-knowledge under another heading, namely “integrity of character” (*morum integritas*).⁴ By “integrity,” he understands a capacity and willingness “to examine with an unprejudiced and free spirit [*integro et libero animo examinare*].”⁵ This frequently repeated adverbial expression—*integro animo*—has a two-sidedness to it which is characteristic of the way that Spinoza generally proceeds in the TTP, often playing on two separate interpretations—a theological one and a philosophical one—of the same terms and expressions. For we have already come upon this same expression in a different, theological context, in relation to Spinoza’s understanding of what it means to “embrace” religious command, namely “to obey God wholeheartedly [*Deo integro animo obedire*].”⁶ What we now learn is that there exists a rational equivalent to such wholehearted embrace of religion, namely the wholehearted embrace of adequate knowledge—an embrace of reason that, however, is not associated with obedience, but with freedom. Hence, Spinoza argues, “if nature had so constituted men that they desired nothing except what true reason teaches them to desire, ... they would do voluntarily, wholeheartedly, and in a manner worthy of a free man [*integro & liberali animo*], what is really useful.”⁷ This distinction between wholehearted obedience and wholehearted freedom applies not only to the inner life of individuals, but also to the intersubjective dynamic that governs collectives, indeed whole societies. Hence, “that person is most under another’s control [*sub alterius imperio*] who resolves wholeheartedly [*integro animo*] to obey all the other’s commands.”⁸ By contrast, in a free republic, “each person, when he wishes, can be free, i.e., live wholeheartedly [*integro animo*] according to the guidance of reason.”⁹

It is exactly such wholehearted embrace of reason that the conception of rational self-contentment in the Ethics is also designed to account for. For it explains why, once we have experienced the joy of rational self-contentment associated with the free exercise of our judgment, when we have experienced ourselves as the source of our own knowledge, we will necessarily come to love such knowledge, and pursue it. Thus motivated by “the love of freedom alone,” each person “will strive, as far as he can, to come to know the virtues and their causes, and to fill his mind with the gladness which arises from the true knowledge of them.”¹⁰ The upshot of this vision—closely related to the conception of “intellectual love of God” in the Ethics—is strikingly optimistic: Spinoza argues that once we, individually or collectively, have experienced the joy of our own intellects working unimpeded by prejudice, we will necessarily desire to do this more and consequently embrace the pursuit of adequate knowledge wholeheartedly, *integro animo*.

This is why free philosophizing requires integrity before it requires science, self-knowledge before it requires knowledge, adequate self-assessment before it requires epistemic competence. One can be eminently learned and yet lack the integrity required for free philosophizing. A good example can be found in Spinoza’s correspondence. In 1675, Nicolas Steno, a former friend who converted to Catholicism, published an open letter, entitled *Ad novæ philosophiæ, reformatorem de vera philosophia epistola*, where he exhorted Spinoza to return to the church and abandon his philosophical

1 TTP XVI, G III.193 | C II.286.

2 TTP XVII, G III.203 | C II.299.

3 TTP III, G III.44 | C II.111.

4 TTP XX, G III.244 | C II.349.

5 TTP Preface, G III.9 | C II.72.

6 TTP Preface, G III.10 | C II.73. For similar use of the same expression, see also TTP Preface, G III.10 | C II.73: “embrace the Word of God ... with their whole heart [*Verbum Dei ... integro animo amplecterentur*]”; TTP XIV, G III.178 | C II.270: “to accept them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart [*integro animo*], so that he may obey God wholeheartedly [*pleno animo*].” For discussion, see Chapter 4, sect. “The Epistolary Style.”

7 TTP V, G III.73 | C II.144; see also TTP IV, G III.62 | C III.130: “to love [God] from true freedom and with a whole and constant heart [*ex vera libertate, & animo integro & constante amare*].”

8 TTP XVII, G III.202 | C II.297.

9 TTP XVI, G III.195 | C II.289.

10 E5p10s, G II.289 | C I.603.

presumptuousness.¹ He accused Spinoza of being “ignorant of the certainty of faith surpassing all demonstrations” and claimed that “the perfect Christian is the perfect philosopher.”² Now, Steno was hardly a common ignorant. Perhaps the greatest anatomist of the seventeenth century, he is also often considered the father of modern geology.³ Still, in his open letter he proved to be like those, as Spinoza put it in the TTP, “who would philosophize more freely if they weren’t prevented by this one thought: that reason ought to be the handmaid of theology.”⁴ Spinoza never replied to Steno’s letter.⁵ In March 1677, however, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz—who otherwise was no supporter of Spinozism⁶—took it upon himself to reply on Spinoza’s behalf: “I have the impression that Mr. Steno presupposes too many things to persuade a man who believed in so few Spinoza would doubtless reply that those are all very pretty promises but that he has committed himself to believe nothing without proof.”⁷ Leibniz was, I think, perfectly correct. From a Spinozist perspective, Steno had renounced his own freedom of judgment by arguing from tradition, no longer speaking his own mind but only the prejudices of the Church of Rome with which his mind was now preoccupied, defending his voluntary submission to the ecclesiastical tradition as if he was fighting for his freedom.⁸

Deception with Evil Intent I: The Context

Following the example of Paul, when engaging in free philosophizing, one must speak one’s mind candidly, appeal to one’s interlocutors’ natural reason through argument and reasoning, and leave the evaluation of what one says open to their free judgment. Now, it is important to realize what freedom is at stake here. Whether philosophizing qualifies as free is not—or not in the first place—concerned with the freedom of the individuals who philosophize. It is concerned with the freedom of the discursive interaction between individuals, or with the freedom of the philosophizing itself. It emerges in the discursive interstices between interlocutors. What does belong to all individuals, however, and what makes free philosophizing possible is the authority to teach and advise that all human beings have by inalienable natural right in virtue of their common humanity. A violent ruler can attempt to suppress this common right, but it cannot be suppressed effectively in a state without renouncing the very purpose of statehood itself, i.e., the protection and security of human beings. As we already saw above, Spinoza’s best example of a political regime attempting to do it nonetheless is that of the “Turks” and the “wretched” peace they maintain by subjecting people to slavery and barbarism while denying them protection.⁹ Violent rule is, however, not necessarily the greatest threat to free philosophizing. That threat comes from within philosophizing itself in the form of abusive uses of the natural authority to teach and advise, i.e., when it is used for purposes of deception. For, as Grotius already argued, deceiving is equivalent to depriving one’s interlocutors of their free judgment.¹⁰ Or, as Spinoza puts it in the TP, “a person’s faculty of judging can ... be subject to someone else’s control insofar as the other person can deceive him. From this it follows that a mind is completely its own master just to the extent that it can use reason rightly.”¹¹ This explains why “good faith [is] especially

1 Steno [to Spinoza], *Ad novæ philosophiæ, reformatorem de vera philosophia epistola* (1675), Letter 67bis, G IV.292–8|C II.451–4. On Steno’s letter to Spinoza and their personal relationship, see Klever, “Steno’s Statements”; Totaro, “Ho certi amici in Ollandia.”

2 Steno [to Spinoza], 1675, G IV.298|C II.458.

3 Steno converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism in 1666 and was later ordained Bishop. In 1677, he was appointed papal envoy to northern Europe. He was beatified by John Paul II in 1988. For a recent volume on Steno’s position in the philosophical landscape of his time, see Andraut and Lærke, *Steno and the Philosophers*.

4 TTP Preface, G III.14|C II.75.

5 Indications in Steno’s letter suggest that it was already written around September/October 1671, at which time he may or may not have sent it to Spinoza, who may or may not have read it.

6 For a full study, see Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*; for a short survey, see Lærke, *Leibniz and Spinoza*.

7 Leibniz, *Autre lettre au mesme* [Zwei Fingierte Briefe], March 1677 (?), *Sämtliche Schriften*, VI, iv, p. 2198.

8 As Leibniz wrote again later in his 1710 *Essais de théodicée*, Steno “was a great anatomist, and very well versed in the natural sciences, but unfortunately he abandoned research and turned from a great physician into a mediocre theologian” (Leibniz, *Essais de Théodicée*, §100, in *Philosophischen Schriften*, VI, p. 158).

9 TP VI.4, G III.298|C II.533.

10 See Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III, chap. 1, p. 1212, where he argues that a “Lye strictly taken, as it is naturally unlawful” implies the violation of “real Right” of the interlocutor which is “the Freedom of him, with whom we discourse to judge of the Conceptions of our Minds, a Freedom which, as by a silent Contract, we are supposed to owe him.”

11 TP II.11, G III.280|C II.512.

necessary in a republic”¹ and why Spinoza even declares that his entire concern in the TTP is “to establish the state so that there’s no place for fraud [fraudi].”² Without good faith and the absence of deception, free philosophizing begins to collapse from within.

And yet, Spinoza explains in a later note to the TTP, the Annotation XXXII, it is not all deceptive discourse that is equally reproachable:

In the civil state, where there is a common law which decides what is good and what is evil, we rightly distinguish between a good and an evil intent to deceive [recte dolus distinguitur in bonum et malum].³

The distinction stems from Roman law which opposes *dolus malus* (or sometimes just *dolus*) to both *bona fides*, good faith, and to *dolus bonus*, understood as mere shrewdness.⁴ The notion of *dolus malus* occurs in one other place in Spinoza’s works, namely in E4p72, according to which “a free man always acts honestly [cum fide], and not deceptively [dolo malo].”⁵ Annotation XXXII provides no explanation of how Spinoza draws the distinction between deception with good and evil intent, but some contextual signposting can help better situate his distinction within the general field of early modern political theory.

The first name that comes to mind is Machiavelli, an author Spinoza knew well.⁶ Chapter XVIII of *The Prince* famously offers an argument in favor of the permissibility of certain forms of dissimulation and deceit for political purposes, stressing the usefulness for the Prince “to be a great pretender and dissembler” because “men are so simple and so obedient to present necessities that he who deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived.”⁷ When seen in that context, Spinoza’s use of the distinctly legal opposition between *dolus malus* and *dolus bonus* comes through as anti-Machiavellian, as expressing juridical, if not moral, opposition to pragmatically justified political deceit. This is consistent with other texts. In the TP, Spinoza acknowledges that “political practitioners [politici] have written much more successfully about political affairs than philosophers have,” but also notes that “political practitioners [politici] are thought more inclined to set traps for men than to look after their interests. They’re judged to be shrewd rather than wise.”⁸ He also argues against the justifications of political lying given by radical Machiavellians. In 1671, writing to Jarig Jelles, he thus relates the contents of a rare book he recently read, entitled *Homo politicus*, published in 1665 under the pseudonym *Pacificus à Lapide* (in fact a certain Philipp Andreas Oldenburger).⁹ Spinoza deems it “the most harmful book men can devise,” because the author, as Spinoza summarizes it, defends the view that “you should not be true to anyone, except insofar as it’s to your advantage. For the rest, he puts the highest value on dissembling, promising without performing, lying, false oaths, and many other things.”¹⁰ And indeed, Oldenburger does argue that “nothing harms the political man quite as much as an open mind and an overly truthful tongue” and stresses how, *sine dolo malo*, the “political

1 TTP XX, G III.243|C II.34; see also TTP XX, G III.239|C II.344.

2 TTP XVII, G III.203|C II.299.

3 TTP XVI, G III.263|C II.285.

4 See Garrett, “Promising Ideas,” pp. 204–5; Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*, p. 374 (entry “*Bona fide*”) and pp. 444–5 (entries “*Dolus*,” “*Dolus bonus*,” “*Dolus malus*”).

5 See Garret, “Promising Ideas,” pp. 204–5.

6 See esp. TP V.7, G III.296–7|C II.531. Spinoza had a copy of the 1555 edition of Machiavelli’s *Opere* in his library (Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-folio no. 14, pp. 144–5). For commentary on Spinoza and Machiavelli, see Morfino, *Le Temps et l’Occasion; Del Lucchese, Conflict, Power, and Multitude*.

7 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 70.

8 TP I.2, G III.273–4|C II.504.

9 See *Pacificus à Lapide* [pseud. for Oldenburger], *Homo politicus* (for explicit references to Machiavelli’s *Prince*, see 6 and 10). The book is also mentioned in a letter from Schuller to Leibniz, March 29, 1677 (Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften*, I, ii, p. 53; see also Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle*, pp. 284–6). Schuller requests information regarding a list of “very rare” books written down by Spinoza. It does not, however, figure in the inventory of Spinoza’s library established after his death (see Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*). *Homo politicus* has often been erroneously attributed to Christoph Rapp (1566–1619). For the correct attribution of the work, see the Data page from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France at https://data.bnf.fr/fr/15113503/philipp_andreas_oldenburger. Oldenburger (1617–78) also published, in 1669, another work under that same pseudonym, *Dominus de Monzambano illustratus et restrictus ... opera et studio Pacifici a Lapide Germano-Constantiensis*, dedicated to Samuel von Pufendorf’s 1667 *De statu imperii germanici*, also published under a pseudonym, *S. de Monzambano Veronensis*.

10 Spinoza to Jelles, February 17, 1671, G IV.228–9|C II.390–1.

man” should engage in dissimulation and deceit. He references both Plato’s view that “lying and deceit should be abundantly used by rulers in order to command subjects more easily” and a “certain Frenchman”—Jean de Silhon—who, in his 1633 *Le Ministre d’etat*, warns against “making of whoever comes first one’s confessor or judge,” noting “that God certainly recommended silence to keep the dangerous truths unsaid as much as he granted us the gift of speech to announce the necessary ones.”¹ Appalled by the *Homo politicus*, indeed by the whole French tradition of reason of state it relies upon,² Spinoza “thought about writing a little book indirectly against it,” but of course never did.³

A second possible context for Annotation XXXII would be the work of a more moderate politique, but arguably still within the Machiavellian sphere, or Tacitist at any rate, namely Justus Lipsius’s *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex* of 1589.⁴ Here, Lipsius describes what he calls “a certain honest and laudable deceit.”⁵ In the name of pragmatism in a world of “crafty and malicious persons,”⁶ he argues in favor of using political deception, including dissimulation,⁷ when required for the security of the commonwealth, arguing that it is “sometimes lawful, and reasonable to trace out indirect courses in this tempestuous sea of the affairs of the world: and if we cannot arrive at the haven by the right course, that we turn sail, and alter our navigation to attain thereunto.”⁸ Lipsius thus distinguishes three kinds of political fraud (*dolus*)—light, middle, and heavy—recommending liberal use of the first, toleration of the second, and condemnation of the third.⁹ Spinoza, of course, makes no such recommendations. Still, in the *TdIE*, he states as a “rule of living” that one must “speak according to the capacities of ordinary people” in order to ascertain that they “give a favorable hearing to the truth.”¹⁰ These recommendations have famously been depicted by Leo Strauss as a strategy of useful political dissimulation in the name of self-protection.¹¹ To support the interpretation, Strauss leans heavily on a passage in *TTP IV*, according to which “the more we have observed and the better we know the customs and character of men ... the more cautiously we will be able to live among them and the better we will be able to accommodate our actions and lives to their mentality, as much as reason allows.”¹² Spinoza, however, most often presents accommodation as a strategy deployed for the sake of others, as a kind of well-intended and nobler form of manipulation of the *vulgus*. For example, in *TTP V* he argues that “if someone wants to teach a doctrine to a whole nation ... and wants everyone to understand him in every respect, he is bound ... for the most part to accommodate his arguments and the definitions of his teaching to the capacities of ordinary people.”¹³ On this reading, Spinoza’s theory of accommodation is in some respects comparable to Lipsius’s “light fraud,” or to *dolus bonus*, although Spinoza himself does not envisage these strategies in terms of deception at all, but rather in terms of benevolent manipulation of people’s imagination.

1 *Pacificus à Lapide* [pseud. for Oldenburger], *Homo Politicus*, 4. Oldenburger is quoting from Silhon’s 1633 (1634 on the title page) *Le Ministre d’etat*, book II, dissertation 14, p. 337. In neighboring passages, however, Richelieu’s secretary also explains that while “he who does not know how to dissimulate does not know how to govern,” still “dissimulation tending to the ruin of our fellowmen, or serving as cover for injustice, must be avoided by honest people” (pp. 337–8). These distinctions are perhaps reflected in Oldenburger’s use of the expression *sine dolo malo*.

2 On this tradition, see the classic volume by Farr Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*.

3 Spinoza to Jelles, February 17, 1671, G IV.228|C II.391. One could perhaps consider the TP a possible candidate for the projected “little book,” but Spinoza only began writing that treatise some four years later.

4 The suggestion should be taken with a grain of salt: Spinoza did not own and does not reference Lipsius’s *Politica*. Most commentators associate Lipsius’s treatment of deceit with Tacitus and Machiavelli (see e.g. Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 40, 46–8; Van Gelderen, “The Machiavellian Moment,” pp. 209–10). For a dissenting view, Gary Remer holds that Lipsius’s conception of political deceit and prudence is more informed by Cicero than by Tacitus (Remer, “Justus Lipsius”).

5 Lipsius, *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, chap. 13, p. 114; I update the spelling of this sixteenth-century translation for readability.

6 Lipsius, *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, chap. 13, p. 113.

7 Lipsius, *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, chap. 14, p. 117: “Dissimulation is that which discovers the countenance, and covereth the mind. It is so necessary for a Prince that the old Emperor said, that he knew not well how to bear rule that knew not how to dissemble.”

8 Lipsius, *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, chap. 14, p. 114. Note throughout the chapter the multiple allusions to Machiavelli’s fox, e.g., p. 113: “O pure men, nay rather poor children ... Do you say ... that the Prince may not sometimes have to deal with a fox, play the fox, especially if the good and public profit, which are always conjoined to the benefit, and profit of the Prince do require it? Surely you are deceived.”

9 Lipsius, *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, chap. 14, p. 115.

10 *TdIE*, §17, G II.9|C I.12; trans. modified.

11 Strauss, “How to Study,” pp. 106–9. For discussion of Strauss’s thesis, see Chapter 1, sect. “Elements of Method.”

12 *TTP IV*, G III.62|C II.130.

13 *TTP V*, GP III.77|C II.148; trans. modified.

Next, as a third possible context, in *De jure belli ac pacis*, part III, chap. 1, Hugo Grotius discusses “whether Deceit be one of those Things that are always Evil”¹ and allows “that it may sometimes happen, that they may be good” and that “Cicero overstretched the point when he said, Disguise and Dissimulation should be banished out of human life.”² He distinguishes different forms of deception—concealment and outright lying, qualified, respectively, as negative and positive acts of fraud—and explains how, in some circumstances, negative and even positive fraud can be justified.³ This is the case, for example, when a physician comforts a sick patient with false reassurances of recovery or an army chief gives false prospects of easy victory in order to encourage his troops.⁴ He moreover gives a distinctly jurisprudential turn to this reasoning by inserting it into a legal logic of presumptions. For, in such cases, Grotius claims, “there is no ... unjust Deceit” under the assumption that it is to the advantage of the deceived and that “a Presumption of another’s Will has the same Force as an express Consent.”⁵ Spinoza, of course, makes no use of such legal presumptions. Indeed, Grotius’s jurisprudential approach to justification is somewhat foreign to his method of demonstration. Still, it is possible that, as in Grotius, the consideration of presumed future effects entered into Spinoza’s conception of possible “good” deception.

Finally, Spinoza may have learned from Hobbes’s treatment of command and counsel in the *Leviathan*, chapter XXV. According to Hobbes, the difference between them is that “he that Commandeth, pretendeth thereby his own Benefit,” whereas he who gives counsel “pretendeth onely (whatsoever he intendeth) the good of him, to whom he giveth it.”⁶ Hobbes establishes the distinction exclusively by reference to the consideration of benefit. Whether some prescription counts as command or counsel is entirely predicated on who is—correctly or not—understood to benefit from it: a command benefits the commander; a counsel the counseled.⁷ What interests us here is the definition of counsel. Hobbes lays no explicit conditions on the means of achieving what it aims at. It is the duty of a counselor, says Hobbes, to regard the benefits of the counseled. He does not say that it is the duty of a counselor to be sincere and candid if this proves detrimental to the counseled, nor does he argue that sincerity or candor in delivery is necessary for a piece of advice to be beneficial. Admittedly, he does not explicitly argue that deceit is allowed or recommended either. Still, on his conception, one can easily imagine someone deceiving his friend for the friend’s own benefit, or a royal counselor deceiving his sovereign for the sovereign’s own benefit. In such cases, the quality of deception, good or evil, would then depend not on what the counselor says, but on the intention behind it. Understood in this way, Hobbes’s position is not too far removed from that of a moderate politician such as Lipsius who asserts that “deceit is no deceit, if it be not cunningly handled.”⁸

Deception with Evil Intent II: The Systematic Problem

As we have seen, numerous options in terms of both influences and possible targets exist for contextualizing Spinoza’s critique of deception with evil intent. Regardless of the context in which we understand it, however, it represents a formidable challenge to the freedom of philosophizing. It is not just an intellectual challenge relating or opposing Spinoza to other philosophers, but also a concrete theological and political one, opposing Spinoza to the theologians that he does not hesitate to qualify

1 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III, chap. 1, p. 1222.

2 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III, chap. 1, pp. 1198–9.

3 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III, chap. 1, p. 1202. Grotius declares lying “wicked” only in cases where “the Honour of God, our Charity to our Neighbour, or Reverence to our Superiors, or the Nature of the Thing in Question requires, that we should plainly declare the Truth” (III, chap. 1, p. 1211).

4 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III, chap. 1, p. 1217 (quoting Maximus Tyrius): “the Physician deceives his Patient, the General his Soldiers, and the Pilot his Mariners, and yet no Injury.” Jean LeClerc elaborates in a note: “He maintains, that in this Case it is rather telling a Lie than Lying, and alleges the Example of a Physician who deceives his Patient in order to cure him.”

5 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, III, chap. 1, pp. 1216–17.

6 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXV, p. 398; see also p. 402.

7 Bramhall, and Martinich after him, have held that Hobbes’s conception of “command” is mistaken, on the grounds that a command may very well be issued for the benefit of the person commanded (e.g., the Ten Commandments were issued by God for the benefit of humankind) (Martinich, *The Two Gods*, p. 130). Discussion of these passages in the Hobbes commentary has mostly turned on this point, which is not of our concern here.

8 Lipsius, *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, chap. 14, p. 118.

as “anti-Christ.”¹ For, despite Spinoza’s invectives against the author of *Homo politicus*, the radical Machiavellian politician is clearly not his principal target when he denounces deception with evil intent. It is rather the figure of the deceitful theologian who, similar to the “pseudo-divines who deceived the nations” among the gentiles and the “pseudo-prophets [who] deceived the Jews,”² peddles “his own inventions as the word of God, concerned only to compel others to think as he does, under the pretext of religion.”³ Without him explicitly pointing his finger at them, there can be little doubt that Spinoza had orthodox Calvinist theologians in the Dutch Republic in mind—theologians who “think up new doctrines in religion” and “corrupt Scripture” while invoking their own “divine authority,”⁴ who “propagate the most bitter hatred, which they shield under the false name of religious zeal and passionate devotion,”⁵ and who—most importantly in this context—“completely prevent everyone from freely using his judgment and from distinguishing the true from the false.”⁶

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, deception with evil intent is also a systematic challenge. For, as we shall see, Spinoza’s own understanding of free philosophizing affords him no clear conceptual resources to counter it. A simple legislative solution, one could suggest, would consist in simply correlating the external legal permission to speak one’s mind with those internal conditions of free philosophizing that relate to candor, thus giving citizens the legal permission to engage in philosophizing only if they do so without deceit. After all, Spinoza says in TTP XX that he believes the state should permit everyone “to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks.”⁷ He does not say that the state should also permit all to say what they in reality do not think (i.e., deceive) or not say what they in reality do think (i.e., dissimulate). This strictly juridical solution to the problem of deception is, however, not available. Putting to one side the fact that it makes it very difficult to make good sense of the distinction between deception with good and evil intent, it is rendered impossible by two issues, one *de facto*, the other *de jure*.

First, *de facto*, identifying deception is a problem.⁸ How can we know whether our interlocutors engage in philosophizing in good faith? We do not have access to each other’s minds and, absent the signs characteristic of prophecy, the only reassurance that can be given of an utterance’s truthfulness is in terms of another utterance—e.g., Paul’s reassurance to the Corinthians that he “is trustworthy”—the truthfulness of which is equally subject to evaluation: Paul says that he is trustworthy, which, if truthful, allows the Corinthians to freely judge the truth of what he initially said. But in virtue of what do the Corinthians know that Paul’s proclamation of trustworthiness is, in fact, trustworthy? In fact, they do not know that any more than they know it about what he initially said. In humanist rhetoric, essentially concerned with laying down the conditions of good political and ecclesiastical counsel, such problems had given rise to head-spinning reflections on how, within speech itself, it was possible to persuade an interlocutor of one’s truthfulness and good faith by means other than simple reassurance.⁹ This same problem of *parrhesia* does, however, also arise in Spinoza because, as he puts it, we cannot gain absolute access to the minds of other people.¹⁰ The point is, of course, an element in Spinoza’s argument in favor of freedom of conscience, as a way to reassure us that the mind’s inner life remains under our private authority.¹¹ There is, however, an important respect in which the inaccessibility of thought is not just a cause for celebration but also a motive for regret, because the

1 TTP XIV, G III.176 | C II.267.

2 TTP III, G III.53 | C II.120.

3 TTP VII, G III.97 | C II.170. For the expression *sub specie religionis* (or similar), see also TTP Preface, G III.6–7 | C II.68–9; TTP Preface, C II.75 | C II.14; TTP VII, G III.118 | C II.192.

4 TTP VII, G III.97 | C II.170: “the theologians have mainly been anxious to twist their own inventions and fancies out of the Sacred Texts, to fortify them with divine authority.” See also Chapter 5, sect. “Divine and Priestly.”

5 TTP VII, G III.97 | C II.170.

6 TTP Preface, G III.8 | C II.70.

7 TTP XX, Title, G III.239 | C II.344.

8 For a similar point, see Garber, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” p. 170.

9 A substantial literature exists on the *parrhesiastic* rhetoric of political counsel in the context of Tudor England. See notably Parkin-Speer, “Freedom of Speech”; Colclough, “*Parrhesia*”; Colclough, *Freedom of Speech*; Rose, “*Kingship and Counsel*”; Paul, “*Thomas Elyot on Counsel*”; Paul, *Counsel and Command*.

10 TTP XX, G III.239 | C II.344.

11 See Chapter 5, sect. “*Public and Private*.”

point equally applies in relation to the problem of deception. Consequently, we potentially lose as much freedom from this inaccessibility as we gain from it. For, what people gain in freedom of judgment from the fact that their own thoughts are shielded and hidden from the direct view of others, they also potentially lose exactly because the thoughts of others are equally shielded and hidden from them. The problem is that, when facing the intractable problem of deception, no applicable criterion exists for assessing whether some philosophizing exchange is free or unfree.

Second, *de jure*, the idea of banning deception from the sphere of free philosophizing by means of legislation conflicts with Spinoza's conception of the authority governing it, i.e., the authority to teach and advise. For, as we have seen, the authority to teach and advise is a matter of natural right as determined by natural law.¹ Natural law prescribes only that I, like any other natural thing, strive to persevere, and nothing else.² My natural right extends to everything that the natural law prescribes. Hence, I can, by natural right, do whatever serves my preservation, including deceive others:

Whatever anyone who is considered to be only under the rule of nature judges to be useful for himself—whether under the guidance of sound reason or by the prompting of the affects—he is permitted, by supreme natural right, to want and to take—by force, by deception, by entreaties, or by whatever way is, in the end, easiest.³

For example, if kidnapped by a robber, “it’s certain that if I can free myself from this robber by deceptively promising him whatever he wishes, I’m permitted to do this by natural right, to contract deceptively for whatever he wishes.”⁴ Indeed, “no one can be certain of another’s good faith unless something else is added to the promise. For by natural right each person can act deceptively.”⁵ This is why, “in the state of nature, where everyone is his own judge, and has the supreme right to prescribe and interpret laws for himself, indeed, even to disregard them, as he judges it to be more advantageous for himself, there it cannot be conceived that anyone acts in bad faith”⁶ and that “the right and established practice of nature, under which all are born and for the most part live, prohibits nothing except what no one desires and what no one can do: not disputes, not hatreds, not anger, not deception.”⁷

In other words, when Spinoza declares the authority to teach and advise a natural right, this has both an advantage and a drawback. It makes it impossible to take it away by means other than violence: one cannot legislate against the use of that authority since it does not fall under civil law at all, but under natural right, as determined by natural law alone. However, exactly because it falls under natural law alone, it also lets a permission to deceive in the backdoor since nothing in natural law prevents us from using our authority to teach and advise deceptively in the pursuit of our own advantage. Any attempt to ban deceptive discourse is just as much an act of state violence as an attempt to ban free

1 On Spinoza's conception of natural right and natural law, see Chapter 10, sect. “The Origins of the State: Hobbes and Spinoza.”

2 TTP XVI, G III.189|C II.282; see also E3p6, G II.146|C I.498.

3 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.284.

4 TTP XVI, G III.192|C II.285; see also TP II.8, G III.279|C II.511: “The right and established practice of nature, under which all men are born and for the most part live, prohibits nothing except what no one desires and no one can do; it does not prohibit disputes, or hatreds, or anger, or deceptions, and it is absolutely not averse to anything appetite urges.”

5 TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.308. These passages could seem to contradict what Spinoza has to say about lying in the Ethics. Here, he develops an argument—curiously premonitory of Kant's categorical imperative—according to which a “free man always acts honestly, not deceptively” (E4p72, G II.264|C I.586). He allows no exceptions to this rule—even when there is a question of saving oneself “from the present danger of death by treachery”—on the grounds that “if reason should recommend that, it would recommend it to all men,” so that men would “make agreements, join forces, and have common rights only by deception,” which is “absurd” (E4p72s, G II.264|C I.587; see also Garrett, “A Free Man,” pp. 221–38). This rule, however, applies only to how “a free man, insofar as he is free” would act by his own accord, i.e., insofar as he is rational or has adequate ideas. It does not express what all men—free and rational or not—are permitted to do by natural law. In fact, in the TTP, too, Spinoza argues that a free man guided by reason will necessarily abstain from deception: “If all men could easily be led just by the guidance of reason, and could recognize the supreme utility and necessity of the republic, there would be no one who would not absolutely detest deceptions ... Above all else, they would maintain trust, the chief protection of the republic” (TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.286). In reality, however, “a state whose well-being depends on someone's good faith, and whose affairs can't be properly looked after unless the people who handle them are willing to act in good faith, won't be stable at all” (TP I.6, G III.276|C II.506). To reconcile these passages, we must gauge the difference between whether it is rational to lie, which Spinoza denies in the Ethics, and whether natural right allows it, be it rational or not, which Spinoza affirms in the TTP.

6 TTP XVI, G III.192|C II.285.

7 TTP XVI, G III.191|C II.284.

philosophizing, because both amount to the same kind of violation of the same natural authority grounded in the same natural right.

It is thus far from clear what means are available to Spinoza for excluding deception with evil intent from the public sphere of free philosophizing, for it cannot and should not be prohibited by law. Citizens can be punished for abusing state power to impose their own opinions: “if any citizen has undertaken to carry out any public business solely by his own decision, without the supreme council’s knowledge, he’s violated the right of the supreme power, has committed treason, and is rightly condemned.”¹ But they cannot be legally condemned for deceiving, even deceiving the sovereign power, because such actions of speech do not fall under civil law. Moreover, any attempt at suppressing deception not by law but by violence will end up affecting all the wrong people, namely those who have integrity and who will therefore necessarily resist.² So what is to be done? It is a question to which no easy answer exists, and we shall be centrally concerned with it in Chapter 7. First, however, we need to address a particular form of theological and political deception that Spinoza discusses as the problem of “flattery.”

Flattery

Among the forms of deception with evil intent that Spinoza addresses, flattery occupies a prominent place. He employs two terms (and their cognates) to convey the idea: *adulatio* and *assentatio*. *Adulatio* is the term he adopts in the Ethics. In the TTP, he most often uses *assentatio*.³

In E4p57, flattery (*adulatio*) plays an important role in a reflection on the affect called pride (*superbia*): “The proud man loves the presence of parasites, or flatterers [*adulatorum*], but hates the presence of the noble.”⁴ The demonstration appeals to an earlier definition of pride as “thinking more highly of oneself than is just, out of love for oneself.”⁵ Only a proud person is receptive to flattery. The argument is reminiscent of Cicero, according to whom flattery works only on those who already flatter themselves.⁶ Flattery, however, is not separately thematized in Spinoza’s own geometry of the passions for, as he declares in E4p57d, he “omitted the definitions of [flatterers and parasites] because they are too well known.”⁷

Who is this well-known flatterer Spinoza has in mind? His association of the figure with a “parasite” in E4p57d provides a first set of indications: the parasite is a stock character in Roman comedy, Spinoza’s most immediate source likely being Terence’s *Eunuchus* and the character *Gnatho*, the “flattering parasite” (*parasitus kolax*) of the play.⁸ Spinoza knew Terence’s play from his days in Van den Enden’s Latin school, where he performed in a staging of it in 1658.⁹ He very frequently cites and alludes to the play in the TTP.¹⁰ For example, in TTP XVIII, while explaining how, during the period shortly before Nehemiah’s return, the Jewish high priests tried to gain the people for their cause by means of flattery, Spinoza alludes to *Gnatho*’s motto *Omnia assentari* when arguing that “they gave lip service to

1 TTP XVI, G III.197–8|C II.292.

2 TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

3 Curley translates sometimes by “flattery,” sometimes by “giving lip service,” depending on context.

4 E4p57, G II.251|C II.577.

5 E3def.aff.28, G II.197|C II.537.

6 See Cicero, *De amicitia*, in *Ethical Writings*, pp. 66–7: “it is the case that he is most ready to open his ear to flattery, who flatters himself and finds supreme Edition: current; Page: delight in himself.” See also pp. 62–3: “The greatest blame, however, rests on him who both spurns the truth when it is told him, and is driven by the complacency of friends to self-deception”; and Cicero, *On Duties*, I, 91, p. 36: “we [must] beware of giving ear to flatterers or of allowing ourselves to be fawned upon. It is easy to be fooled in this, for we think that we are the kind of people who ought to be praised.” Pace Eylon and Heyd according to whom, because of the inherently relational nature of flattery, “people cannot flatter themselves” (“Flattery,” p. 688). Eylon and Heyd reference Aristotle, Plato, Aquinas, Shakespeare, Hobbes, Mandeville, and (in a footnote) Spinoza, but—astonishingly—never even mention Cicero, Plutarch, John of Salisbury, or Erasmus. It is not at all clear to me that these modern commentators are describing the same historical concept as I do.

7 E4p57d, G II.251|C II.577.

8 *Gnatho*, in turn, was probably modeled on the character *Strouthias* in Menander’s Greek play *Kolax* (see McC. Brown, “Menander,” pp. 91–107; Konstan, “Friendship, Frankness, and Flattery,” pp. 11–12).

9 Leopold, “Le langage de Spinoza,” p. 28; see also James, “Freedom, Slavery, and the Passions,” p. 230.

10 See Proietti, “Le ‘Philedonius’ de Franciscus van den Enden”; Proietti, *Philedonius*, part II; Akkerman, “La pénurie de mots,” p. 16.

everything [omnia assentabantur], approving what the ordinary people did, even if it was impious, and accommodating Scripture to their worst customs.”¹

The comparison of the flatterer with a parasite is instructive in a more straightforward way as well. A parasite draws nourishment from a host animal to the detriment of the latter, paradigmatically a flea or a tick.² It is neither superior nor subordinated to its host body, but contiguous to it, associated with it and drawing life from it. Host and parasite are independent from each other with regard to their respective aims of self-preservation. The parasitical is thus associated with the diversion or misappropriation of nourishment, life, and power, in a sense that easily carries into the political domain. Terence already draws on these connotations in his literary imagery: Gnatho is obsessed with food and filling his stomach!³ Similarly, in Lucian’s satirical dialogue *De Parasito*, subtitled “a demonstration that sponging is a profession,” parasitical behavior or sponging is defined as “the art of eating and drinking, and of the talk by which these may be secured.”⁴ In Spinoza, the character trait is echoed in the TTP’s description of the greedy, the flatterers, and the weak as people “whose supreme well-being consists in contemplating the money in their coffers and having bloated bellies.”⁵

The historical resonances of Spinoza’s discussion of flattery are, however, far from exhausted by the well-known reference to Terence. This becomes particularly clear when we turn to Spinoza’s treatment of flattering priests. As a political metaphor, the figure of the *parasitus kolax* captures well how Spinoza saw the “collateral” church–state relations favored by the Dutch Calvinists which allowed their “public church” to avoid state control while still benefiting from a privileged position in terms of access to the sovereign’s ear and the state’s coffers. It was a “parasitical” system, one could argue, where the church was like an independent body living off the state. Still, the parasite of Roman satire is a crude opportunist whose shamelessness is easily recognizable,⁶ an “open flatterer” whom “no one who has a moderate share of common sense fails to detect,” according to Cicero.⁷ The flattering priest is a more complex figure. Similar to Cicero’s “wily and covert flatterer” who is “not very easily recognized, since he often assents by opposing, plays the game of disputing in a smooth, caressing way,”⁸ the flattering priest is less of a buffoon, not a mere sponger stuffing his mouth, but someone who puts on a mask like an actor on a stage, and who seeks to gain favor with his interlocutors by speaking to their preferred self-image.⁹ Adding a layer of deception, he may even simulate candor in the same way as those “most pernicious flatterers ... who operate with apparent frankness” also denounced by Erasmus.¹⁰

In the TTP, the flattering priest appears in Spinoza’s analysis of how, after Moses’s death, the high priests in the Hebrew Republic established an illegitimate regime governed by priestly authority.¹¹ At first, “while the high priests [pontifices] were trying to get the rule at the beginning of the restoration,” they gave lip service to everything in order “to get the ordinary people on their side.” Once they had obtained that, however, “they all wanted to be called kings”; they all began “interpreting the laws as

1 TTP XVIII, G III.223–4|C II.324. For Terence, see *Eunuchus*, V.

2 See Welch, “Fleas and Flatterers,” p. 35. Other animal species do, however, sometimes figure in the literature. Saavedra-Fajardo, for example, compares “flatterers and parasites” with worms gnawing in a cedar tree, false silk-worms, and lizards that “change [their] skin every year, [as] does Flattery, as oft, I mean, as the Prince changes his mind” (*The Royal Politician*, Emblem XLVIII, pp. 337–9).

3 McC. Brown, “Menander,” pp. 98–9; Yona, “A Manual for Flatterers,” p. 608. As shown by Ellen Welch, the association of the flatterer and the parasite—including the constant preoccupation with eating—also occupied a central place in the Baroque theater of the mid-seventeenth century (Welch, “Of Flatterers and Fleas,” pp. 31–41, esp. 33).

4 Lucian, *The Parasite*, in *Works*, III, p. 172. I find no direct indication that Spinoza was familiar with this text, but it is not unlikely that he knew it. His library included a copy of Lucian’s *Dialogue of the Dead* which draws upon similar imagery in its description of the Greeks in particular (Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-octavo no. 20, pp. 178–9; for Lucian, see *Works*, I, pp. 107–56).

5 TTP XX, G III.243–4|C II.349.

6 Konstan, *Friendship*, p. 99.

7 Cicero, *De amicitia*, in *Ethical Writings*, III, p. 68.

8 Cicero, *De amicitia*, in *Ethical Writings*, III, p. 68.

9 I borrow the account of the flatterer in theatrical metaphors from Cicero’s *De amicitia*, in *Ethical Writings*, III, p. 67; see also Dox, *The Idea of the Theater*, pp. 87–92. Incidentally, the theatrical metaphor also abounds in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (see Nederman, “John of Salisbury’s Political Theory,” p. 261).

10 Erasmus, *Education*, p. 57. Quintilian already notes that *parrhesia* “may frequently be made a cloak for flattery” (*Institutio oratoria*, 9.2.27).

11 See Chapter 5, sect. “Divine and Priestly.”

they pleased, and taking no account of God, but only of persons”; they were all “daily issuing new decrees.” This was how “the flattery of the high priests [pontificum adulatio], and the corruption of religion and of the laws, and the incredible increase in the number of laws gave a very great and frequent opportunity for arguments and disputes, which could never be settled.”¹ The flattering priest here represents something decidedly more dangerous than a mere opportunist: he is cunning, turning the laws to his advantage by interpreting them perversely; seditious, wanting to usurp sovereign power and not simply sponge off it; and divisive, not seeking common ground but only his own glory.

In this context, Spinoza also invites us to compare flattering priests with false prophets. In the Hebrew Republic, “we don’t see that the people were ever deceived by false prophets until after they gave sovereignty to kings, whom most of them were eager to flatter by agreeing.”² Flatterers and false prophets both falsely allege privileged access to divine knowledge that they claim to use in the service of their superiors. Like false prophets, flatterers adapt and accommodate the expression of their own desires to the mentality of receptive sovereigns. Still, despite the similarities, false prophecy and priestly flattery do not employ the same means of deception. For, in accordance with the two apostolic styles described in TTP XI, religious deception takes two forms following whether it simulates prophetic command or brotherly advice. These forms differ with regard to the means of authentication they (deceptively) appeal to. Generally, prophecy is authenticated by external signs, traditionally the performance of miracles. For Spinoza, however—unsurprisingly given his naturalist understanding of miracles as a mere mode of perception—miracles are not reserved for true prophets. They are performed by false prophets as well.³ This is why additional, doctrinal criteria apply to distinguish them from each other: “a true prophet is distinguished from a false one by doctrine and miracle taken together.”⁴ Flattering priests, by contrast, do not perform miracles at all, exactly because they do not pose as prophets who command by communicating divine laws. Instead, they pose as teachers and deceptive interpreters of such divine laws. Correlatively, the style of their deception differs from that of false prophets as the epistolary style of the Apostles’ Letters differs from the prophetic style the Apostles employ when preaching in public assemblies. False prophecy represents a perversion of prophetic command, an abusive claim to divine authority, with the false prophets peddling their own desires as God’s commands; priestly flattery, by contrast, is a perversion of brotherly advice, an abuse of people’s natural authority to teach and advise.⁵

When conjuring up this more taciturn figure of the flattering priest, Spinoza speaks to a well-known topos in moral and political philosophy that can be traced as far back as Plato’s *Gorgias*, where flattery (κολακεία) is presented as a simulacrum of justice and legislation in politics.⁶ There are clear echoes

1 For all the quotes, see TTP XVIII, G III.222–3|C II.324; trans. modified. On both accounts, Curley has “priests” and not, as I have, “high priests” for Spinoza’s pontifices. On this, see my preliminary Note on Texts, Translations, and Abbreviations.

2 TTP XVIII, G III.225|C II.327.

3 TTP VI, G III.87|C II.159; TTP VII, G III.99|C II.172.

4 TTP XV, G III.186|C II.279; see also TTP II, G III.31|C II.96. For Spinoza, the mark of a false prophet is principally that he preaches doctrines contrary to true religion, justice, and charity. Mohammed, Spinoza argues, is a case in point, for “it clearly follows from [his opinions] that Mohammed was an impostor, since he completely takes away that freedom which the universal religion concedes” (Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671, Letter 43, G IV.225|C II.389). Spinoza’s analysis is reminiscent of Hobbes, albeit with one significant difference. For Hobbes, the authenticating sign of prophecy is obedience to the civil sovereign; for Spinoza, it is virtue, i.e., adherence to true religion, justice, and charity: “the prophets’ certainty is known chiefly from the fact that they had a heart inclined toward the right and the good. So it’s necessary to establish the same thing for us also, if we’re to be able to have faith in them” (TTP VII, G III.99|C II.171–2). Still, in both Hobbes and Spinoza, miracle is no longer the exclusive sign of true prophecy. For Spinoza, at best, the performance of miracles—i.e., the performance of things for which the common audience of prophets have no explanation and that they consequently admire—is a part of the prophetic style, as one way that the prophets adapt and accommodate their doctrines so as to better indoctrinate them, and nothing else.

5 Spinoza does not—or not directly, at any rate—consider what would be the equivalent of flattery when used not in relation to a monarch, but in relation to a sovereign assembly or sovereign people in a democracy. The question is addressed by Aristotle for whom the flatterer is in a tyranny what a demagogue is in a democracy because “the spirit of both is the same” (Aristotle, *Politics*, IV, 1292a; see also *Politics*, V, 1313b).

6 According to Socrates in *Gorgias*, 20a, “flattery” (κολακεία) takes two forms following whether it appeals to the body or to the mind. “Cooking,” for example, is flattery of the body, a simulation of medicine that aims at pleasing rather than healing. “Attiring” is another flattery of the body, “working deceitfully by the help of lines, and colours, and enamels, and garments, and making men affect a spurious beauty to the neglect of the true beauty which is given by gymnastic.” Moving to the mental side, the care of the mind is attended to by politics, and “in politics there is a legislative part, which answers to gymnastic, as justice does to medicine; and the two parts run into one another, justice having to do with the same subject as legislation, and medicine with the same subject as gymnastic, but with a difference.” Accordingly,

of Cicero in his conception of the connection between flattery and pride in the Ethics. Tacitus is, however, arguably the most important ancient source for Spinoza's conception of flattering priests in the TTP. He owned a copy of the posthumous, seventh edition of 1607 of Lipsius's annotated works of Tacitus and made good use of it: Tacitus and Curtius are among the most frequently cited authors in the TTP.¹ It may very well be from Tacitus that Spinoza first learned that the liberty of public debate would have to be regulated in some way in order to prevent it from degenerating into flattery and sycophancy.² In his treatment of flattering priests, he probably also learned from Tacitus's account of how the Roman pontiffs included Nero and Drusus in their prayers for the emperor "not so much out of affection for the young men, but rather by way of flattery"³—even if, on this occasion, the strategy backfired: by doing this, the pontiffs incurred the wrath of the jealous Tiberius, prompting Tacitus to famously muse about how "in times of corrupted mores, too much flattery may be as perilous as too little."⁴

Authors other than classical do, however, also resonate in Spinoza's account of flattery. Moving forward to the nascent political thought of the late Middle Ages, the figure of the flattering priest stands centrally in book III of John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* of 1159.⁵ Mostly relying on Cicero in elaborating this moral physiognomy of the flatterer, John deems flattering priests particularly pernicious, denouncing them as "hypocrites who endeavour to conceal the disgrace of ambition under the false pretext of religion."⁶ Spinoza, of course, knew nothing of the *Policraticus*, but an attentive reader will find a striking number of incidental parallels between them, on this topic as on others. Closer to Spinoza, flattery is a pervasive theme among Renaissance and humanist thinkers. Thomas More deplors how "the counsellors of kings endorse and flatter the most absurd statement of the prince's special favourites, through whose influence they hope to stand well with the prince."⁷ For Montaigne, "nothing exists that poisons princes more than flattery or by means of which evil men can more easily obtain advantages from courting them."⁸ Francis Bacon discusses the classic distinction between the friend and the flatterer in his 1625 *Essays or Counsel Civill and Morall*.⁹

More importantly, however, Erasmus paints a very detailed portrait of the courtly flatterer in his *Education of the Christian Prince* of 1516, drawing on Plutarch's *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, a text he published in a Latin translation from the Greek along with his own political tract.¹⁰ Spinoza does not explicitly reference Erasmus's text, or Plutarch's for that matter, but given Erasmus's intellectual standing in the Dutch Republic we can safely assume that he was familiar with both on some level.¹¹ Erasmus describes flatterers as "officers of state [who] do not give frank advice and counsellors [who] do not consult him with enough openness of heart,"¹² vilifying them as "repulsively depraved little men" who represent a "particular plague" in the state.¹³ Carrying John of Salisbury's baton forward, ecclesiastical counselors are singled out: "often even those who preach on religious matters speak ingratiatingly, fishing for the favour of the prince and his court."¹⁴ Alluding to the Stoic

flattery of the mind is a simulation of legislation and justice, a part of which Socrates identifies as "rhetoric." See also Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 2.15.24–8.

¹ Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-folio no. 4, p. 122; C II.67 n. 8.

² See Tacitus, *Annals*, IV, chap. 6, vol. I, p. 266 (on the government of Tiberius): "all public business ... was transacted in the senate. Its leaders had liberty of debate, and the Emperor himself checked any lapses into sycophancy." See also *Annals*, XVI, chap. 2, vol. II, p. 311. For commentary, see Strunk, *History after Liberty*, sect. "Tacitus' Denunciation of Adulatio," pp. 135–46.

³ Tacitus, *Annals*, IV, chap. 17, vol. I, p. 278.

⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, IV, chap. 17, vol. I, p. 278, trans. modified; see also *Annals*, II, chap. 88, vol. I, p. 182, and *Annals*, III, chap. 65, vol. I, pp. 247–8.

⁵ For John's particularly vivid portrait of the character, see *Policraticus*, III, iv, pp. 18–19.

⁶ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, VII, xxi, p. 167.

⁷ More, *Utopia*, I, p. 14; see also p. 27. Spinoza owned a copy of *Utopia* (see Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, in-folio no. 34, pp. 156–7).

⁸ Montaigne, *Essais*, II, xvi: "De la Gloire," p. 954.

⁹ Bacon, *The Major Works*, pp. 379–83 ("Of Friendship"), and pp. 390–6 ("Of Counsel"); see also Achilleos, "Friendship and Good Counsel."

¹⁰ Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, pp. 8, 52, 54–65, 90, 114–17; see also, in the same volume, the *Panegyric for Archduke Philip of Austria*, pp. 130–2.

¹¹ For some insightful remarks on the status of Erasmus in Grotian and, later, Spinozist milieus, see Leo, "Spinoza's Calvin," pp. 155–7.

¹² Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, p. 57.

¹³ Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, pp. 54–5.

¹⁴ Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, p. 56.

analogy between priests and physicians who, as officers to the court, are both in charge of telling difficult truths and prescribe unsavory remedies to the prince, Erasmus explains how both are particularly prone to flatter instead of providing “friendly and sincere advice”: “Priests are flatterers and physicians are yes-men.”¹

How to distinguish honest political advisors from flatterers is also frequently discussed in early modern Italian and Spanish political literature, some of which was well known to Spinoza. It is a recurrent theme in Castiglione’s 1628 *Book of the Courtier*, for example.² Another less famous example, but this one perhaps known by Spinoza, is Diego Saavedra-Fajardo’s 1640 anti-Machiavellian work *Empresas Políticas. Idea de un príncipe político Cristiano*.³ As Castiglione, Saavedra-Fajardo considers flattery to be a major internal threat to good government.⁴ In a way not unlike Spinoza, he analyzes political flattery as a way to alienate a sovereign from his own mind or divert him from his own judgment: “The proper quality of a Flatterer, who with specious pretenses charms the Eyes and Ears of Princes, and put them so beside themselves, that they can’t search the truth of things.”⁵ Saavedra-Fajardo’s analysis relies heavily on his reading of Tacitus but is also predicated on a broader Augustinian outlook on the depravity of human nature that in some respects is foreign to Spinoza’s thinking.⁶ Nonetheless, they agree that there is nothing in the natural state of human beings that prevents them from interacting with others with deception and flattery as long as they see their own advantage in doing so.

The discussions of flattery in the *de regimine principum* literature form the background for the section included in Machiavelli’s *The Prince* on to “how to avoid flatterers.”⁷ For Machiavelli, eradicating political flattery involves a kind of paradox. For “there is no other way to guard oneself from flattery unless men understand that they do not offend you in telling you the truth; but when everyone can tell you the truth, they lack reverence for you.” To solve the problem, he recommends electing a council of a few “wise men” whose members alone would be permitted to speak freely. But once someone is made a counselor, “the more freely he speaks, the more he will be accepted.” Moreover, the prince should be wise enough himself to know how to usefully synthesize inevitably divergent advice from different counselors, because even when they are carefully selected, “each of his counselors will think of his own interest.”⁸ As we shall see in Chapter 7, Spinoza’s strategy will be the exact opposite. Instead of limiting the number of counselors, he will recommend increasing it drastically by creating a general public sphere of free philosophizing for the government to consult with—a veritable sphere of democratic participation.

Next, it is worth mentioning that Spinoza owned a 1644 edition of *Las obras y relaciones* by Antonio Pérez,⁹ the exiled former advisor of Philip II and ardent Taticist. The work contains numerous moral and political aphorisms regarding flattery. Pérez, for example, compares the flatterer with a sunflower who turns with the prince as the flower with the sun;¹⁰ describes flattery as “cooking for the ear palate”;¹¹ and proclaims that there is no ambition that a prince under the sway of flattery will not undertake to realize.¹² Spinoza quotes Pérez explicitly a couple of times in the TP, but not in relation

1 Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, p. 57.

2 See Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, book I, p. 59; book II, pp. 92–3, 118; book IV, pp. 246–7, 249, 282.

3 See Saavedra-Fajardo, *The Royal Politician*, Emblems XLVI–XLVIII, pp. 319–48 (I reference a 1700 English translation by Sir James Astry). This widely distributed work was not on Spinoza’s shelves, but he did own a 1658 edition of Saavedra-Fajardo’s *Corona gothica, castellana y austriaca politicamente ilustrada* (see Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, in-folio no. 16, pp. 146–7).

4 Saavedra-Fajardo, *The Royal Politician*, Emblem XLVIII, p. 337: “[domestick enemies] are Flatterers and Parasites; nor is there less danger from their Fawns than from an Enemy’s Sword. Flattery has ruin’d more Princes than force.”

5 Saavedra-Fajardo, *The Royal Politician*, Emblem XLVIII, p. 339.

6 See Saavedra-Fajardo, *The Royal Politician*, Emblem XLVI, pp. 320–4, esp. p. 320: “Man has no greater Enemy than Man,” to compare with Spinoza’s “To man ... there is nothing more useful than man” at E4p18s, G II.222|C I.556.

7 For a commentary, see Kapust, *Flattery and the History of Political Thought*, pp. 64–95.

8 For all quotes, see Machiavelli, *The Prince*, sect. xxiii, pp. 93–5.

9 See Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, in-octavo no. 17, p. 177.

10 Pérez, *Obras y relaciones*, “Aphorismos de la Carta para el Papa,” no. 9, pp. 401–2.

11 Pérez, *Obras y relaciones*, “Aphorismos de las secundas cartas,” no. 191, p. 1036.

12 Pérez, *Obras y relaciones*, “Aphorismos de las Relaciones de Ant. Perez,” no. 89, p. 419; see also “Aphorismos de la Relaciones de Ant. Perez,” no. 42, p. 411; no. 157, p. 433; “Aphorismos de las secundas cartas,” no. 78, p. 1022; no. 309, p. 1051. We also find a few significant

to the question of flattery.¹ Antonio Droetto (followed by Curley) has, however, suggested that Spinoza had Pérez in mind when stating in TP VII.13—a section concerned with “the devices and shrewd tricks counselors must use”—that “no reader of history can fail to know that loyalty has commonly been the ruin of counselors. For their own protection they are obliged to be shrewd, rather than loyal.”²

Finally, in the *Leviathan*, Hobbes warns sovereigns not to be “subject to evil Counsell, and to be seduced by Orators, as a Monarch by Flatterers; and becoming one another’s Flatterers, serve one another’s Covetousnesse and Ambition by turns.”³ His solution to the problem mostly consists in subordinating counsel to the will of the sovereign—a solution not exactly designed to curb courtly flattery, which arguably it might even encourage, but rather to neutralize its effects by insisting on the exclusivity and supremacy of sovereign decision-making. We shall have occasion to return to Hobbes’s approach to political counsel in more detail in Chapter 8.⁴

The reader should, of course, be aware that the brief overview of the intellectual history of flattery from a Spinozist point of view offered above far from exhausts this vast topic in early modern political theory. Daniel J. Kapust has recently published an excellent study on the topic and I will content myself with referring to his work for more detail.⁵ Still, it is important to realize that the works and authors mentioned—many of them familiar to him—resonate deeply in Spinoza’s denunciation of flattery in the TTP and provide a rich contextual framework that allows filling in the blank of his missing definition of flattery in the *Ethics*, omitted simply because our author deemed it “too well known” already.

The Flatterer, the Violent Ruler, the Mob

In the humanist tradition, in Erasmus and Thomas More, the purpose of liberal study is essentially to become an efficient personal tutor and counselor to princes and noblemen.⁶ A sovereign who does not keep such counsel is considered imprudent and autocratic. Teachers and advisors are required to provide disinterested lessons and advice to the sovereign. In return for their candor, they should feel safe telling the sovereign even unpleasant truths. One must “create an atmosphere of civilized talk without ever using pretense or lies to gain favour,” as Erasmus puts it.⁷ The figure of the flatterer highlights the obvious weakness of such a system of advisory decorum: how, exactly, is one to exercise “proper care” in distinguishing between what is “disguised and feigned” and what is “genuine and real,” as Cicero already formulates the problem in *De amicitia*?⁸ Erasmus, for example, is deeply concerned that “officers of the state do not give frank advice and counsellors do not consult with him with enough openness of heart.”⁹

Spinoza shares these concerns. It comes through in particular in the TP, in his discussion of the king’s council in a monarchy. Members of this council, Spinoza insists, “should be chosen only from the

passages on flattery in the correspondences. See *Epistola prima*, Epist. XXVIII to Lord Essex, p. 667; and *Secundas Cartas*, Epist. XXIV to the “Duque de Humayna” [?], p. 788.

¹ TTP VII.14, G III.314 | C II.55 (the passage concerns the dangers of absolute rule in a monarchy; for Spinoza’s systematic approach to this question, see Chapter 7, sect. “Absolute States: Citizens, Counselors, Sovereign Powers”); TTP VII.30, G III.323 | C II.563 (the passage concerns the fate of the Aragonese under Philip II; see also the following section: “The Flatterer, the Violent Ruler, the Mob”).

² TTP VII.13, G III.314 | C II.551; see also the note by Curley at C II.551 n. 22.

³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIX, p. 290. On Hobbes and flattery, see Kapust, “The Problem of Flattery.” As Quentin Skinner has highlighted, Hobbes’s pupil William Cavendish wrote a brief *Discourse against Flatterie* around 1611, drawing on Plutarch and, perhaps, Machiavelli (Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 169–70, 216).

⁴ See chapter 8, sect. “Hobbes on Men of Leisure and Public Instruction.”

⁵ See Kapust, *Flattery and the History of Political Thought*.

⁶ See Erasmus, *The Education of the Christian Prince*; More, *Utopia*, II, p. 78; Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, p. 70; Skinner, *The Foundations*, I, pp. 313–21.

⁷ Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, p. 55. See also e.g. Saavedra-Fajardo, *The Royal Politician*, Emblem XLVIII, p. 344: “Let a Prince also publicly gratifie those who shall be so ingenuous as to tell him Truth. ... Happy that Kingdom, in which Counsel is neither embarrass’d by Respect, nor aw’d by Fear! All men know the baseness of Flattery, but they know too the inconveniencies of Truth, and see more danger from this than that. ... Ministers often run great Risques, who through zeal are too forward in telling their Thoughts of future dangers, that they may be seasonably prevented.”

⁸ Cicero, *De amicitia*, in *Ethical Writings*, pp. 64–5.

⁹ Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, p. 57.

citizens.”¹ This implies, among other things, that courtiers should be excluded: “those who frequent the court [aulam], and members of the king’s household, to whom he pays a salary from his private funds, are to be excluded from every ministry or office of the commonwealth.”² Implicitly conjuring up the classic image of the courtly parasite, Spinoza insists that counselors should be citizens whose private livelihood is not dependent on the king’s good graces and who will, consequently, be able to speak their minds publicly to the king without fear of private repercussions.

The exclusion of courtiers also applies to those in charge of educating the future sovereign, which is why the “responsibility for educating the king’s sons will also fall to the council.”³ The prince’s education should be assured by tutors who presumably have the public interest of the commonwealth at heart, as opposed to private tutors who seek only to please the king, at the expense of the commonwealth or even at the expense of the princely heir they are put in charge of educating. For, as Spinoza explains, kings fear their sons and heirs more than they love them and, for this reason, “they try to educate them so that they’ll have no cause to fear them. Their officials [officiarii] are very ready to obey the king in this, and do their best to have a successor king who is untrained, whom they can manipulate by their craft.”⁴ In short, in order to ensure that tutors are not crafty flatterers seeking only to mold the future sovereign to their own liking and that of the present sovereign, tutors must be chosen among private citizens whose livelihood is independent of the court and who will, consequently, be able to teach the prince in view of the true interest of the state. Spinoza here intervenes in a major political controversy of his day, regarding the guardianship and education of William III (1650–1702) who was born after the death of his father, William II.⁵ The minority of William III and consequent inability to assume the function of Stadhouders opened up the possibility for De Witt to take control of the Republic as Grand Pensionary of Holland in 1653. After William III’s mother, Marie Stuart, died in 1660, De Witt sought to gain control over the young prince’s education and to have him brought up by state-assigned teachers rather than by private tutors chosen and paid by the family, in order to gain the young prince for the republican cause.

It would be wrong, however, to place all the blame on the counselor and none on the counseled. A flatterer deceives a sovereign into never seeing himself as he is, but only as he would like to be seen. While reveling in the compliments of the flattering tutor or counselor, the sovereign deprives himself of any adequate understanding of himself and of any control over his own thoughts. A sovereign under the sway of flatterers is thus quite literally basking in his own submission, as yet another form of voluntary servitude. At the same time, however, Spinoza acknowledges that rulers can rarely be considered mere passive victims of flattery. It is often their own penchant for violence that tends to attract it: “everywhere it’s common for enemies and servile flatterers to bend the truth—especially when they’re ruled despotically by one or a few men.”⁶ A violent ruler, persecuting his citizens, will contribute to producing flatterers by making people fearful of retribution if they speak their minds: “the necessary consequence would be that every day men would think one thing and say something

1 TP VI.15, G III.300–1|C II.536.

2 TP VI.34, G III.306|C II.542.

3 TP VI.20, G III.302|C II.538.

4 TP VI.7, G III.299|C II.534; trans. modified. Curley translates *officiarius* as “courtier” which is the English term one would expect to translate *aulicus*. At TTP XVII, G III.207–8|C II.304–5, in Spinoza’s discussion of the role of the Levites in the Hebrew Republic after the death of Moses, Curley himself translates *aulici* by “courtiers.” His choice in the TP may be guided by the suggestion, first made by Sylvain Zac, that Spinoza’s discussion of court counselors in the TP is informed by his reading in the TTP of the role taken on by the different tribes of Israel, including the Levites, in the Hebrew Republic (this said, Curley seems to disparage that reading at C II.535 n. 15). But I think that should not justify the assimilation of the two terms *officiarius* and *aulicus* in translation. Moreover, at TP VI.34 (G III.306|C II.542), Spinoza excludes all “those who frequent the court” (*qui aulam frequentant*) from every “ministry or office” (*ministerio seu officio*). But an *officiarius* is, one must assume, just someone who occupies such an “office” or *officio*. Shirley translates by “minister,” but I prefer to adhere to the more literal translation “official” in order to avoid confusion with the “ministries of the church [*Ecclesiae ministeria*]” or the “sacred ministry [*ministerium sacrum*]” associated with the “whole practice of religion” (TTP Preface, G III.8|C I.92; TTP XIX, G III.238|C II.343). Proietti/Ramond have, in French, *grands officiers*, importing military connotations that I find unwarranted in this context, even though Spinoza at TP VI.31—which contains the only other occurrence in Spinoza of the term—discusses “commanders and the other officers [*duces et reliqui officarii*]” in the army (C II.305|C II.541).

5 See Troost, William III, pp. 26–9, 43–5, 47–52; and note by Curley at C II.538 n. 22.

6 TP VII.27, G III.320|C II.559.

else.”¹ Under a violent ruler, “abominable flattery and treachery [abominanda adulatio et perfidia] would be encouraged, as would deceptions and the corruption of all the liberal studies.”² In the TP, Spinoza gives the example of the Aragonese who, after the oppressive rule of Philip II, were “led by their desire to flatter the powerful with lip service [potentioribus assentandi] ... and the rest of whom [were] deterred by fear, [having] retained nothing but specious words of freedom and empty customs.”³ Spinoza’s historical account of the incident largely derives from Antonio Pérez,⁴ but his argument as such draws upon a long tradition. Aristotle already notes how “most men love flattery” because it procures a sense of friendship and superiority at the same time,⁵ making it particularly appealing to the “ambitious.”⁶ This is why “tyrants are always fond of bad men, because they love to be flattered, but no man who has the spirit of a freeman in him will lower himself by flattery; good men love others, or at any rate do not flatter them.”⁷ The association of tyrants and flatterers also figures prominently in Erasmus: “Nowhere do we read of a state oppressed by implacable tyranny without a flatterer playing a leading part in the tragedy.”⁸ Still, the most immediate source for Spinoza is probably Tacitus and the account in book I of the *Annals* of how the Romans reacted after Tiberius took possession of government and established his autocratic imperial regime:

Meanwhile all at Rome—Consuls, Senators, and Knights—were plunging into servitude. Men bearing the most illustrious names were the foremost with false professions; composing their features so as not to show too much pleasure at the death of the one prince, or too little at the accession of the other; blending tears with their smiles, and flattery with their lamentations.⁹

The violent ruler and the courtly flatterer are, finally, joined by a third party, namely the “mob” (plebs).¹⁰ Violent rulers are defined as those who try to force people’s conscience even though it is against human nature. They are “the real troublemakers ... who want, in a free republic, to take away freedom of judgment, even though it can’t be suppressed.”¹¹ But the means by which they try to achieve this is not legislation and institutionalized state power, but instrumentalization of the mob: “For that government which makes it a crime to hold opinions—which each person has a right to hold, a right no one can surrender—is the most violent of all. Indeed, when this happens, what rules most is the anger of the mob.”¹² For violent rulers “can’t endure free minds and ... can, by a certain grim authority, easily change the devotion of a seditious mob to madness, and rouse it against whomever they wish to.”¹³ The mob represents the mass of minds under the sway of prejudice, common men constantly preoccupied by the judgments of others, manipulated into fighting for their bondage as if for their freedom. The mob is the violent ruler’s instrument of violence, the raw power of the multitude that they manipulate because they cannot impose their rule by law. Spinoza famously qualifies it as “terrifying.”¹⁴ One concrete issue Spinoza clearly has in mind when speaking up against such constructions is the persecution of intellectuals: “The real schismatics are those who condemn the writings of others and seditiously incite the unruly mob against the writers, not the writers themselves,

1 TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

2 TTP XX, G III.243|C II.349. A few pages later, Spinoza reiterates the point: “Again, both liberal studies and faith [artes et fides] are corrupted, flatterers and traitors [adulatores et perfidi] are encouraged” (TTP XX, G III.247|C II.353; trans. modified).

3 TP VII.30, G III.223|C II.563.

4 See notes by Curley at C II.561–2 nn. 54–60.

5 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 1159a.

6 Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, VII, 139a1.

7 Aristotle, *Politics*, V, 1314a1.

8 Erasmus, *Education of the Christian Prince*, p. 54.

9 Tacitus, *Annals*, chap. 7, vol. II, p. 13.

10 In the TTP, Curley most often translates plebs as “ordinary people,” understood as practically synonymous to *vulgus*, or “common man.” He only gives plebs as “mob” when a distinctly pejorative sense is implied (see Glossary at C II.647). One might quibble with one or two occurrences (e.g. at TTP Preface, G III.6|C II.67: “seers have had the greatest control over ordinary people”), but I generally agree with Curley’s choices here. Still, it is important to realize that, on the terminological level, Spinoza makes no distinction between “ordinary people” and the “mob.”

11 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

12 TTP XVIII, C III.225|C II.327.

13 TTP XX, G III.244|C II.350.

14 E4p54s, G II.250|C I.576.

who for the most part write only for the learned [doctis] and call only reason to their aid.”¹ Hence, in one of the most virulent passages of the TTP, Spinoza deploras how “the worst hypocrites, stirred up by the same madness (which they call zeal for divine right), have everywhere persecuted men distinguished for their integrity, famous for their virtue, and on that account, envied by the mob—publicly denouncing their opinions and inflaming the savage multitude in their anger against them.”² The flatterer, the violent rulers, and the mob thus together form the three cornerstones in a perverted construction of the republic entirely built on mechanisms of deception with evil intent, common prejudice, and flattery, mutually reinforcing and attracting each other. And when thus assembled together, they form an efficient alliance to persecute better citizens and suppress the freedom of philosophizing.

Conclusion

I shall conclude this chapter by restating a problem already raised earlier and to which no real solution has been found so far. Spinoza claims that the whole aim of the TTP is to show how “to establish the state so that there’s no place for fraud.”³ And yet, at this point in our analysis, it is not at all clear how Spinoza’s model can prevent deceivers with evil intent and flatterers from operating with impunity, everywhere imposing “the authority of their own decision” through trickery rather than direct force. All we know is that deception exists, what forms it takes, and who engages in it.

So what is to be done? The reality is that Spinoza has no easy answer to this question. There are no simple or easily applicable means of eradicating systematic deception of the people or flattery of the sovereign power from public discourse. Spinoza shall instead go on to explore ways of making people—whether citizens or sovereigns—better equipped to resist deception and flattery; ways of inoculating or immunizing the body politic against such maladies.⁴ In other words, absent a cure for deception and flattery, he shall, as we will see in Chapters 7 and 8, go on to devise something like a vaccine with two main components: (1) replacing courtly advisory structures of government with a system of broad public consultation, pulling his entire political project in the direction of participatory democracy, and (2) undertaking educational reform, putting the arts and sciences and civic education at the heart of his defense of the freedom of philosophizing.

¹ TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

² TTP XVIII, G III.226|C II.328.

³ TTP XVII, G III.203|C II.299.

⁴ I partly derive the imagery from Van Velthuysen’s characterization of Spinoza’s conception of the prophets. See Van Velthuysen to Ostens, January 24, 1671, Letter 42, G IV.207|C II.374: “[Spinoza has] worked quite diligently to free his mind from all superstition. To make himself immune [se immunem praeberet] from that, he’s inclined too much in the opposite direction”; and G IV.209|C II.376: “He denies that the prophets were so knowledgeable about things that they were completely immune [immunes] from the errors of the common people.”

Counsel, Collegiality, and Democracy

Navigating Free Philosophizing

We concluded Chapter 6 with a problem. On Spinoza's own understanding, the TTP should serve as a manual to eliminate "fraud" from free philosophizing and neutralize the effects of the deceptions perpetrated by radical Machiavellian politicians and priestly flatterers in the public sphere. And yet his conception of the freedom of philosophizing seemingly provides no workable resources to identify and suppress such fraud. So how, exactly, can the effects of deception with evil intent and flattery be canceled? How can people be taught to use and navigate free philosophizing in view of the common good, and what can be done politically to ensure that they do?

First, Spinoza devises a somewhat ad hoc solution for at least the problem of flattery; a political quick fix. The sovereign power, he recommends, should pursue an explicit policy not to privilege any particular individual, group, or sect, rendering private jockeying for public influence futile from the outset. For, "if men were not possessed by the hope of getting the laws and the magistrate on their side ..., they'd never contend so unfairly. Their minds would not be excited by such a great frenzy."¹ The suggestion reflects the specificity of the Dutch situation, especially with regard to the question of religion. While article 13 of the Union of Utrecht prohibited the establishment of a state religion, Calvinism enjoyed preferential treatment as the "public religion." As for other confessions and sects, their existence depended on the willingness or unwillingness of the political authorities to accommodate the Calvinists and follow the recommendations of local consistories and national synods in terms of regulation of the religious landscape. Moreover, since the Arminian–Gomarist disputes in the early decades of the century, the fortunes of the different orientations within the Calvinist church itself had been constantly attuned to the rise and fall of the political powers they were associated with. Spinoza wanted the state to resist such associations and deny any particular sect, confession, or orientation privileged status. This is why he urges the public authorities not to let themselves be influenced by private interests. In particular, he urges them not to be swayed by self-interested ecclesiastical counselors to implement policies designed to advance the agenda of any particular sect. But this political remedy is entirely predicated on the rulers' willingness to shun such alliances and their ability to recognize the advantages of doing so, not only for the citizens, but also for their own subsistence.²

Second, now making a claim with a more complex philosophical backdrop, Spinoza suggests that eradicating flattery and deception with evil intent requires a legal permission to philosophize freely: "if good faith, not flattering lip service, is to be valued, if the supreme powers are to retain their sovereignty as fully as possible ..., freedom of judgment must be granted."³ In light of what we learned in Chapter 6, the reasoning is puzzling. As we have seen, if flattery and evil deception represent such a threat to a public sphere of free philosophizing, it is because the practice of free philosophizing includes the formal resources neither to identify nor to exclude them. Acts of deception are not open to direct scrutiny and thus not subject to any possible legislation: de facto, the true intentions of a deceiver pertain to "the internal action of the soul."⁴ Moreover, de jure, from the viewpoint of the natural right upon which free philosophizing rests, nothing renders the use of deception for purposes of mere self-interest illegitimate per se. In fact, grudgingly, Spinoza is obliged to recognize that free philosophizing does, after all, have "disadvantages which can't be avoided by the magistrates' authority."⁵ Flattery and evil deception, as vices that both de facto and de jure fall outside the scope

¹ TTP XX, G III.244 | C II.350.

² See Chapter 10, sect. "The Origins of the State: Hobbes and Spinoza."

³ TTP XX, G III.245 | C II.373.

⁴ TTP XVII, G III.202 | C II.297.

⁵ TTP XX, G III.242 | C II.348.

of any possible legislation, join the list of such trivial “evils” as “extravagant living, envy, greed, drunkenness, and the like.” For, Spinoza admits, “we endure these things, because the laws’ command can’t prohibit them, even though they’re really vices.”¹ So the problem is this: How is it that just a few pages later in the same chapter, Spinoza can go on to argue that granting freedom of judgment is supposed to help prevent flattery and promote good faith?

The solution to the problem—which is not simple to implement and leads us into a whole new area of Spinoza’s understanding of the *libertas philosophandi*—lies in understanding that a “permission” to philosophize freely includes not only a negative legal decision not to restrict free philosophizing by laws, but also a more positive political program for encouraging the creation and reproduction of a public sphere of free philosophizing. Spinoza, we recall, urges that “men must be so governed that they can openly hold different and contrary opinions and still live in harmony.”² But this recommendation must be understood in a double sense. It involves both removing obstacles to candid and genuine self-expression and creating conditions favorable to it, i.e., a political and societal program for creating a citizenry sufficiently free and self-possessed to engage in free philosophizing.

In this chapter and Chapter 8, we shall explore how, according to Spinoza, the state can best promote free philosophizing in this second, more positive sense. He proposes two measures: the first consists in reframing the general structures of political counsel; the second consists in reform of public education. In this chapter, we shall focus on political counsel. We shall also study his understanding of democracy as the state form most favorable to free philosophizing. The reason why this classic question of Spinoza’s preferred state form comes up in this context is because his program for reforming political counsel is inseparable from his democratic republicanism. It essentially consists in replacing the traditional court-like structures of political advice with a broader context of public consultation, thus promoting democratic participation. This is of central interest for us because the context where such public consultation is to take place just is the public sphere of free philosophizing where citizens exercise their natural authority to advise. We shall finally see how Spinoza associated such public advisors with a particular class of citizens not unlike the “wise merchants” described by Caspar Barlaeus.

Public Consultation and Political Resistance

As we have seen in the discussion of flattery, the status of counselors to the prince, the question of political advisors, was a major issue in the political theories of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, from Erasmus to Machiavelli to Hobbes. A great many humanist writers took up the problem because they saw themselves as essentially teachers and advisors to aristocrats and princes.³ One of the last, major representatives of this humanist tradition was Grotius, and turning to his discussions of political counsel provides a very instructive context for understanding what is at stake in Spinoza’s association of the freedom of philosophizing with an “authority to advise.”

In chapter IV of *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, a book that stood on the shelves of Spinoza’s library,⁴ Grotius proposes a classification of different kinds of “rule” (*regimen*), divided into two main groups. First, there are the forms of “constitutive rule,” associated with command. It is imperative, carries obligation, and is enforced by coercion. Constitutive rule is associated with the sovereign power but can also be held by “deputies”—civil servants—who receive such authority by “emanation” from the sovereign power.⁵ But no one else can exercise constitutive rule and, certainly, no one can exercise such rule over the sovereign power. Grotius here lays down the groundwork for the essentially Erastian position he shall go on to defend, denying the church any constitutive rule. Second, there are the forms of “directive rule,” associated with advice and counsel. In the political

1 TTP XX, G III.242|C II.348.

7 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351.

3 See Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 70–3; Skinner, *Foundations*, I, pp. 213–21; Paul, *Counsel and Command*, pp. 15–40.

4 Servaas van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, vol. in-octavo no. 31, p. 183.

5 Grotius, *De imperio*, II, p. 187.

context, directive rule consists in “showing what is virtuous or what is necessary for the public good.”¹ Some directive rule, so-called persuasive rule, is weak: the advisor’s power to guide the advisee depends on the advisor’s “person” alone; that is, on the advisor’s persuasiveness and perceived trustworthiness. No obligation is attached to it. A stronger form of directive rule, however, is “declarative rule.” Declarative rule is not commanding and cannot be backed up by coercion, which is why “the authority [imperium] of the supreme powers ... is not taken away by the directive and declarative rule.”² And yet it comes with an obligation: it “takes away the freedom of action of the person in question.”³

To illustrate what he has in mind, Grotius appeals to a commonplace analogy between a priest and a physician:

Declarative rule itself does not cause an obligation, but it gives rise to one because those who rule in this way impress something upon someone which brings about or increases an obligation: for example, a physician rules a sick man by showing him what is fatal and what is necessary to restore or retain his health; when the sick man has understood that, he is bound to do this and avoid that, not by any right that physician holds over him, but by virtue of the law of nature which imposes on everyone the care for his own life and safety.⁴

A sick man is bound to follow the medical counsel of a qualified physician because of his interest in self-preservation:

Someone who is ill does well to take a medicine prescribed by a physician of good reputation: when his health is in danger he is even obliged to follow the counsels of physicians, if he himself lacks the perception of knowledge to draw a firm conclusion from natural principles.⁵

The physician does not directly govern the sick man, but the sick man is advised to acknowledge his subjection to the laws of nature through the physician’s declaration of the necessary course of the illness. This is why this type of directive rule takes away the freedom of the person directed: it “obliges” by the necessity of natural consequences.

Grotius associates declarative rule with wise counselors or advisors to a sovereign, including in particular, but not exclusively, philosophers and priests. For, as he argues, “rulers are wise by associating with wise men,” and “if this is true in profane matters, how much more true is it in sacred matters, where it is very dangerous to err?”⁶ In this way, “philosophers direct moral and political life by showing what is virtuous or what is necessary for the public good,”⁷ while priests are “giving counsel and declaring what God commands.”⁸ Declarative rule is predicated on epistemic competence and therefore reserved for certain classes of “wise men.” However, in order for declarative rule to be legitimate, the wise men wielding it must be presumed not only to have the required knowledge, but also to declare that knowledge candidly. Wise men are expected to explain openly the natural or divine consequences of whatever action or judgment is under consideration.⁹ And this frankness of political counselors relies entirely on reassurances given by the counselors themselves. This is where Grotius’s adherence to the humanist model of political counsel, duty-based and caught up in the rhetoric of parrhesia, shines through.¹⁰

1 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 246–7.

2 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 234–5.

3 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 246–7.

4 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 246–7; trans. modified.

5 Grotius, *De imperio*, VI, pp. 292–3; my italics.

6 Grotius, *De imperio*, VI, pp. 292–3. Compare with Grotius’s illustration of how vice leads to decline in Meletius, §39, p. 115: “[Aristotle] gives the example of a man who has fallen ill as a result of his intemperance and because he did not heed the advice of the physicians; he could have avoided falling ill, but now he no longer can.” Grotius is discussing Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book III, 1114a.

7 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 246–7; see also VI, pp. 258–9: “for a counsellor rules over a king by persuasion, someone skilled in natural law rules over him by declaring natural law, a physician and a pastor in both ways.”

8 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 256–7.

9 Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 246–7.

10 See Chapter 6, sect. “Flattery”; and Chapter 4, conclusion.

Now, Hobbes and Spinoza were equally wary of such models. They both sought ways to curb the excessive authority that, on their view, self-interested privy counselors—especially priests—exerted over sovereigns in court-like settings; they both proposed models of political counsel that do not rely on moral presuppositions about the counselors' wisdom and candor. The ways in which their respective models achieve that do, however, display an instructive contrast.

In Hobbes, the goal is principally achieved by subordinating counsel to the sovereign will. A counselor or council of state is not a "public person" and holds no independent authority to compete or conflict with that of the sovereign.¹ This does not prevent counselors to the state from having—indeed they always have—some "other authority, either of Judicature, or of immediate Administration." But they only have this other authority to the extent that they also operate as "ministers" to the sovereign, i.e., as "deputies," as Grotius calls them.² Hobbes, then, maintains that whatever counsel is given to the sovereign has no authority over and above what the sovereign bestows upon it. Moreover, he stresses, counsel should not be spontaneously given but only on request, thus transferring the responsibility for its consequences from the counselor to the counseled:

to ask Counsell of another, is to permit him to give such Counsell as he shall think best; And consequently, he that giveth counsell to his Sovereign, ... when he asketh it, cannot in equity be punished for it And generally he that demandeth Counsell, is Author of it; and therefore cannot punish it.³

Counsel is thus seen by Hobbes as a form of subjection to the counseled: it carries no weight other than what the sovereign assigns to it. For this reason, counsel never comes with an obligation but "a Monarch receiveth counsel of whom, when, and where he pleaseth; and consequently may heare the opinion of men versed in the matter about which he deliberates, of what rank or quality soever, and as long before the time of action, and with as much secrecy, as he will."⁴

For Spinoza, by contrast, the goal is achieved by extending the structures of political counsel to the general citizenry. Contrary to Hobbes, he does not subordinate the advisory function to the sovereign will. It is not difficult to see why. A conceptual framework like Hobbes's is efficient in securing the integrity and indivisibility of sovereign decision-making. The model, however, also seems like a standing invitation to flatterers and parasites, rendering political counsel potentially even more suspect. More importantly, however, in Spinoza as in Grotius, the authority of political advice to some extent remains predicated on the consideration of natural consequences, regardless of the sovereign's will. For Spinoza, a violent ruler—a sovereign governing against human nature by suppressing people's natural authority to speak their mind—is unintentionally ruling in view of his own inevitable downfall.⁵ This is because citizens will eventually withdraw their allegiance to such a sovereign and rebel against the regime. If a sovereign attempts to suppress freedom of judgment, "the result is that [men] dare to denounce the laws and do what they can against the magistrate; they don't think it shameful, but quite honorable, to initiate rebellions and attempt any crime for the sake of this cause."⁶ Violent rule will, as a natural consequence, draw a violent response from the citizens subjected to it. For the sake of his own survival, a sovereign thus does best for himself by heeding warnings against violent rule. He ought to submit to the directive rule of such citizens who, by speaking up against him rather than engaging in outright rebellion, in fact do nothing but declare the harmful but necessary natural consequences of violent rule for the sovereign himself.

In this way, instead of subordinating political counsel entirely to the sovereign will like Hobbes, Spinoza opts for a model where counsel still carries something like declarative rule in the Grotian sense.

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIII, p. 170.

2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIII, p. 170.

3 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXV, p. 400.

4 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIX, p. 130. For a somewhat different but I think not incompatible analysis of Hobbes on counsel, see Paul, *Counsel and Command*, pp. 203–16, esp. 212–16.

5 See Chapter 5, sect. "Violent Rule," and Chapter 10, sect. "The Origins of the State: Hobbes and Spinoza."

6 TTP XX, G III.244 | C II.349; see also Garber, "Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?," pp. 169–70.

Spinoza, however, does not believe that, in itself, a presumption of wisdom—being conferred by the status of being, say, a “theologian” or a “philosopher”—provides sufficient grounds for attributing such declarative rule to anyone or, conversely, that presumed lack of wisdom provides sufficient grounds for denying it to them. As much as he rails against the influence of theologians, he also warns strongly against elevating philosophers to any official capacity as privileged interpreters of divine or natural law.¹ Instead, he seeks to associate declarative rule with a kind of authority that belongs to all citizens in virtue of their common human nature. And that common authority is, exactly, the natural authority to advise, the nature of which we have already studied at length. Contrary to Grotius’s declarative rule, this common authority is not predicated on actual epistemic competence but on the ability to reason common to all men, the “natural light common to all.”² It does not single out any particular group of citizens: “What we’ve written may be ridiculed by those who think the vices common to all mortals belong only to the plebeians But everyone shares a common nature—we’re just deceived by power and refinement.”³ Unlike Grotius, Spinoza thus refuses to grant declarative rule only to a restricted circle of presumably wise priests or philosophers. Instead, he suggests extending the authority to advise to all citizens, and this not by reason of some alleged superior virtue or wisdom of the people, but simply by reason of their common humanity.⁴

All citizens, then, must assume a double role as both subjects and counselors to the sovereign power. They must, at the same time, submit to the sovereign power’s constitutive rule but also themselves exercise directive rule over the sovereign. Those commentators, such as Michael Rosenthal, Matthew Kisner, or Justin Steinberg, who have most strongly insisted on democratic participation as a fundamental political virtue in Spinoza have hit upon this republican elaboration of the humanist discussions of political counsel.⁵ Spinoza envisages a system of public consultation between the sovereign and the people where the latter, while in one capacity being subject to the sovereign power, also, in another capacity, takes up an independent advisory function with regard to it. All citizens should simultaneously stand below and next to the sovereign power. Hence the double role as both obedient subject and independent political counselor in which Spinoza casts the “best citizen” in a central passage of the TTP already quoted in the conclusion of Chapter 4, but which bears repeating:

If someone shows that a law is contrary to sound reason, and therefore thinks it ought to be repealed, if at the same time he submits his opinion to the judgment of the supreme power (to whom alone it belongs to make and repeal laws), and in the meantime does nothing contrary to what that law prescribes, he truly deserves well of the republic, as one of its best citizens. But if he does this to accuse the magistrate of inequity, and make him hateful to the common people, or if he wants to nullify the law, seditiously, against the will of the magistrate, he’s just a troublemaker and a rebel.⁶

Spinoza has enormous confidence in these best citizens who, while still obeying the law, candidly submit their opinion to the sovereign power. The governing authorities in Spinoza’s free republic do not rely for counsel on priests or philosophers with privileged access to sovereign decision-making. They rely on these best citizens whose integrity and candor are more certain because, unlike courtly flattering parasites whose livelihood is tied up with their ability to please the prince, their private fortune relies less on the good graces of the sovereign power. They represent the exact opposite of those “worst men,” who out of “greed and ambition” peddle prejudices that “completely prevent

1 TTP VII, G III.114|C II.188–9.

2 TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191; see also TTP III, G III.46–7|C II.114: “these gifts are not peculiar to any nation, but have always been common to the whole human race”; TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278: “[Reason] is common to everyone.”

3 TP VII.27, G III.319|C II.557–8.

4 Spinoza was decidedly anti-Machiavellian on this point: the Florentine’s solution to the problem of flattery was to single out only a few wise men to form an even smaller privy council. See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, sect. xxiii, pp. 93–5.

5 See Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, pp. 220–9; Rosenthal, “Spinoza’s Political Philosophy,” pp. 410, 426–9; Steinberg, “Benedict Spinoza: Epistemic Democrat”; Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*, pp. 163–4.

6 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.347; see also TP IV.3, G III.292|C II.526: “So, since only the supreme power possesses the right to handle public affairs, or to choose ministers to do so, it follows that if a subject, by his own decision, without the knowledge of the supreme council, undertakes some public business—even if he believes that what he intends to do will be best for the commonwealth—he is laying claim to political authority.”

everyone from freely using his judgment and from distinguishing the true from the false, and seem deliberately designed to put out the light of the intellect entirely.”¹ And the forum where the best citizens make their suggestions and lodge their complaints to their fellow citizens and to the sovereign power just is the public sphere of free philosophizing, wedged in between civil society and the state. This public forum constitutes the designated context where citizens have the opportunity to claim their natural authority to advise and exercise their directive rule over the sovereign power.²

On Spinoza’s model, then, no citizen holds a greater right than any other citizen to give counsel to the sovereign power.³ As human beings, they all have authority to advise as a matter of common natural right. And, as Spinoza shows in TTP XX, it is precisely by not attempting to violate that right, by permitting citizens to exercise it, that a sovereign power can be better assured to receive independent sincere counsel rather than the self-interested flattery a courtly system of privy counselors affords it. And this—to return to our initial problem—is the reason why “if good faith, not flattering lip service, is to be valued, if the supreme powers are to retain their sovereignty as fully as possible ..., freedom of judgment must be granted.”⁴

By contrast, a violent ruler who does attempt to violate the citizens’ natural right to exercise their authority to advise will inevitably face resistance from the best citizens:

[T]he more the authorities try to take away this freedom of speech, the more stubbornly men will resist. Not the greedy, of course, or the flatterers, or the rest of the weak-minded, whose supreme well-being consists in contemplating the money in their coffers and having bloated bellies. Resistance will come instead from those whom a good education, integrity of character, and virtue have made more free.⁵

Such resistance is not to be confused with rebellion. It does not consist in civil disobedience or the refusal to act in accordance with the laws established by the sovereign. It consists in submitting a disapproving opinion in public in spite of a ban on doing so. Resistance is a borderline form of public consultation, namely public consultation against the will of the sovereign power. It cannot involve disobedience to law in any proper sense. For, regardless of what they stipulate, it does not fall under the authority of the sovereign powers to emit a ban on speaking freely. The authority to give advice to whomever they wish belongs to every human being as a matter of inalienable natural right. A state-perpetrated attempt to take away people’s freedom to speak their mind cannot therefore be a “law” in any proper sense; it represents only a violent attempt to encroach upon a natural right. By the same token, to resist such an attempt by not respecting a putative ban on free philosophizing does not amount to disobeying a law. The notion of resistance thus enshrines the relative independence of a public sphere of free philosophizing from the sovereign power in terms of authority and right: when “resisting,” citizens assert their authority to speak their minds against a ruler attempting to deny them that inalienable natural right, which cannot be by law but only by violence.

Absolute States: Citizens, Counselors, Sovereign Powers

What kind of state can best accommodate a public sphere of free philosophizing? Spinoza is often hailed, by commentators of all stripes, as the first major modern philosopher to embrace democracy

1 TTP Preface, G III.8|C II.70.

2 Daniel Garber, mistakenly I think, takes the passage on the best citizen to indicate that “the wise (and virtuous) person will discuss the imperfections in the law in question only with the supreme power and refrain from a fully public discussion” (Garber, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” p. 170). I think Spinoza was opposed to such Machiavellian strategies of sovereign counsel, as were most other thinkers in the Dutch republican tradition. Garber is perhaps misled by the fact that he does not distinguish between resistance and rebellion. Whether citizens engage in (laudable) resistance or (condemnable) rebellion is not a matter of how publicly they express their disagreement, but of what kind of action they undertake: whether they use their inalienable natural authority to advise the sovereign power, or whether they usurp public authority to force the sovereign power into changing course.

3 In this respect, Spinoza is close to Lucius Antistius Constans who dedicates an entire chapter of his *De jure ecclesiasticorum* to debunk the idea that any class of citizens, and ecclesiastical citizens in particular, form a special class, but that they are all equal in their relation to the magistrate (Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, chap. IV, pp. 52–64).

4 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351.

5 TTP XX, G III.243–4|C II.349.

as a political ideal.¹ And the TTP does indeed favor democracy, including for reasons that relate to the promotion of free philosophizing. A free republic does, however, not necessarily require democracy. In the TP, at least, Spinoza clearly holds that freedom can be achieved in any form of state, including a monarchy, if only it is “well-ordered.”² This, however, can be accomplished only if the king is “most attentive to the well-being of the multitude”³ and willing to listen to his subjects and act for their advantage, i.e., to be “led by a nobility of spirit, to consult the public advantage [sive animi generositate ductus, ut scilicet utilitati publicae consulat].”⁴ In this way, “a multitude can preserve a full enough freedom under a king, so long as it brings it about that the king’s power is determined only by the power of the multitude, and is preserved by the multitude’s support.”⁵ What makes of a republic a free republic, then, is not the type of sovereign rule which, in principle, can take any basic form and still accommodate freedom, but the nature and scope of the contiguous structures of political counsel. It is the existence of structures of public consultation alongside the structures of sovereign rule which, as we can say it in Grotius’s terms, simultaneously ensures that the collective body of citizens is subjected to the constitutive rule of the sovereign power and that, conversely, the sovereign power is subjected to the directive rule of the collective body of citizens. In short, the political freedom a republic enjoys, be it monarchical, aristocratic or democratic, is directly correlated with the robustness and extent of the public sphere of free philosophizing it can muster.

A possible objection here provides an opportunity to better explain Spinoza’s thinking about free monarchies. For, elsewhere in the TP, Spinoza appears to discourage direct public consultation with the people in monarchies. He proposes the constitution of a council made up of only select men and stresses that “citizens will have no access to the king except through this council, to whom all claims and petitions are to be delivered, to be presented to the king.”⁶ Spinoza’s recommendation must, however, be seen in the light of the exact position that such a council occupies in relation to the king. In reality, because “the power of one man is quite unequal to bearing such a burden,” all monarchies are in practice “covert aristocracies,” with the prince and his council jointly assuming sovereignty.⁷ Indeed, Spinoza argues, “the king will not be permitted to decide anything about any matter unless he has first heard the opinion of this council.”⁸ Yet, he does not see this as dividing sovereignty or giving rise to what Hobbes describes with loathing as “mix’t government.”⁹ For this council only apparently constitutes something really distinct from the sovereign power. In practice, they together make up the single head of the body politic, with the king representing the mind and the council representing the senses—the eyes, the ears, etc.—of the commonwealth:

The king is absolutely to be considered as the mind of the commonwealth; but the council should be considered the mind’s external senses, as it were the body of the commonwealth, through which the mind conceives the condition of the state, and does what it decides is best for itself.¹⁰

Consequently, in Spinoza’s free monarchy, when a citizen summons the council in order to address the king, there is in reality no middleman, but this citizen literally—or at least as literally as Spinoza’s use of the traditional body politic analogy allows it to be—has the ear of the king.

1 See e.g. Strauss, “Progress or Return?,” p. 254; Feuer, Spinoza, pp. 65, 80–1; Balibar, Spinoza and Politics, pp. 25, 31–6; Smith, Spinoza, p. 131; Israel, Radical Enlightenment, p. 259; and Curley’s General Preface in C II, p. xv.

2 See Letter 84 where Spinoza describes the TP as dealing in part with “how a monarchic government must be set up, so as not to fall into tyranny” and with “the organization of a well-ordered monarchy” (Spinoza to [?], mid-1676, G IV.335|C II.488).

3 TP VI.8, G III.299|C II.534.

4 TP VI.11, G III.312|C II.512.

5 TP VII.31, G III.323|C II.563.

6 TP IV.19, G III.302|C II.537.

7 TP VI.5, G III.298|C II.533.

8 TP VI.17, G III.301|C II.537.

9 Hobbes, On the Citizen, vii.4, p. 93; Leviathan, XXIX, p. 512.

10 TP VI.19, G III.302|C II.537–8; compare with Hobbes, On the Citizen, vi.19, pp. 88–99: “the holder of sovereign power in the commonwealth ... has the relation to the commonwealth ... of the soul. The appropriate analogy for the head is rather the corps of counsellors.”

This is not, however, the only conclusion we can draw from the curious position that counselors occupy in the incorporated body of Spinoza's free monarchy. That position is, in fact, double. Like a sense organ, the council is, at the same time, connected to the mind of the king and to the body of the state apparatus by means of which the king governs. A monarch requires a large council of citizens.¹ The role of this council is double. First, it must "give advice about the things to be done, so that the king may know what he must decree for the public good."² Second, it must "look after the whole administration of the state, as deputies of the king."³ This is necessary because "the power of one man is quite unequal to the task of preserving a whole state." So, for that reason as well, "a king absolutely requires counselors."⁴

It is of some importance not to confuse these two functions, even when they are occupied by the same individuals. On this point, Spinoza is close to Grotius who also allows that the same individuals can be both counselors and deputies to a sovereign power, but distinguishes the conditions of authority under which they operate in each capacity. Hence, in the context of his discussion of ecclesiastical counselors, Grotius stresses that "pastors as such are subject, but not deputy," and "people who put great effort into proving that pastors are not deputies of the supreme powers are fighting against their own shadow: for who could be so ignorant as not to know that?" Still, "if these pastors receive some authority or jurisdiction besides their pastoral office, they may rightly be called deputies or delegates of the supreme authorities."⁵ Similarly, in Spinoza, when giving advice, counselors stand beside the king, so to speak, exercising their private natural authority to advise. When acting as "ministers" or "deputies," by contrast, they represent the public authority of the king, executing his will on his behalf.⁶ In the first case, the council exercises authority over the king; in the second, the king exercises authority over and via the council. As an advisory institution, the council does not enact statutes and decrees. It exercises only a directive rule, not a constitutive one, in Grotius's terms. As an executive institution, the council does not enact statutes and decrees either, but only enforces those already enacted by the king, fulfilling its "duty ... to defend the fundamental laws of the state."⁷ In this way, regardless of the function it fulfills, the council never assumes any independent constitutive rule which remains the sole prerogative of the king, thus maintaining the unity of sovereignty and the integrity of sovereign decision-making.

The construction just described represents the basic constitutional set-up of a well-ordered monarchy, and if only kings would follow these instructions, it "would yield great security to the king in his rule, and to the citizens in maintaining freedom and peace."⁸ In practice, however, such a well-ordered repartition of authority is very difficult to achieve under monarchical rule. It requires a noble sovereign with exceptional and justified confidence in his own subjects and administration. In reality, however, a king "will always fear his own citizens more than his enemies" and therefore "try to look out for himself, and ... plot against his subjects."⁹ His subjects will in turn engage in "murmuring and perverse interpretations" of his laws.¹⁰ For this reason, monarchical rule is almost always described in the TTP in negative terms, as deceptive, based on hidden decrees, leading to incessant civil unrest, and impossible to establish once people have lived under other circumstances, but also—as Spinoza takes

1 TP VII.15, G III.300–2|C II.536.

2 TP VI.17, G III.301|C II.537.

3 TP VI.18, G III.302|C II.537.

4 TP VIII.3, G III.325|C II.566; see also TP VI.5, G III.299|C II.533: "Anyone who believes that one man alone can control the supreme right of a commonwealth is greatly mistaken. ... That's why, when a multitude has chosen a king, he seeks commanders or counselors or friends, to whom he commits his own well-being and that of everyone else."

5 Grotius, *De imperio*, II, pp. 186–7.

6 For the notion of a "deputy" (vicarius) in charge of administering the commands of the sovereign power, see TTP XIX, G III.234|C II.339; TP VI.18, G III.302|C II.537. Spinoza also speaks of a "minister" (minister) of the state; see TTP XIX, G III.231|C II.335; see also TP IV.3, G III.292|C II.526.

7 TP VI.17, G III.301|C II.537.

8 TP VII.15, G III.314|C II.552.

9 TP VI.6, G III.299|C II.534.

10 TTP XX, G III.339|C II.345.

the English example to illustrate—exceedingly difficult to change when it is already in place, with successful uprisings only replacing the current monarch but rarely eliminating monarchy itself.¹

A democratic state form, by contrast, facilitates the establishment of a more balanced relationship between citizens, counselors, and sovereign powers. This is first of all because the same individuals all potentially figure everywhere in the political equation: a democracy is a state where citizens are all appointed to a sovereign citizen assembly where they can themselves contribute to political deliberation and decision-making.² In a democracy, any citizen has “the right to vote in the supreme council and to stand for political offices.”³ Moreover, “no one so transfers his natural right to another that in the future there is no consultation with him.”⁴ In a democracy, no citizen subjects himself to the constitutive rule of the sovereign power without simultaneously reserving for himself the right to exercise directive power over the sovereign power, i.e., a right to be “consulted.” No citizen is perpetually consigned to any given position within the structure, but can assume—albeit not at the same time or in the same capacity—all three basic roles in the state as subject, counsel, and sovereign power, alternately standing beneath, beside, and inside the structures of government. The three capacities line up, so to speak, because all citizens can equally assume them all. If Spinoza in the TP describes democracy as a “completely absolute state,”⁵ it is arguably because it allows for such complete alignment of civic capacities, potentially bestowing upon democracies superior peace and security.⁶ Indeed, in a democracy, for citizens to plot against the sovereign powers or intentionally interpret perversely their laws makes little sense, because it amounts to them plotting against themselves and perversely interpreting their own laws.

This understanding of Spinoza’s conception of absolute rule—i.e., in terms of alignment of civic capacities—allows for an instructive contrast between free monarchies and free democracies to be drawn. A state is increasingly absolute as the executive and the advisory structures align. In monarchies, this occurs when sovereigns exercise their power without consulting with their subjects, i.e., when they take advice only from themselves. An absolute monarchy will, obviously, be less free for the subjects: “it’s quite impossible to entrust the commonwealth to someone absolutely and at the same time maintain your freedom.”⁷ Still, the absolute monarch will feel—and indeed is—in constant danger of being overturned: “he must fear treachery every day. So he’s forced to look out for himself, and to set traps for the multitude, rather than look out for their interests.”⁸ As a state form, monarchy

1 See TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.68; TTP XVII, G III.205|C II.301; TTP XVII, G III.207|C II.304; TTP XVIII, G III.224|C II.325; TTP XVIII, G III.226–7|C II.328–30.

2 See TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287; see also TTP XX, G III.239|C II.345; TP VIII.1, G III.323|C II.564, and TP XI.1–2, G III.358|C II.601–2.

3 TP XI.1, G III.358|C II.602. In the TP, Spinoza allows that legal restrictions related to what is required for eligibility—legal standing, age, income, or other—can greatly diminish the proportion of citizens included. Oddly, however, he still wants to qualify as a “democracy” any state where voting rights and eligibility of public office are determined by law, no matter how small a proportion of the population the law will grant this civic privilege (TP XI.2, G III.358|C II.602). Before the text breaks off, we learn that, in the following never completed sections, Spinoza intended to focus exclusively on the kind of democracy where “everyone who is bound only by the laws ... and who is ... his own master and lives honorably, has the right to vote in the supreme council and to stand for political offices” (TP XI.3, G III.359|C II.602). While honorability is listed as a condition mostly to exclude convicted criminals, the requirement to be one’s own master prompts Spinoza’s infamous exclusion of women from voting rights and political office (TP XI.3–4, G III.359–60|C II.603–4). As Matheron notes in an insightful analysis, the demonstrable awfulness—on every level, logical, rhetorical, and ethical—of the argument Spinoza develops to that particular effect has tended to overshadow the systematic meaning of the requirement of self-mastery. See Matheron, “Femmes et serviteurs,” esp. pp. 287–8.

4 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

5 TP XI.1, G III.358|C II.601.

6 This, at any rate, is my suggestion. There is no clear consensus among commentators what “absolute” means in this context. For two very different but not necessarily incompatible analyses, see Secretan, “La démocratie absolue”; Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*, pp. 166–72. Steinberg focuses on irresistibility, independence, and indivisibility as the criteria of absolutism, including absolute democracy. I do not disagree, but it is important to realize that these “three ‘I’s of absolutism” are necessary effects rather than the root causes of absolutism—root causes that differ from one kind of government to another: in a monarchy, absolutism is caused by the concentration of all powers in the unitary figure of the king (and is ultimately unsustainable without violence); in a democracy, absolutism is caused by an alignment of powers between citizens, political advisors, and the sovereign power (and is in principle sustainable, but fragile). In both cases, the crucial point in the construction is the separation of the public, civil authority of enforcing laws and the private, natural authority of giving counsel—a separation that collapses in an absolute monarchy but is maintained and reinforced in an absolute democracy.

7 TP VII.29; G III.320–1|C II.560; see also TP VI.8, G III.299|C II.534: “a king is less his own master, and ... the condition of his subjects is more wretched, the more absolutely the right of the commonwealth is transferred to him.”

8 TP V.7, G III.297|C II.531; see also TP VII.5, G III.309|C II.547: “the multitude freely transfers to a king only what it cannot have absolutely in its power”; TP VII.14, G III.314|C II.552 (Spinoza quotes Antonio Pérez): “to exercise absolute rule is very dangerous for a Prince”; TP VII.23,

may be very hard to get rid of. But monarchs change and, depending on how they rule, they sit more or less firmly on their thrones. And a monarch attempting to govern absolutely by his own decision is bound to fail, whereas a noble monarch who consults with a large citizens' council about the public advantage, permitting them to express their judgment freely, is more likely to succeed in securing his own position. In this case, vesting the executive powers and the advisory powers in distinct persons, namely, respectively, the king and the citizens' council, will not only mean greater freedom for the citizens but also "yield great security to the king."¹ In other words, as a general rule, a monarchy is better ordered and less likely to be overturned the less absolute it is.

A democracy, by contrast, is better ordered the more absolute it is, i.e., the more all basic roles within society—subject, counselor, sovereign—are open to all and alternate between them.² And this is why "if there's any absolute rule, it's the rule which occurs when the whole multitude rules."³ A well-ordered absolute rule can in effect occur only in a republic where the subservient, advisory, and governing capacities are completely aligned, and all expanded to encompass the entire citizenry, i.e., in a democracy. This, however, also implies that democracies are, by their very nature, structurally inclined toward the creation of the contiguous structures of public consultation that define an open public sphere of free philosophizing. For, contrary to other state forms, the more democracies settle in their absolute form, the more they expand and generalize such structures of public consultation until, when "completely absolute," they align perfectly with the structures of popular sovereignty. We here come upon a first reason why democratic states, without necessarily being free, indeed far from it, still by nature include a tendency toward freedom, or prove more favorable to the creation of a public sphere of free philosophizing.

We must here make a brief additional note on how this conception of democracy relates to Spinoza's reading of the history of the Hebrew Republic. This theocratic regime was clearly not a democracy in the sense outlined earlier: its citizens held neither constitutive power of sovereignty nor directive power of counsel. Still, Spinoza makes the comparison for reasons having to do with the way it was first established. The Hebrew Republic came about when, after having left Egypt and become free to organize themselves as they pleased, the Jews "resolve[d], according to a common agreement, that they would obey only those commands which were revealed to them prophetically by God."⁴ I shall have more to say in Chapter 10 about what such a common agreement, or social contract, amounts to for Spinoza. However, he continues, by thus agreeing to obey God rather than a person or an assembly of persons, "everyone surrendered his right equally, as in a democracy."⁵ These passages are sometimes taken to imply that, for Spinoza, the Hebrew Republic was initially a democracy, indeed that all states are initially democracies. I shall argue in some detail in the next section why I think such a reading is mistaken. But, on closer inspection, this is also not what Spinoza argues in this specific passage. The reason why the Hebrew theocracy was in some respect comparable to a democracy was because the natural right that the Hebrews relinquished was not transferred to any individual or group of individuals among them, but equally to God. A genuine democracy requires, Spinoza explains in TTP V, that "everyone is bound to be subject to himself" but also that "no one is bound to be subject to his equal."⁶ And while the Hebrew Republic certainly did not satisfy the first condition—the Hebrews bound themselves to be subject to God alone—it did at least initially satisfy the second condition. For a brief moment, before Moses became like a monarch and, later, the high priests usurped power after the death of Moses, the Hebrews realized an alignment of civic capacities or political equality among all citizens otherwise found only in democracies—even if, in the Hebrews' case, that alignment

G III.317|C II.555: "The more absolutely the right to rule has been transferred to one person, the easier it is to transfer it from him to someone else."

¹ TP VII.15, G III.314|C II.552.

² In this way, I would restrict Justin Steinberg's general assumption that "civic harmony covaries with sovereign absolutism" to democratic states alone (see Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology*, pp. 165, 169–72).

³ TP VIII.3, G III.325|C II.566.

⁴ TTP XIX, G III.230|C II.334.

⁵ TTP XVII, G II.206|C II.303.

⁶ TTP V, G III.74|C II.144.

consisted only in them all being equally subjected to God, without any of them being either counsel to the sovereign or sovereign themselves. The democratic aspect of their theocracy consisted exclusively in the equality of their common submission to God.

Consensus and Collegiality

A democracy is, as Spinoza defines it in the TP, a state where “the responsibility for public affairs ... is the business of a council made up of the common multitude.”¹ The TTP describes such a council as a “general assembly” that holds “the supreme right over everything.”² But how is this council or general assembly founded and how does it operate? We can reconstruct Spinoza’s account on the basis of some very complex but also extremely carefully written passages in TTP V.

Spinoza first envisages an ideal society of men who desire “nothing except what true reason teaches them to desire.” Such a society “could exist without laws.” Members would need only “true moral lessons” that they would follow “spontaneously [sponte].”³ Such a society is not a civil state. It is a natural society where everyone spontaneously agrees about everything, where each part operates in unison with the constituted whole, so that whatever they all decide for themselves, *ex proprio consilio*, they also confirm for each other as a fully integrated community, *ex communi consensu*. In reality, however, human nature does not allow for such natural harmony, so “no society can continue in existence without authority and force, and hence, laws which moderate and restrain men’s immoderate desires and unchecked impulses.”⁴ Among such societies that cohere by means of authority and force—states, properly speaking—Spinoza distinguishes between those where sovereignty is held by the “whole society,” as opposed to those where it is held by “a few men” or “one man alone,” clearly alluding, respectively, to democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy.⁵

Within this classification, how does the democratic state differ from the natural society of truly rational men? Clearly, the two kinds of society have something in common. As we have already seen in the previous section, in a democracy, “everyone remains equal, as they were before, in the state of nature.”⁶ In both societies, power and right are equally vested in all. On the other hand, Spinoza’s constant denunciation of the anger and envy of the mob in the TTP makes it patently clear that he does not think that popular rule in itself represents an unconditional good.⁷ In fact, when Spinoza argues that democracy is “the most natural state, and the one which approached most nearly the freedom nature concedes to everyone,”⁸ or that “a democratic state ... comes closest to the natural condition,”⁹ this can be understood in two ways. For, depending on how well organized and regulated a democratic state is, the natural condition it approaches is not the same. A well-ordered democracy comes closest to the ideal natural society formed by individuals guided by true reason. A disorderly democracy, or mob rule, by contrast, comes closest to the wretchedness of an initial state of nature where everyone lives “according to the laws of appetite.”¹⁰ In either case, however, well ordered or disorderly, a democratic state is not a natural condition, no matter close it comes to it.¹¹ It is, by definition, a civil one where the execution of decisions is grounded in force and authority; it is a state form which, as every state form, is adopted to mitigate the debilitating effects of our human incapacity to curb our desires and reach unanimous rational decisions spontaneously. The question is how a democracy must function in order for it to “approach” the first natural condition rather than the second.

1 TP II.17, G III.282|C II.514.

2 TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287; trans. modified.

3 TTP V, G III.73|C II.144.

4 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144.

5 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144.

6 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

7 TTP XVIII, G III.225|C II.327; TTP XVIII, G III.236|C II.328; TTP XX, G III.245|C II.350; TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

8 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

9 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351.

10 TTP XVI, G III.198|C II.292.

11 Pace Antonio Negri who argues that “Spinozan democracy has no contractarian structure” but forms “a social practice of singularities that intersect in a masses process” (Negri, “*Reliqua Desiderantur*,” p. 237).

Now, in TTP V, Spinoza goes on to argue that “obedience has no place in a society where sovereignty is in the hands of everyone and laws are enacted by common agreement [communi consensu sancuntur].” For, in this case, “the people nevertheless remains equally free, because it does not act from the authority of someone else, but by its own agreement [ex proprio suo consensu agit].”¹ These passages could suggest that decision-making by common agreement represents a specific feature of democracy. In TP II, however, Spinoza is clear that all state forms are initially founded on common agreement and that the difference between them concerns only whom this common agreement vests sovereignty in, whether it is the common multitude, certain select men, or one person:

Whoever, by common agreement, has responsibility for public affairs ... has this right absolutely. If this responsibility is the business of a council made up of the common multitude, then the state is called a democracy; if the council is made up only of certain select people, it’s called an Aristocracy; and finally, if the responsibility for public affairs, and hence sovereignty, is vested in one person, it’s called a monarchy.²

Should we then conclude that Spinoza’s position evolved from one work to the other on this point, as it did on others?

I think not. We must here turn to a passage in TTP V where Spinoza evokes yet another principle of deliberation and decision, namely the principle of collegiality. In a democracy, he argues, “the whole society should hold sovereignty collegially [collegialiter] (if this can be done), so that everyone is bound to be subject to himself, and no one is bound to be subject to his equal.”³ Spinoza repeats this on several occasions while discussing democracy in TTP XVI: a democracy is defined as a “general assembly of men who hold the supreme right collegially [collegialiter] over everything in its power”⁴ and “a democratic state ... is held collegially [collegialiter] by the whole or a large part of the people.”⁵ Now, collegiality is the common corporate principle according to which, when deciding about something, all members of a collegium must confirm and adhere to the decisions of the majority. Johannes Althusius—the political thinker in Spinoza’s seventeenth-century Dutch context who developed the most elaborate theory of collegiality—gives extensive treatment to this principle in an expanded analysis included in the 1614 edition of his *Politica methodice*. A collegium, as he defines it, is “a body organized by assembled persons [who] agree among themselves by common consent on a manner of ruling [communis consensus, de modo regendi].”⁶ In a collegium established as an equal society, that manner of ruling involves first of all an obligation to defer to the majority: “A majority [major pars] of all assembled colleagues binds the minority [minore] by its vote in those matters common to all [omnes] colleagues or pertaining jointly and wholly to the colleagues as a united group [universos].”⁷ The principle of collegiality thus establishes that decisions are made by the majority, but enacted or confirmed by all in virtue of an initial common agreement to adhere to and obey majority decisions. For, as Althusius formulates the foundational principle of a collegium, “the common right [jus commune] of the collegium or the colleagues ... is ... received from and maintained by the common consent [ex communi ... consensu] of the colleagues.”⁸ This is also why “the colleagues, on the basis of this right that is accepted by their common consent [ex ... communi ... consensu], can be fined whenever they commit anything against the laws of the collegium.”⁹

1 TTP V, G III.74|C II.145; both passages modified.

2 TP II.17, G III.282|C II.514; my italics.

3 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144; trans. modified. Curley everywhere translates collegialiter as “as a body.” The translation does a good job in avoiding the connotations of amicable workplace relations today associated with “collegiality.” But it glosses over the fact that “collegiality” was—and still is—a technical term of both political and juridical thought which is clearly operative in Spinoza’s texts. On one occasion, Susan James opts for “corporately,” which is an acceptable compromise that maintains part of the technical sense while avoiding some of the awkwardness of using the legal term (see James, *Democracy and the Good Life*, p. 139).

4 TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287; trans. modified.

5 TTP XX, G III.239|C II.345; trans. modified.

6 Althusius, *Politica*, IV, §§1–5, pp. 45–6, trans. Carney, p. 34.

7 Althusius, *Politica*, IV, §18, p. 51, trans. Carney, p. 50.

8 Althusius, *Politica*, IV, §17, 50, trans. Carney, pp. 36–7.

9 Althusius, *Politica*, IV, §22, p. 52, trans. Carney, p. 37.

Adopting collegiality as the principle of democratic deliberation and decision-making is, for Spinoza, a necessary concession to the irreducible differences in judgment among citizens who are less than fully rational. How is a large assembly such as the citizen assembly of a democracy ever going to decide by universal agreement about anything given that “not all men can equally think the same things”?¹ In practice, as Spinoza succinctly explains the principle of collegiality in TTP XX,

in councils, both of the supreme powers and of lesser powers, it's rare for anything to be done by the common vote of all the members; nevertheless everything is done according to the common decision of all, both of those who voted for it and of those who voted against.²

The democratic process of deliberation and decision, via the principle of collegiality, is thus not consensus-seeking but dissensus-mitigating. As Spinoza also puts it, “in a democratic state ... everyone contracts to act according to the common decision, but not to judge and reason according to the common decision.”³ Common commitment to the principle of collegiality ensures that all citizens will act as if they all agreed, i.e., in unison, even when in fact they do not. This universal commitment is a condition of the effective unity of the democratic state, for “the body of the state must be guided as if by one mind” which requires that “what the commonwealth has decreed ... must be thought of as having been decreed by each [citizen]. So, though the subject may think the decrees of the commonwealth unfair, he's nevertheless bound to carry them out.”⁴

A democratic process of decision-making and deliberation thus operates by collegiality and majority rule. But a democratic republic is still founded on common agreement, i.e., an initial common agreement to follow the majority. By the same token, majority decisions are always confirmed or ratified by implicit common agreement. Terminologically, Spinoza navigates these distinctions by generally using the verbs *consiliare* and *deliberare*, “to consult” and “to deliberate,” whenever decision-making processes are concerned, and the verbs *sancire*, *decretare* or *decernere*, and *exequi*, i.e., “to confirm,” “to decree,” and “to carry out,” whenever the enactment or confirmation of decisions is concerned. Consequently, when arguing in TTP V that, in a democracy, “laws are enacted [*sanciantur*] by common agreement,”⁵ he is not arguing that democratic decision-making operates by common agreement, for it operates by majority rule. He is arguing that democratically made decisions must be confirmed or ratified by all in virtue of a universal commitment to such majority rule within the general assembly.

Structural evidence in favor of this reading can be found as well. For, if we understand Spinoza's notion that a democracy is governed collegialiter by the people along these lines, it accounts for an otherwise uncomfortable discrepancy between different formulations in the TTP about how a democratic state is contracted. In a democracy, Spinoza explains in one passage, “each person transfers all the power he has to society” so that “society alone will have sovereignty.”⁶ In another passage, however, he offers a more complex construction according to which each individual “transfers [his natural right] to the greater part of the whole society, of which he makes one part.”⁷ On one account, the transfer is made to the whole; on the other, it is made to the greater part of the whole. How are we to reconcile these two positions? The answer, of course, is that all individuals agree to transfer their power to the whole but on the understanding that, in each case, the exercise of that collective power will be determined by the greater part of the whole, i.e., by the principle of collegiality prescribing that the whole assembly must abide in the decisions of its major part.⁸

1 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.373.

2 TTP XX, G III.242|C II.347.

3 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351.

4 TP III.6, G III.287|C II.519; trans. modified. Curley has “decided” for *decernit*.

5 TTP V, G III.74|C II.145; trans. modified.

6 TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287; trans. modified.

7 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

8 Spinoza, to my knowledge, has little to say on the topic, but it is worth pointing out that this does not imply that it is always the same greater part that decides, or that some given smaller part is always excluded from decision-making. The “greater part” is a fluid entity that shifts in proportion, distribution, and configuration among the members of the general assembly, who renegotiate it from one case to the

The decision-making collegialiter characteristic only of democracies should thus not be confused with the foundations *ex communi consensu* shared by all republics, including democratic ones. On this point I diverge from an influential interpretation offered by Alexandre Matheron.¹ Matheron argues that since all states are originally established by common agreement, they are all initially founded as, and subsequently derived from, a sort of provisional democracy. On the view I defend here, on the contrary, a common agreement to adopt some shared principle of deliberation and decision, whatever that principle is, is the republican foundation of any kind of state. What is specific for a democratic state is only that it adopts majority rule as its shared principle of deliberation and decision. This holds for the TTP as well as for the TP. It just so happens that, in the TTP, Spinoza chooses to focus on democracy and “pass over the foundations of the other forms of power,”² thus leaving to one side the foundations of monarchical or aristocratic republics. In the TTP, he analyzes only one other state foundation in detail, namely the specifically theocratic foundations of the Hebrew Republic, and he does so mainly to point out similitudes and differences that help him better explain the specificity of a democracy.

Matheron, of course, has reasons for not distinguishing between the republican foundation of all kinds of states and the principle of decision-making in democratic states. According to him, Spinoza takes his cue from Hobbes’s *De Cive*, chapter VII, where Hobbes complicates the difference between foundational common agreement and democratic majority rule:

When men have met to erect a commonwealth, they are, almost by the very fact that they have met, a democracy. From the fact that they have gathered voluntarily, they are understood to be bound by decisions made by agreement of the majority.³

Hobbes’s idea is that, whenever people seek to come to a common agreement about some shared principle of deliberation and decision, this in and by itself implies a commitment to majority rule, whatever decision they may eventually reach about which principle to adopt, be it democratic, aristocratic, or monarchical. It is a principle that Hobbes also subscribes to in the *Leviathan*, but now—importantly—without associating it specifically with democratic rule: “A Commonwealth is said to be Instituted, when a Multitude of men do Agree, and Covenant, Every One With Every One, that to whatsoever Man, or Assembly Of Men, shall be given by the major part, the Right to Present the Person of them all.”⁴ Through this foundational mechanism, majority rule subsequently becomes embedded in any kind of state, expressed in the form of majority rule among those who hold sovereignty (in a monarchy, presumably, the monarch decides by a majority of one).

For Hobbes, there is thus some pre-societal, natural disposition to submit to majority rule among those people who gather to form a society. The principle is similar to what we also find in Grotius’s *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, book II, chapter 5:

[Public societies] all ... have this in common to them, that in Matters for which each Association was instituted, the whole Body, or the major Part in the Name of the whole Body, oblige all and every the particular Members of the Society. For it is certainly to be presumed, that those who enter into a Society are willing that there should be some Method fixed of deciding Affairs; but it is altogether unreasonable, that a greater Number should be governed by a less; and

next. Consequently, the decisions of the whole society are—except perhaps in times of extreme political partisanship—determined by a constantly renegotiated greater part. For, as Kisner puts it, “majority rule ... provides political actors with incentives to attend to the concerns of others” (Spinoza on Human Freedom, p. 215).

1 Matheron, “La fonction théorique”; and e.g. Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, p. 221.

2 TTP XVI, G III.195 | C II.289–90.

3 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vii.5, p. 94; see also Matheron, “La fonction théorique,” p. 156.

4 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XVIII, p. 264; see also XVIII, p. 268: “Institution Of The Sovereigne [is] Declared By The Major Part ... because the major part hath by consenting voices declared a Sovereigne; he that dissented must now consent with the rest”; and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXII, p. 352: “if the Representative [in a Body Politique] be an Assembly, whatsoever that Assembly shall Decree ... is the act of the Assembly, or Body Politique, and the act of every one by whose Vote the Decree was made; but not the act of any man that being present Voted to the contrary It is the act of the Assembly, because Voted by the major part.”

therefore, tho' there were no Contracts or Laws that regulate the Manner of determining Affairs, the Majority would naturally have the Right and Authority of the Whole.¹

Grotius can support the notion of such a reasonable pre-societal inclination toward majority rule by reference to his Aristotelian understanding of human nature and natural right, which denies “that every Creature is led by Nature to seek its own private Advantage”² and affirms that natural right is “the Rule and Dictate of Right Reason.”³ For Hobbes, however, human beings are naturally led by nature to seek their own private advantage: “each man is drawn to that which is Good for him and to avoid what is Bad for him.”⁴ Under those conditions, it seems a blatant petition of principle to hold, as Hobbes in effect does in *De Cive* when it comes to democratic states, that a majority decision can be an effective or even possible way to establish majority rule as the principle of decision-making. And I suspect that if Hobbes in the *Leviathan* no longer seems to associate majority rule with democracy at all, it is to address that problem.

However, we should not saddle Spinoza—whose understanding of the state of nature and human nature is considerably closer to Hobbes’s than to Grotius’s—with a position similar to the logically defective position found in *De Cive* without conclusive, textual evidence. Fortunately, clever as it is, Matheron’s analysis produces no such evidence. In fact, when turning to TP II–III, where Spinoza explains in greatest detail the natural basis of states generally, there is only ever a question of common agreement, never of collegiality or majority rule. Sovereignty establishes the responsibility for public affairs “by common agreement [*ex communi consensu*].”⁵ In order for human beings to be “led as if by one mind” and “to have common rights,” they must “live according to the common opinion of all [*ex communi omnium sententia vivere*],” so that “whatever [someone] is commanded to do according to the common agreement [*ex communi consensu*], he’s bound to carry out—or (by §4) is rightly compelled to do.”⁶ For Spinoza, “men are guided by nature to unite in one aim [*in unum conspirare*].”⁷ He never suggests that men are guided by nature to unite around majority decisions! And if we turn to the TTP, there is no passage where Spinoza evokes the principle of collegiality except when speaking specifically of democratic deliberation and decision-making. In relation to the foundation of democracy, by contrast, he only ever speaks of common agreement.

This given, I think we do Spinoza’s overall position better justice by clearly separating the principles of common agreement at the foundation of all republics from the principles of collegiality or majority rule which, for Spinoza, remain at the heart of the democratic process of deliberation and decision-making.⁸ In order to address the problem of *De Cive*, Hobbes in the *Leviathan* embeds majority rule in any common agreement, but dissociates majority rule from democracy; in order to address the exact same problem, Spinoza, by contrast, separates majority rule from common agreement, but maintains the association of majority rule with democracy.

Mob Rule and Free Democracy

Equipped with this brief analysis of Spinoza’s conception of the democratic process, we can now return to the issue with which we also began the previous section: the difference between a free democracy and simple mob rule. As we have seen, a democracy is more absolute as it develops capacities of public consultation that are increasingly aligned with those of the sovereign power. For this reason, a

1 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, II, chap. 5, pp. 545–6. Grotius does not associate the principle of majority rule with democracy here, but he does so later at II, chap. 20, p. 1553: “In an Aristocracy, or Democracy, the Power of making Peace shall be in the major Part ... Therefore Things thus agreed upon, shall be obligatory even upon those who dissented from them.”

2 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, Preliminary Discourse, sect. VI, p. 81.

3 Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*, I, i, sect. 10, p. 150.

4 Hobbes, *On The Citizen*, i.7, p. 27.

5 TP II.17, G III.282|C II.514.

6 TP II.15–16, G III.281|C II.514; see also TP III.2, G III.284–5|C II.517.

7 TP III.9, G III.288|C II.521.

8 The necessity of such unanimous agreement for founding a state could, on the face of it, appear as an impossibly high bar to set, but we shall have occasion in Chapter 10 (sect. “The Contract as a Foundational Narrative”) to get a better understanding of what such common agreement in fact amounts to, which is neither a logical condition nor a historical event, but a doctrine designed to structure the collective imagination.

democratic state tends to remove obstacles to the freedom of philosophizing that are more likely to exist in other state forms. Specifically, it is unlikely to engage in violent rule, i.e., the violent repression of citizens' natural right to speak their minds, because doing so conflicts with its very form.

This advantage, however, also applies to mob rule. If Spinoza's conception of violent rule is his version of the traditional conception of tyranny, mob rule is his version of the traditional conception of anarchy. The mob does, however, play a role in both. As we already know from Chapter 6, violent rulers use the mob to impose by violence what they cannot enforce by law, namely suppress citizens' natural right to speak their minds: "that government which makes it a crime to hold opinions—which each person has a right to hold, a right no one can surrender—is the most violent of all. Indeed, when this happens, what rules most is the anger of the mob."¹ Thus orienting popular anger toward a given target requires "a certain grim authority"—indirect mind control and manipulation—which can "easily change the devotion of a seditious mob to madness, and rouse it against whomever they wish to."² A violent ruler thus rules by means of the mob, as a tyrant. Such a rule is highly restrictive: nothing is permitted. By contrast, genuine mob rule—that is to say, a state where the mob rules itself—will rather descend into a disorderly condition of general license:

Those who've experienced how changeable the mentality of the multitude is almost despair about it. They're governed only by affects, not by reason. Rushing headlong toward everything, they're easily corrupted either by greed or by extravagant living. Everyone thinks that he alone knows everything, and wants everything to be done according to his mentality. He thinks a thing fair or unfair, permissible or impermissible [fasque nefasque], just to the extent that he judges it brings him profit or loss.³

Mob rule is thus one extreme on a spectrum of undesirable state forms whose other extreme is violent monarchical rule where "each depends on what the monarch says and only from that [understands] what is permissible and impermissible [fas nefasque]."⁴ Everything is allowed under mob rule. More precisely, everyone uses the public authority they have acquired to issue permissions to themselves: "everyone could assume a license to do anything."⁵ For each and every citizen, private advantage becomes the norm of public right. Mob rule can thus be understood as a kind of chaotic democracy where everyone decides *ex proprio consilio*, making it impossible for any efficient decision-making process to ever emerge. In fact, it is barely a state at all. It lacks the incorporation of the sovereign general assembly or council required for it to acquire proper unity; it is an "assembly [coetus] of a disorderly multitude" where the sovereign power is "in the hands of each of its members" rather than in the hands of a "council as a single body [unum veluti corpus]."⁶ Genuine incorporation of a democratic council—indeed, of any kind of sovereign power—can only come about through universal commitment to a shared principle of decision-making. And in the case of a democracy, that principle is by definition that of collegiality. The incorporation of the general multitude that sets an integrated, unified democracy apart from the disintegrating anarchy of mob rule is thus the effectiveness with which it manages to implement the principle of collegiality in the general assembly.

Admittedly, even if it tends to make society disintegrate altogether, mob rule does eliminate obstacles to freedom that potentially remain in other state forms: at least the mob is unlikely to become its own violent ruler. Still, mob rule is not free. Being beholden only to oneself in the sense of being able to grant oneself permission to do whatever one desires is not at all the same as being determined by oneself in accordance with reason. The same point, however, also applies to a democratic state. A state is an integrated democracy if everyone agrees to abide by the decisions of the majority. But if

¹ TTP XVIII, G III.225|C II.327; see also TTP XVIII, G III.226|C II.328: "we see ... how necessary it is ... for the republic ... to grant the supreme powers the right to distinguish between what is permissible and what is not [fas nefasque]."

² TTP XX, G III.245|C II.350.

³ TTP XVII, G III.203|C II.298–9.

⁴ TTP XVII, G III.207|C II.304.

⁵ TTP XVI, G III.199|C II.295.

⁶ TP VIII.19, G III.331|C II.572; trans. modified. Curley has "as a whole" for "unum veluti corpus." Compare also with Hobbes's remarks on the difference between a democracy and a disorganized crowd in *On the Citizen*, vii.5, p. 94.

the majority makes decisions that are contrary to reason, that democracy is not free. Some version of rational self-determination is required for any state to earn the qualification “free.” Common possession of “true reason” as described in TTP V would, of course, bring such freedom about. But, apart from it being an excessively tall order, a society of such truly rational people requires no structures of sovereignty. It is free but it is not a state. A fortiori, it is not a free democratic state either. In order for a democracy to earn the qualification “free,” some other principle of collective rationalization must therefore operate within it. And Spinoza is quite clear what that consists in: “that republic is most free whose laws are founded on sound reason.”¹

Now, by “sound reason,” we recall, Spinoza understands the actualization of the “natural light common to all.”² It is less concerned with the adequate knowledge that stems from geometrical demonstration than with the kind of moral certainty Spinoza associates with practical reasoning. Sound reason is knowledge of such “true principle[s] of living” that allow people to acquire a “virtuous disposition.”³ It has a somewhat provisional status: in the absence of true reason or complete adequate knowledge, sound reason allows us “to conceive a right way of living, or sure doctrines of life.”⁴ Sound reason enshrines those basic principles of communal life which, by the fact that citizens subject themselves to them and embrace them, allow them to live and act in accordance with their rational self-interest even when they do not possess the requisite adequate knowledge to recognize what that consists in. We learn these “doctrines of life” largely from experience and history, from hearsay and good education. I shall have more to say about them in Chapters 9 and 10. Here, we should only note the following. First, a state founded on “sound reason” realizes a less ambitious form of freedom than the one that obtains in a society of free men living according to “true reason,” which in fact is not a state at all. Still, in a state, sound reason is sufficient to regulate citizens’ behavior toward a well-ordered society or to make them act as if they were rational. Second, the collective acquisition of sound reason happens through the teaching of doctrines, which in turn necessitates that institutions and collective structures of discourse exist within which such teaching can take place. In other words, a free democracy requires the existence of designated contexts within which citizens can exercise their natural authority to teach and advise. This is why a democratic republic cannot be free without the freedom of philosophizing. It is because it is within a public sphere of free philosophizing that the “sound reason” that will earn a democracy the qualification “free” can develop. The common acquisition of sound reason through free philosophizing liberates democracy.

But does democracy not also, and conversely, advance the use of sound reason and free philosophizing? The question is—and this will be the last problem to tackle in our investigation of Spinoza’s understanding of democracy—whether there is not something in the form of decision-making that characterizes a successfully incorporated democracy—i.e., collegiality and majority rule—that also favors decisions made on the basis of sound reason. Spinoza seems to think so: “in a democratic state, absurdities are less to be feared. If the assembly is large, it’s almost impossible that the majority of its members should agree on one absurd action.”⁵ Indeed, “[the] foundation and end [of a democratic state] are precisely to avoid the absurdities of appetite, and to confine men within the limits of reason, as far as possible, so that they may live harmoniously and peacefully.”⁶ On a first reading, these assertions appear patently contrary to experience. How often does it not happen that a political majority imposes absurd decisions? Spinoza’s point, however, is not that whatever all citizens in a democracy decide by majority rule must, in virtue of that majority alone, be more rational. The point is, on the contrary, that if decisions follow the majority in a democracy, those decisions must

1 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289; my italics.

2 See Chapter 3, sect. “Sound Judgment and Right Reason.”

3 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283; see also TTP XVI, C III.190|C II.284, where Spinoza opposes acting “under the guidance of sound reason” to acting “by the prompting of the affects.”

4 E5p10s, G II.287|C I.601; trans. modified.

5 TTP XVI, G III.194|C II.288.

6 TTP XVI, G III.194|C II.288.

still be made in consultation with everyone. And it is this general consultation with everyone that necessarily involves processes of collective rationalization.

How can we get to that conclusion? As we recall, in a democracy as Spinoza understands it, any citizen has “the right to vote in the supreme council”¹ but also “no one so transfers his natural right to another that in the future there is no consultation with him.”² The crucial and original contribution of Spinoza here lies in the second clause, and the relation between the governing majority and adjacent structures of general public consultation that it involves. In democratic decision-making, the greater part makes (constitutive) decisions that the whole must confirm, but the whole still retains (directive) advisory power with regard to the greater part. This is how the sovereign and advisory capacities of all citizens come to be aligned in a fully developed participatory democracy. It is also Spinoza’s reply to the worry, as formulated by Susan James, “that even an individual with a voice in the sovereign assembly of a state may become part of an entrenched minority that is persistently subject to the will of a majority” which will “effectively enslave them to the will of the majority.”³ For, as James puts it in somewhat less technical terms of “influence” and “help,” if the majority submits to the directive rule of everyone, i.e., takes their advice, “no one is forced to conform to the command of a sovereign power over whom they have no influence. Instead, each person obeys laws that they themselves have helped to make.”⁴ The major part rules, but the minor part always maintains the right to be consulted, in virtue of being a part of the whole. And as a result of this process of general consultation between the majority and the minority, the decisions eventually taken by the majority will gain in rationality, for “by asking advice, listening, and arguing, [human wits] are sharpened.”⁵

The designated context for this mechanism of democratic participation, of public consultation between the governing majority and remaining minority, just is the public sphere of free philosophizing as constituted within a fully developed democracy. As a function of the alignment of civic capacities that characterizes it in its absolute form, democracy facilitates the emergence of a public sphere of general consultation where all citizens—no matter whether they represent the majority or a minority—can exercise their natural authority to teach and advise vis-à-vis the governing majority. And if processes of rationalization necessarily occur within such a sphere, it is because it is highly regulated, subject to all the rules of free philosophizing exemplified by the apostolic epistolary style: rules of candor, argumentation, reasoning, equality, falsifiability, and so on. And this explains why it is unlikely that the majority should agree on an absurd decision in a free democracy. It is not because they are the majority. It is because, even though they are the majority, they are still bound to take advice from everyone, including from those who are not part of the majority, through a mechanism of general public consultation which is regulated by rules tending to “confine men within the limits of reason.”

A democratic state where the adjacent public sphere of free philosophizing is not sufficiently robust, and where those who participate in public deliberation do not abide by the rules that apply within it, will tend to slide into mob rule. The impression of some commentators, that Spinoza’s commitment to democracy is somewhat mitigated stems from this important requirement.⁶ Still, the emergence of a public sphere of free philosophizing is facilitated by democracy because of the prospect of broad public consultation built into its very form. Spinoza’s commitment to democracy is thus not half-hearted. It is conditional: he embraces democracy only to the extent that it manages to effectively create the sphere of free philosophizing within which those processes of rationalization can develop—the emergence of collective sound reason through mutual teaching and advising—that are necessary to elevate a people from an ignorant mob to an informed citizenry worth consulting.

1 TP XI.1, G III.358|C II.602.

2 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

3 James, Spinoza, p. 253.

4 James, Spinoza, p. 235.

5 TP IX.14, G III.352|C II.594.

6 For a list, including Leo Strauss, Lewis Feuer, Douglas Den Yul, Steven B. Smith, Yitzhak Melamed, and Raia Prokhovnik, see Steinberg, Spinoza’s Political Psychology, pp. 163–4.

Conclusion: Wise Merchants

In a free republic of whatever form, be it monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic, citizens should not just live as subjects under a sovereign power. They should also take up a place next to the sovereign power as public counselors and constitute a source of independent political advice. Through free philosophizing, citizens must raise themselves to the point where they can confidently contribute to public, political deliberation. In his own context, Spinoza was far from alone in advancing such ideals of a politically active citizenry. They are part of a common heritage in the Dutch republican tradition. For example, in their writings, the brothers De la Court mount a frontal attack on courtly systems of political and ecclesiastical counsel by proposing the establishment of more direct channels between government and citizens, enlisting the whole emerging class of well-educated and financially independent citizens to contribute actively to the constitution of true republicanism.¹

In his famous 1632 inaugural lecture at the Illustrious School of Amsterdam, the Mercator sapiens, Caspar Barlaeus names this emerging class of citizens the “wise merchants.”² The wise merchant is someone capable of a rationally moderated and balanced pursuit of riches. He engages in commercial exchanges while adhering to values of sincerity, trustworthiness, and good faith. These values also make him a valuable citizen. As Weststeijn puts it, the wise merchant is someone “who masters as no other the proper *parrhêsia* for entering the marketplace of public political debate, and thus ... fulfils the prime prerequisite of a truly civic life.”³ The De la Court brothers quite clearly adopt this ideal in their conception of how to conduct public debate.⁴ But Spinoza arguably does as well. In this context, Catherine Secretan juxtaposes the passage in the TTP where Spinoza praises Amsterdam as “this most flourishing republic, this most outstanding city, [where] all men, no matter their nation or sect, live in the greatest harmony” with a parallel passage in the Mercator sapiens where Barlaeus praises Amsterdam as a “fortunate republic” where “merchants are now allowed to philosophize and philosophers to conduct trade.”⁵ Now, the passage from Spinoza quoted by Secretan mostly aims at stressing the lack of importance that the Amsterdammers allegedly gave to religion in their public dealings. It is, however, instructive to note what Spinoza goes on to say immediately after about what they did in fact find important, which gives even more weight to Secretan’s comparison: “when they entrust their goods to someone, the only thing they care to know is whether the person is rich or poor, and whether he usually acts in good faith or not.”⁶ The ideals that Spinoza holds up are clearly related to those of honest commerce.

It is equally clear that his conception of how a public sphere of free philosophizing should function is colored by these same ideals of honest commerce. Indeed, many of the virtues that Spinoza associates with free philosophizing—practical rationality, honesty, equality, candor—converge with those Barlaeus identifies in “a merchant of upright and good character [who] distinguishes virtue from vice as he distinguishes bad from good merchandise.”⁷ In trade relations, merchants must learn to recognize how “important it is, even if the deceit would be hard to detect, not to want to deceive, and to be sincere and truthful”;⁸ they must follow Cicero’s recommendations in *De officiis* and marry the

1 Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 190. This ideal citizen is, for example, nicely captured in the preface to Pieter de la Court’s *True Interest of Holland*, in the author’s account of what brought him to undertake the work: “Whereas from my tender years I had been delighted with nothing more than the study of history, philosophy and political government, I soon concluded that one of these would be very much conducing to my present purpose and recreation. And whilst I was deliberating with myself about the choice, I was desired by some good friends to set down in writing such political thoughts as I had at several times communicated to them. Partly therefore for my own sake, and partly for the satisfaction of those to whom I owed the greatest deference, I undertook, among other things, to consider the fundamental maxims of the republic” (De la Court, *The True Interests*, preface, pp. iii–iv).

2 On the mercator sapiens, see Post, “Introduction”; Van Miert, *Humanism*, pp. 226–8; Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, pp. 184–90; Secretan, “Introduction [to Barlaeus]”; Secretan, “La démocratie absolue,” pp. 352–3.

3 Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 188.

4 Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, pp. 139–40.

5 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352 (trans. modified), and Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 116–17. See Secretan, “Introduction [to Barlaeus],” in *Le Marchand philosophe*.

6 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

7 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 88–9; see also Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 187.

8 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 92–3.

useful with the honorable;¹ they must learn “to do business more strictly”;² they must become like the “ancient Romans who like sincerity, simplicity, candour, and who dislike cunning and deceit,”³ for “a good man will neither simulate nor dissimulate anything to make a better purchase or sale.”⁴ Incidentally, this explains why Spinoza was first duped into engaging in correspondence with Willem van Blijenbergh and why he first replied to him as a “very welcome friend,” expressing the resolve “to do everything on my part to bring us to a closer acquaintance and genuine friendship.”⁵ For Blijenbergh initially presented himself with all the attributes of a wise merchant: “I am a free person, not dependent on any profession, supporting myself by honest trade and devoting my spare time to these matters.”⁶

The mercantile analogy is, however, to be handled with some caution. Commentators sometimes evoke John Stuart Mill’s notion of a “marketplace of ideas” in his 1859 *On Liberty* to describe Spinoza’s freedom of philosophizing.⁷ And, anachronism aside, the proximity between Spinoza’s best citizen and Barlaeus’s wise merchant gives some credence to the idea that something akin to market forces plays a role in the discursive dynamic of free philosophizing. Suggestive as the comparison to Mill is, one should, however, be cautious about pushing the analogy too far. In my concluding Chapter 12, I shall argue that, when it comes to deploying helpful analytical anachronisms, it is more instructive—with regard to both systematic similitudes and differences—to compare Spinoza’s understanding of the freedom of philosophizing with Kant’s conception of the “public use of reason” and, by extension, with Habermas’s conception of an ideal public sphere or “universal auditorium” where only the “better argument” reigns. In fact, Barlaeus already does not depict the wise merchant as being wise in virtue of being a merchant but, on the contrary, as being wise in virtue of moral principles of honest commerce that entirely transcend economic interest, for “the wise have revealed that wealth should be estimated not with a valuation, but by one’s way of life and one’s culture.”⁸ Merchants, Barlaeus argues, should be “eager for money, but without detriment to a better pursuit, that is: the pursuit of the arts and virtue.”⁹ They should learn “not to condemn the pursuit of wealth, but to keep it in check with the brake of reason.”¹⁰ They should “assuage the transience of the riches they possess with the knowledge of the arts and perpetuity of their names.”¹¹ Balancing the pursuit of riches against the acquisition of learning earns greater happiness in this life. For when “the wise man ... admonishes the trader that he should take care not to want too much,”¹² the trader will learn that moderation will bring contentment, while insatiable desire for ever more riches will render even the richest man poor. Indeed, Barlaeus exclaims, “the more brightly a merchant can philosophize, the luckier I will deem him.”¹³ Similarly, when joining his fellow Dutch republicans in conjuring up the figure of the wise merchant as someone particularly apt to engage in free philosophizing, Spinoza is not suggesting that there is something inherently virtuous about market mechanisms. After all, in the *TdIE*, he declares the pursuit of wealth for itself “empty and futile.”¹⁴ And, in a passage of the *Ethics* that strongly resonates with Barlaeus’s admonitions in the *Mercator sapiens*, he stresses that “those ... who know the true use of money, and set bounds to their wealth according to need, live contentedly with

1 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 92–5, 98–9.

2 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 94–5.

3 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 98–9.

4 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 98–9.

5 Spinoza to Blijenbergh, January 5, 1665, Letter 19, G IV.86|C I.357.

6 Blijenbergh to Spinoza, December 12, 1664, Letter 18, G IV.86|C I.357.

7 Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 209; Nadler, “Spinoza’s Vision.” For other comparisons to Mill, see Feuer, *Spinoza*, p. 116; and Smith, *Spinoza*, pp. 198–9. For a strong criticism of such comparisons and, more generally, of any assimilation of Spinoza’s position to Mill’s liberal individualism, see Cooper, “Freedom of Speech.” For an entirely different way of making the analogy between knowledge exchange and commerce in Spinoza, with no mention of Mill, see Rovere, “Avoir commerce.”

8 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 86–7; see also Post, “Introduction.”

9 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 70–1.

10 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 76–7.

11 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 74–5.

12 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 84–5.

13 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 76–7.

14 *TdIE*, §1–3, G II.5|C I.7–8.

little.”¹ He is only suggesting that the way in which the exchange of ideas in the public sphere can be regulated with wisdom and virtue bears similarities to the way in which the exchange of goods in the marketplace can be regulated with wisdom and virtue.

As Beth Lord argues in an insightful paper, Spinoza thus generally “resists the conflation of virtue with mercantile values.” Instead, he teaches his merchant friends “how to navigate a market society without allowing the values of the market to define virtue and freedom.”² In this way, Lord pursues, “the burgher should act nobly and honorably in commerce, with the principal aim not of increasing his wealth, but of developing rational friendship in the community of the marketplace.”³ Free philosophizing, as associated with the candid exchange of brotherly advice, emerges at a similar intersection between true friendship and honest commerce. From the viewpoint of cultural history, such close association of genuine friendship with ethical trade practices is not as surprising as it might at first appear. Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies thus show how, in Dutch society at the time, “friendship” often designated an almost transactional relation of mutual assistance without carrying the emotional charge associated with the present-day use of the term. Friendship, as they describe it, was thus conceived in terms of an “investment of social capital” and as a “functional, instrumental solidarity between persons for the sake of gaining or using social assets of this kind, with the express intention of reciprocity,” which involved a “network of moral obligations” where “credit was the keyword.”⁴ Clearly, Spinoza’s conceptions of intellectual friendship and free philosophizing cannot be reduced to this transactional variety, but is informed by all sorts of classical and biblical sources as well. Moreover, some aspects of this functional conception of friendship—notably the emphasis it puts on kinship—remain foreign to Spinoza. Still, the fact that this transactional understanding of friendship was so embedded within Dutch culture gives weight to the idea that the ethics of friendship and brotherly advice governing Spinoza’s understanding of the freedom of philosophizing on some level converges with a system of mercantile virtues focused on a combination of self-interest and mutual trust.

¹ E4app29, G II.275 | C I.593; see also E4p44s, G II.243 | C I.571 (on the greedy man).

² Lord, “The Free Man,” pp. 292–3.

³ Lord, “The Free Man,” p. 297; see also pp. 268, 293. In her description of the burgher and his relation to money, Lord relies mostly on the work by Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches. On money as a social problem in Spinoza*, see also Lordon and Orléan, “Genèse de l’État”; and the insightful analysis in Douglas, “Spinoza, Money, and Desire.”

⁴ Frijhoff and Spies, 1650: *Hard-Won Unity*, pp. 215–7, here 215.

Education

A Topic Saved for Another Place

Any kind of republic—monarchical, aristocratic, or democratic—will benefit from broad consultation with free citizens. This is why, as we saw, a monarchy is better ordered as it is less absolute, and a democracy better ordered as it is more absolute.¹ In both cases, opting for a model of public consultation that includes more citizens will prove in the interest of the state. For, as Spinoza explains in the TP,

when the few decide everything, simply on the basis of their own affects, freedom and the common good are lost. For human wits are too sluggish to penetrate everything right away. But by asking advice, listening, and arguing, they're sharpened. When people try all means, in the end they find ways to the things they want which everyone approves, and no one had ever thought of before.²

The point does, however, not apply unconditionally. The authority to advise belongs equally to all citizens, as a private natural right of which they cannot be deprived without violence. That right is not predicated on epistemic competence. People need not be wise to claim a natural right to be consulted. Still, the state only reaps the benefits of public consultation with the people if the people in fact engages in the kind of free philosophizing—"asking advice, listening, and arguing"—that will help sharpen their wits. The example of how the "uneducated" and "wretched" Hebrews with their worship of the golden calf descended into even deeper superstition and idolatry when allowed to manage their own religion serves as a cautionary tale of how an ignorant people is sometimes better served by being "constrained to live well by the command of the law."³

Moreover, by giving citizens permission to exercise their authority to advise publicly, i.e., to philosophize freely, the state also—inadvertently but necessarily—makes room for citizens to abuse that same authority for ignoble purposes, i.e., to engage in deceit with evil intent and flattery. Such abuse can be prevented. Refraining from it can, however, "not [be] instilled in men by the command of laws or by public authority."⁴ Just as with the dishonest trade practices denounced by Barlaeus in the *Mercator sapiens*, deceitful and dishonorable philosophizing can only be prevented by virtue.⁵ That is why, in order for a state to benefit from granting citizens the permission to think and say what they think, those citizens must be in possession of two basic virtues. First, in order not to be deceived, citizens must have integrity, i.e., they must be sufficiently liberated from prejudice to be able to examine things *integro et libero animo*;⁶ second, in order not to deceive, they must be motivated by honorability and nobility, understood as the "desire to aid other men and join them in friendship."⁷

Once these conditions of learning and virtue are fulfilled, however, the state and its citizens will collectively enter an upward spiral of free philosophizing where mutual advising among citizens engenders knowledge, and knowledge in turn engenders a desire for more mutual advising.⁸ If protected and cultivated by the state, such a public sphere of free philosophizing will in principle tend to self-regulate toward increased rationality and, by the same token, increased freedom. The systematic vision is strikingly optimistic. To keep this political machinery in motion, however, it is

¹ See Chapter 7, sect. "Absolute States: Citizens, Counselors, Sovereign Powers."

² TP IX.14, G III.352|C II.594.

³ TTP II, G III.40–1|C II.106–7; see also Chapter 5, sect. "Violent Rule."

⁴ TTP VII, G III.116|C II.191.

⁵ See Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 98–9: "although it is a known fact that the latter commonly are not considered all that shameful, and are therefore not prohibited by any regulations or civil law, you will agree with me nonetheless that natural law has laid down that nothing should be done insidiously, dishonestly or deceitfully."

⁶ For this expression, see TTP Preface, G III.9–11|C II.72–3.

⁷ E3p59s, G II.188|C I.529; see also chapter 4, note 75.

⁸ See Chapter 6, sect. "Integrity and Rational Self-Contentment."

necessary to effectively reproduce not only the competences that citizens acquire, but also the virtues that make them use those competences for the benefit of other citizens and the state as a whole. And since neither that knowledge nor those virtues can be instilled by force or law, but they can only be taught, it is crucial that citizens receive what Spinoza calls “good education.”¹ In other words, the cultivation and preservation of a public sphere of free philosophizing requires a robust program of public education.

Spinoza’s views on education are, however, frustratingly underdeveloped. Certainly, there is good potential for a Spinozist philosophy of education.² Several recent publications have attempted a Spinozist approach to contemporary questions in the philosophy of education.³ Very little has, however, been written about Spinoza’s own explicit attitude toward education.⁴ A good reason exists for this fact: if Spinoza repeatedly and emphatically stresses the importance of good education, he provides precious little by way of explaining how such education should be structured, what kind of didactic method it should implement, what kind of curriculum it should follow, what kind of institutions it should take place in, and how it should be financed.

The philosopher’s own activities afford us little help. Spinoza did not really envisage himself in the role of public teacher. Not that he was foreign to teaching: while in Amsterdam, he served as an assistant teacher at Van Den Enden’s Latin school;⁵ while in Rijnsburg, he undertook to train a certain Casarius in Cartesian philosophy even though he found the task “troublesome”;⁶ he wrote a couple of teaching manuals, the *Principles of the Philosophy of Descartes* and the unfinished *Hebrew Grammar*. Still, as he wrote to Fabritius when declining his job offer from the University of Heidelberg: “it has never been my intention to teach publicly,” for “if I were willing to devote myself to educating young men, I would stop advancing in philosophy.”⁷ As a matter of personal preference, it seems, Spinoza considered the formal education of others a distraction he could do without.

Nonetheless, he acknowledged the crucial importance of education for his own philosophical program of individual and collective rationalization. In one illuminating passage in the *Ethics*, he thus stresses how communicating our knowledge to others through education represents a particularly worthwhile way for the wise to make use of their wisdom:

because, among singular things, we know nothing more excellent than a man who is guided by reason, we can show best how much our skill and understanding are worth by educating men so that at last they live according to the command of their own reason.⁸

In the light of this passage, the absence of philosophy of education in Spinoza seems like a serious gap in his overall project.

There are indications in the texts that Spinoza realized he had more theoretical work to do on the issue. In the *TdIE* already, while listing the things that must be done for us to collectively attain our “true good,” Spinoza noted that “attention must be paid to moral philosophy and to instruction concerning the education of children [*doctrinae de puerorum educatione*].”⁹ He never really expanded on the topic. Still, an ambition to do so remained. Hence, in the *TP*, after noting that “in a free republic

1 TTP VII, G III.116|C II.191; TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

2 Zourabichvili, *Le Conservatisme paradoxal*, pp. 147–72.

3 The best example is Johan Dahlbeck’s 2017 book on Spinoza and Education which aims at providing a “Spinozist account of education” (Dahlbeck, *Spinoza and Education*, p. 150; I quote the title of the conclusion). A special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* on Spinoza and education appeared in 2018, also mostly dedicated to philosophical reassessment of issues in contemporary philosophy of education “in the spirit of Spinoza’s practical philosophy” (De Freitas, Sellar, and Bang Jensen, “Introduction,” p. 805).

4 For an exception, see Miqueu, “Spinoza on Civic Education.”

5 See Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, pp. 107, 155; Van Miert, “Education,” p. 342; Roth, *Institutio oratoria*, p. 450; Rovere, “Honors and Theater,” pp. 809–11. The information originally stems from the account given to Stolle and Hallmann by Jan Rieuwertsz the younger, son of Spinoza’s publisher, during a conversation recounted in a 1704 travelogue by Stolle, first published by Jacob Freudenthal in 1899. See *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza’s*, p. 229: “Haec se audisse, Spinosam fuisse Submagistratum in Schola, quam Eudidius [sic] habuit Latinam.”

6 Spinoza to De Vries, March 1663, Letter 9, G IV.42|C I.193.

7 Spinoza to Fabritius, March 30, 1673, Letter 48, G IV.236|C II.397.

8 E4app.9, G II.268–9|C I.589.

9 *TdIE*, §15, G II.9|C II.11.

both the arts and the sciences are cultivated best if permission to teach publicly is granted to anyone seeking it”—an important passage that we shall have occasion to discuss in more detail later—Spinoza cuts his own reasoning short, but notes that he will “save these and similar things for another place.”¹ A text on education must thus be added to the list of works that—if he had been granted a longer life—Spinoza intended to undertake in the future. Absent this projected work, however, we will have to engage in some conjecture in order to reconstruct his conception of “good education.”

This chapter offers such a conjectural reconstruction. In order to develop it, a general survey of his texts loosely based on his use of terminology associated with education—“to teach”; “to learn”; “to educate”; “to give lessons,” etc.—will prove instructive in determining the methods and scope of his educational program, to the extent that he has one. Next, the historical circumstances and intellectual context of Spinoza’s writing allow us to make some reasonable conjectures about how to implement that program institutionally. Comparisons with the teaching in art and sciences provided in the so-called Illustrious Schools and with educational reform programs proposed by his former teacher, Franciscus van den Enden, shall prove particularly useful in this regard. Finally, Spinoza’s combined views on political counsel and public education can be further clarified by an instructive, systematic contrast with the views of Hobbes.

Texts on Teaching and Learning

Some suggestions about the curriculum, didactic methods, institutions, and even possible financing of good public education can be made directly from the scattered passages where Spinoza explicitly addresses education, while others can be extrapolated from his use of terms associated with education, such as “to teach” (*docere*), “to learn” (*discere*), “to teach lessons” (*documenta docere*), “teaching” (*documentum, doctrina*), “learning” (*eruditio*), “academy” (*academia*), and so on.

As for the curriculum, Spinoza is quite clear about at least part of it in the TTP: citizens must be taught the “arts and sciences”: “the arts and sciences ... are also supremely necessary for the perfection of human nature and for its blessedness.”² He does not elaborate on what such training consists in because he does not have to: everyone would know that he refers to something like traditional propaedeutic training in the liberal arts. As the liberal arts were taught in the Netherlands at the time, this would mainly consist of courses in history, rhetoric, classical languages, philosophy, and mathematics.³

For Spinoza, such learning should be practically useful, *ad usum, & utilitatem vitae humanae*.⁴ Generally, the arts and sciences must serve the higher goal of attaining our collective “true good.” Spinoza writes in the TdIE: “I wish to direct all the sciences toward one end and goal, viz. that we should achieve, as we have said, the highest human perfection. So anything in the sciences which does nothing to advance us toward our goal must be rejected as useless.”⁵ We should understand this utility in both a pragmatic and a moral sense.

As for the pragmatic utility, it has two basic aspects. First, it provides students with skills that will allow them to make a living. This secures their independence from the governing authorities in terms of subsistence and thus speaks to their political integrity. We recall how, in the TP, Spinoza excludes courtiers from the council in a monarchy exactly because of such concerns.⁶ But the point applies to all state forms, including democracies where only a citizen who is “his own master and lives honorably,

1 TP VIII.49, G III.346|C II.588.

2 TTP V, G III.73|C II.143; see also TTP XV, G III.187|C II.280; and TTP XX, G III.243|C II.349.

3 Van Miert, *Humanism*, pp. 34, 185–6.

4 For this expression, used in the general context of learning Descartes’s doctrine of knowledge, see PPD I, p15s, G I.75|C I.175 (Curley translates this as “what is needed and advantageous in human life”). For a parallel passage in the Ethics, in a similar context, see E2p49s, G I.135|C I.490: “It remains now to indicate how much knowledge of this doctrine is to our advantage in life [Superest tandem indicare, quantum hujus doctrinae cognitio ad usum vitae conferat].” See also TTP Preface, G III.9|C II.72: “those matters which bear on the practice of life and on true virtue [iis ... quae usum vitae, et veram virtutem spectant].”

5 TdIE, §16, G II.9|C I.11; my italics.

6 See Chapter 6, sect. “The Flatterer, the Violent Ruler, the Mob.”

has the right to vote in the supreme council and to stand for political offices.”¹ Second, such training equips students with a diverse set of competencies, making them capable of assisting each other for their mutual benefit, for “not all men are equally capable of all things, and no one would be able to provide the things which a man alone needs most. Everyone, I say, would lack both the strength and the time, if he alone had to plow, to sow, to reap, to grind, to cook, to weave, to sew, and to do the many other things necessary to support life.”²

Turning now to the moral utility, over and above acquiring useful sciences and practical skills to support themselves and others, students must also learn “true moral lessons, so that they would do voluntarily, wholeheartedly, and in a manner worthy of a free man, what is really useful.”³ In other words, they should not only acquire the ability to usefully contribute as citizens to public life and deliberation; they must also acquire the will to do so. This point speaks to the nobility of citizens, as associated with friendship, sociability, and concern for others.⁴ In a society of citizens who are less than fully rational, such nobility must be acquired through civic education, by inculcating them with a sense of civic duty or obligation toward the state and their fellow citizens (as opposed to them acquiring nobility through adequate knowledge of their own rational self-interest).

In order to successfully accomplish such training, certain conditions do, however, apply: “only those who have a free and unprejudiced judgment can cultivate [the arts and sciences] successfully.”⁵ At the same time as they learn, students must learn how to exercise their free judgment, or learn how to learn, so to speak. A similar concern already transpires in the context of the TdIE’s somewhat hodgepodge list of things to achieve in order to attain our collective true good, including: to understand nature, form a society, pay attention to moral philosophy and the education of children, work out the whole of medicine, and learn mechanics.⁶ However, Spinoza continues, “before anything else we must devise a way of healing the intellect, and purifying it, as much as we can in the beginning.”⁷ Healing or purifying the intellect here clearly refers to the eviction of prejudices that preoccupy the mind which also later, in the TTP, figures as a precondition for the acquisition of knowledge.⁸ The point, once again but in another sense, speaks to the integrity of citizens: in order to learn, they must want to learn, as opposed to those who have fallen prey to religious prejudice and superstition and who “partly from devotion, partly from a desire to oppose those who cultivate the natural sciences, ... don’t want to know the natural causes of things.”⁹

Next, we can glean important information about Spinoza’s understanding of didactic method from his analyses of how the Scripture “teaches” the precepts of true religion. The most important are those concerned with the New Testament, for it was Christ’s sole intention “to teach lessons as a teacher [ut doctor documenta docere].”¹⁰ All that Christ and his Apostles did was to “teach moral lessons.”¹¹ Scripture as a whole constitutes a gigantic didactic exercise or theological pedagogy the aim of which is “to teach lessons necessary for salvation [docere documenta ad salutem necessaria]” and relate “the teachings of true piety [verae ... pietatis documenta].”¹² Indeed, the way Scripture adapts its message to its readers represents for Spinoza a uniquely successful heuristic model for “teaching lessons,” and

1 TP XI.3, G III.359|C II.602.

2 TTP V, G III.73|C II.143.

3 TTP V, G III.73|C II.144.

4 See E3p59s, G II.188|C I.529.

5 TTP XX, G III.243|C II.349.

6 TdIE, §§14–15, G II.8–9|C I.11.

7 TdIE, §16, G II.9|C I.11; my italics.

8 See Chapter 6, sect. “Prejudice and the Preoccupied Mind.”

9 TTP VI, G III.81|C II.153.

10 TTP VII, G III.103|C II.177.

11 For Christ, see TTP V, G III.71|C II.140: “Christ ... didn’t want to introduce any new laws into the republic, nor was he concerned about anything but teaching moral lessons”; TTP IV, G III.164|C II.133: “Christ was sent to teach ... the whole human race”; TTP VII, G III.103|C II.177: “Christ ... did not institute laws as a lawgiver; instead as a teacher he taught lessons.” For the Apostles, see TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245: “religion, as the Apostles preached it ..., like the whole of Christ’s teaching, consist[s] chiefly of moral lessons.”

12 TTP VI, G III.96|C II.169, and TTP VII, G III.111|C II.185; see also TTP VII, G III.99|C II.171: “Scripture ... teaches true moral doctrines [documenta moralia]”; TTP V, G III.72|C II.142: “The New Testament ... teaches only moral lessons.”

his analysis of it is indicative of the kind of didactic method he would likely recommend himself for the education of children and uneducated adults alike.

The following passage is of particular interest when read in this light:

Scripture imparts and teaches things in the way which enables each person to most easily perceive them. It does not deduce them from axioms and definitions and connect them with one another. It just speaks simply. To create trust it confirms what it says only by experience.¹

The passage is reminiscent of Plato's *Meno*—a foundational text of the philosophy of education—where Plato demonstrates how mathematical deductions can be performed by an untrained mind if only the teacher adopts a didactic method adapted to the experience and abilities of the student. Throughout the dialog, Socrates thus gently guides an untrained slave boy by means of simple figures drawn in the dirt to recognize his innate comprehension of the theorem according to which a square double the size of another square can be obtained by squaring the diagonal of the latter. By appealing to experience and adapting his teaching to the student, Socrates thus succeeds in bringing out the slave boy's innate capabilities for mathematical reasoning. Similarly, on Spinoza's account, Scripture teaches the precepts of true religion and moral lessons to common people in ways that are adapted to their particular ingenium. If these common people were able to make the appropriate inferences, they would recognize these same precepts and lessons as true principles pertaining to universal ethics. In fact, the human mind's innate cognitive capabilities, i.e., the "natural light common to all,"² provide every human being with "the power to form certain notions which ... teach us how to conduct our lives."³ However, since common men are not initially rational, but mostly preoccupied with prejudices, they do not spontaneously form these adequate "notions" (notiones). In order to conduct their lives correctly nonetheless, they must therefore initially be guided by "lessons" or "teachings" (documenta, doctrinae) instead.

On this Platonic understanding, teaching—even the teaching of mathematics—cannot be a question of merely retracing rational inferences or reproducing demonstrations. Instead, lessons must show the validity of notions and theorems by illustrating them with more concrete narratives, better adapted to the mental capacities of untrained students. A good educator, one might then surmise, should thus emulate the way that the Apostles used their "authority to teach" in their Letters. For they, too, sought in particular "to teach those who are completely uneducated and have not begun to learn languages or sciences from anyone else."⁴ Like the Apostles, it could seem, good educators should appeal to the students' intellects by presenting them with rational notions and argumentative reasoning, but also appeal to their imagination by means of narratives based on common experience and sentiment, thus vacillating between demonstration and experience, relying simultaneously on rational notions common to all and individualized testimonies.⁵ This impression is reinforced by the fact that, whenever there is a question of "teaching lessons" (documenta docere) in Spinoza's texts, it always involves the kind of adaptation of doctrines to the mentality of others that sets the scriptural style apart from the strictly geometrical one.⁶ Teaching and demonstrating are not the same thing.

The analysis has consequences for how we can situate Spinoza's *Ethics* in relation to the question of education. The various passages from the TTP cited earlier suggest that Spinoza did not consider the geometrical method quite as appropriate for didactic purposes as his choice in 1663 to publish a geometrical reconstruction of Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy*—initially "dictated to a pupil"⁷—

1 TTP XIII, G III.167|C II.257; see also TTP VII, G III.115|C II.189: "[Scripture] demonstrates nothing and doesn't teach the subjects it treats through definitions and first causes."

2 See Chapter 3, sect. "The Natural Light."

3 TTP I, G III.16|C II.77–8.

4 TTP XI, G III.157|C II.246.

5 See Chapter 4, sect. "The Epistolary Style."

6 See Chapter 3, sect. "Style: Scriptural and Geometrical."

7 See Lodewijk Meyer's preface to the PPD, G I.129–30|C II.227. The pupil in question was, of course, the "troublesome" Casarius.

might otherwise suggest.¹ It makes it difficult to attribute to Spinoza a Cartesian outlook on education, which would rather tend to associate good didactic method directly with demonstrative rigor.² More importantly, however, it invites us to exercise some caution in understanding the geometrically organized Ethics as a manual in moral education or a philosophical pedagogy, as some recent commentary tends to do.³ The Ethics does, of course, contain some passages—in addition to those already quoted—explicitly concerned with education. In E1app, we learn that “an educated man” seeks “to understand natural things, not to wonder at them.”⁴ In E3def.aff.27, we learn how our notions of “right” and “wrong” depend “chiefly on education.”⁵ We can also note a somewhat obnoxious passage in the E4app.20 where Spinoza asserts that marriage “agrees with reason,” but only on the condition that “the desire for physical union is not generated only by external appearance but also by a love of begetting children and educating them wisely.”⁶ Moreover, it is clear from EVp39s that the ultimate aim of forming children—and presumably of education generally—is to procure them with such knowledge as will allow them to live an active life in the sense of the Ethics, or to ensure that “the infant’s body may change ... into another, capable of a great many things and related to a mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things.”⁷ In light of the passages from the TTP quoted earlier, however, it is far from clear that the geometrically organized deductive itinerary of the Ethics in itself represents how an untrained mind can best achieve that goal. In fact, Spinoza rather seems to suggest that a teacher would do best to begin with lessons based on narratives about human experience, i.e., with historical lessons about science, art, politics, and so on, for even if “historical narratives cannot give us the knowledge and love of God, we do not deny that reading them is very useful in relation to civil life.”⁸

As for the institutions of a Spinozist program of education, the richest source of information is the conception of the “authority to teach,” developed in TTP XI in the context of Spinoza’s analysis of the apostolic epistolary style.⁹ When establishing himself as a “teacher” of the Christian religion, Paul claimed for himself an “authority to advise whomever and whenever he wished.”¹⁰ Indeed, all the Apostles taught as “private persons, or teachers,”¹¹ i.e., they authorized themselves to impart their teaching in whichever way they wanted, and “chose the manner of teaching they judged would be easier for the disciples they wanted to teach at that time.”¹² For example, “in order to teach those things which he partly saw and partly heard, [Paul] was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.”¹³ Now, as with the authority to advise, Spinoza grants the Apostles this authority to teach on

1 Leibniz, incidentally, makes a similar point more explicitly: “To be sure, geometers demonstrate their propositions with a certain rigor, but they compel the mind rather than illuminating it. ... they take into account neither the memory nor the mindset of the reader to a sufficient extent” (Leibniz, *Consilium de encyclopedia de nova conscribenda methodo inventoria*, 1679, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, VI, iv, pp. 341–2). For detailed analysis of this passage, see Lærke, “Leibniz, the Encyclopedia, and the Natural Order of Thinking,” pp. 245–7.

2 For a good example, see Lodewijk Meyer’s preface to the PPD, G I.127|C II.224–5: “Everyone who wishes to be wiser than is common among men agrees that the best and surest method of seeking and teaching the truth [veritatis indagandae, atque docendae] in the sciences is that of the mathematicians, who demonstrate their conclusions from definitions, postulates, and axioms.” Such a Cartesian outlook should not be confused with Descartes’s own approach to the question. After all, he did not write the *Principles of Philosophy* in geometrical form but opted instead to “use a style more suited to the current practice in the Schools. That is ... [to] deal with each topic in turn, in short articles, and ... present the topics in such an order that the proof of what comes later depends solely on what has come earlier, so that everything is connected together in a single structure” (Epistola ad P. Dinet, AT VII.577|CSMK II.389; see also García, “Descartes on Education,” pp. 52–3). In this sense, as Meyer also notes, Spinoza’s geometrical version of the *Principles* represents an effort to present Descartes’s own *Principles* in a form more in accordance with a Cartesian understanding of didactic method.

3 See in particular Dahlbeck, *Spinoza and Education*.

4 G II.81|C I.443–4.

5 G II.197|C I.537.

6 G II.271–2|C I.591.

7 G II.305|C I.614.

8 TTP IV, G III.61–2|C II.130.

9 In this context, I find it a little surprising that, in his *Spinoza and Education*, Johan Dahlbeck can dedicate an entire section to the topic “On Teaching and Authority” without noticing the fact that Spinoza himself operates with an explicit notion of “authority to teach” (see Dahlbeck, *Spinoza and Education*, pp. 136–7).

10 TTP XI, G III.156|C II.246.

11 TTP XI, G III.151|C II.240.

12 TTP XII, G III.164|C II.254. See also TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245: “That’s what the Letters were for: to teach ... men in the way each Apostle judged best for confirming them in religion”; TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245: “[The Apostles] were ... able to teach men these things, as they pleased.”

13 TTP III, G III.54|C II.122.

the grounds that it in fact belongs all human beings, as a private natural authority. Consequently, it is entirely predictable when, in the TP, Spinoza proceeds to grant a similar authority to teach to all citizens in a free republic: “In a free republic both the arts and the sciences are cultivated best if permission to teach publicly is granted to anyone seeking it.”¹ Anyone must be allowed to teach. Authorization to do so is not given according to presumed competence, or by official appointment, but remains equally open to all. Public teachers should not be like civil servants—“ministers” or “deputies” of the sovereign power.² They should teach in their own name, as private agents acting in public, instructing their fellow citizens according to their own free judgment and all with equal right. Spinoza goes even further. For if “everyone can [potest] say and teach [dicere, & docere] what he thinks,” indeed “he must [debet] do this if he wants to show himself to be just and pious.”³ Exercising one’s authority to teach is a private natural right. It is, however, also a moral duty: teaching each other is a noble enterprise that capable citizens ought to undertake out of concern for the common good.

Finally, the fact that Spinoza believed that public education should be a private enterprise, employing self-authorized rather than state-appointed teachers, also has a bearing on the way it should be financed. Spinoza briefly addresses the question in a footnote to the TdIE concerned with private wealth. He predictably disdains such wealth when sought for its own sake, for honor, or for pleasure. He does, however, entirely approve of it when sought “for the sake of health and the advancement of the arts and sciences.”⁴ Spinoza says little more on the topic here, except for noting that he would want to elaborate the topic further but has “reserved this for its own place.”⁵ The topic never found its place, of course, and we can only assume that the financing of education would have come up in the text on education that, almost three decades later in the TP, he still projected to write.⁶ A few additional indications can, however, be found in the TTP. In particular, Spinoza here reveals deep suspicion of publicly funded institutions of education, questioning its academic independence: “Academies [Academiae] supported at the expense of the state are instituted not so much to develop native abilities as to keep them in check.”⁷ Instead, he favors privately run schools that can be set up by anyone “at the risk of his own resources and reputation.”⁸

At this juncture, a rudimentary model for public education begins to come into view: It should include training in the arts and sciences and some civic education; it should adopt a curriculum heavy on historical lessons and only later move on to philosophical notions; mutual instruction should be privileged over magisterial teaching; it should be privately run and privately funded. In order to get a deeper sense of how such a model could be implemented, we will, however, have to turn to the historical circumstances and intellectual context of Spinoza’s reflections on education, teaching, and learning.

Illustrious Schools, Private Latin Schools, Community Colleges

Public education was always a central part of the political strategy of the Dutch Republic to consolidate their newfound freedom after 1579.⁹ The United Provinces of the first half of the seventeenth century saw the establishment of a great number of institutions of higher education, both universities and Illustrious Schools, i.e., preparatory schools intended to make the bridge between the Latin schools and university.¹⁰

1 TP VIII.49, G III.346|C II.588.

2 For these notions, see chapter 7: “Absolute States: Citizens, Counselors, Sovereign Powers,” note 53.

3 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.347.

4 TdIE, §4, n. 2, G II.6|C I.8.

5 TdIE, §4, n. 2, G II.6|C I.8.

6 TP VIII.49, G III.346|C II.588.

7 TP VIII.49, G III.346|C II.588. Ramond translates “academiae” by “universités,” which was doubtless what Spinoza had in mind here. The remark perhaps sheds some additional light on Spinoza’s reply to Fabritius in 1673 when turning down his offer of a position at the University of Heidelberg (see Chapter 2, sect. “Declining a Job Offer: Spinoza’s Answer to Fabritius”). See also Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l’idée de citoyenneté*, p. 521.

8 TP VIII.49, G III.346|C II.588.

9 For an overview, see Van Miert, “Education.”

10 Van Miert, *Humanism*, pp. 21–44; Van Miert, “Education,” pp. 344–6; Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, p. 26.

While Spinoza cared little for public universities, the humanist education in the liberal arts provided in the Illustrious Schools had features that would have been attractive to him.¹ These schools saw a particular role for themselves in shaping virtuous citizens. The universities served mostly to form civil servants and ministers to the church.² The Illustrious Schools, by contrast, aimed at producing an educated class of citizens who were not in public service but living by commerce, but who nonetheless had to learn how to navigate an increasingly complex public sphere, balancing their private interests against those of the common, public good.³ Barlaeus, in his 1632 inaugural lecture at the Amsterdam Athenaeum, thus emphasized how the formation of good citizens required both training in the arts and sciences and moral education: students should “absorb virtue together with learning.”⁴ The Illustrious Schools focused on practically useful knowledge, but were still relatively conservative in their outlook on the arts and sciences; they provided a humanist education, not training in the new science or in Cartesian philosophy.⁵ Religious education was conspicuously absent from their curriculum and care for the students’ salvation not part of their remit. Barlaeus’s only remarks about the afterlife relate to the reputation that wisdom will earn students among future generations: it will “bear fruit of the kind that lives on in the memory of all the centuries, that posterity will revere, that eternity itself will gaze at forever.”⁶ These various features of the Illustrious Schools—their focus on practically useful knowledge; their ambition of shaping an active citizenry; their focus on humanist learning and historical lessons; their secular lack of concern for religious education—are all quite congenial with what we would expect a “good education” to consist in for Spinoza. The fact that lectures at the Illustrious Schools were not reserved for attending students, but open to the general public—and especially scheduled so as to allow the students’ merchant fathers to attend as well—was doubtless an appealing feature, too.⁷

The Illustrious Schools were, however, not the only available historical model for Spinoza. Another, arguably even better fitted to his requirements, would be the training he received himself in Franciscus van den Enden’s private Latin School in Amsterdam in the late 1650s. Van den Enden’s school provided an education in the liberal arts with an emphasis on history and the classics, with a particular bent toward Latin theatre. Students set up performances as part of their language training.⁸ Van den Enden may also have introduced students to new philosophers, both natural philosophers and political philosophers who would not have been part of the reading in the Illustrious Schools.⁹ The exact curriculum is, however, unknown and the question of the general ideological tenor of Van den Enden’s teaching continues to divide commentators. Still, it is clear that, as an educator, Van den Enden fell squarely within the category of such private citizens who “teach publicly ... at the risk of [their] own resources and reputation” favored by Spinoza. Moreover, the particular accent Van den Enden’s school put on performances of ancient plays resonates with the emphasis Spinoza puts on experience and history for “teaching lessons.” Maxime Rovere has in this context also stressed how this feature of Van den Enden’s pedagogy had the advantage of avoiding competitive learning based on the attribution of “honors” to individual students, while favoring a more collective and egalitarian form of learning focused on shared experiences.¹⁰

Van den Enden is, however, an instructive contextual reference point not only on account of his actual teaching practices, but also because of the more theoretical program for educational reform he

1 On the structure and contents of the liberal arts education in the Illustrious Schools, see Van Miert, *Humanism*, parts II and III.

2 Van Miert, *Humanism*, pp. 21–5.

3 Van Miert, *Humanism*, pp. 35–6, 142.

4 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 102–5, 118–19.

5 Van Miert, “Education,” pp. 35–40, 347.

6 Barlaeus, *The Wise Merchant*, pp. 116–17.

7 See Post, “Introduction,” p. 12; Van Miert, *Humanism*, pp. 35–6.

8 Proietti, *Philedonius*; Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, pp. 109–10; Rovere, “Honors and Theater,” p. 811.

9 Nadler suggests Bacon, Galileo, Bruno, Coornhert, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Grotius, Calvin, and Thomas More, but his list is open-ended (Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, p. 111).

10 Rovere, “Honors and Theater,” pp. 810, 815–16.

formulated in the context of his democratic republicanism, developed in the early 1660s.¹ I have no intention to revisit the longstanding debate about mutual influences in this context. I am happy to yield to the conclusion of the most recent research, which rejects the idea that we should consider Van den Enden a kind of proto-Spinoza.² Still, Van den Enden was part of a group of freethinkers in the late 1650s and early 1660s that also included Adriaan Koerbagh and Spinoza. And regardless of where the ideas originally came from, it is not unreasonable to assume that Van den Enden's work from the early 1660s is at least partly representative of their common discussions.³ Moreover, as a simple matter of interpretation, I disagree with Wiep van Bunge that "there is no evidence in Van den Enden's writings of anything coming close to what would become the philosophy of the mature Spinoza."⁴ In particular, I agree with Maxime Rovere that Van den Enden's views on civic education are very instructive for illuminating the political and institutional aspects of Spinoza's rudimentary understanding of good education.⁵

In his 1665 *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, Van den Enden promotes a form of democratic republicanism centered on natural equality and citizen participation.⁶ He emphasizes in particular the importance of education for the broader population and of public consultation in the conduct of politics.⁷ He recommends the establishment of both local "citizen-councils" and a general "free citizen-assembly and council" where "all citizens may well be seen and heard by each other," and where "every citizen, indeed every inhabitant would be free to, indeed required to, put into writing what they consider to contribute to the common good and the empowerment of all."⁸ Moreover, in order to form a general citizenry capable of assuming such a role, he deems it crucially important that "each and every citizen, including all young men, must receive fundamental, clear, and concise instruction about all the laws and ordinances of the republic."⁹ Stressing equality among teachers and students, he does, however, reject education based on "supervision" and even proposes to suppress "all titles of excellency or degrees of pretended knowledge like the names of doctors and professors," arguing that they only serve to generate a sense of inequality and contempt of others. Instead, "all teachers of any art or science" must be evaluated not on the basis of established authority, but on their ability to provide "reasons" alone.¹⁰ Concretely, he envisages the establishment of "community colleges" which must be publicly funded, i.e., "provided with some privileges and subsidies" in order to "protect them against all dirty pursuit of gain and riches."¹¹ Teaching should be in the vernacular so that everyone "can freely hear it and get access to it."¹²

1 I borrow the characterization from Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 175, 259; see also Israel, "The Intellectual Origins"; Israel, "Spinoza's Formulation," pp. 342–3; and Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l'idée de citoyenneté*, pp. 53–72.

2 The thesis has been advanced by Marc Bedjaï, Wim Klever, and Jonathan Israel (Bedjaï, "Franciscus van den Enden"; Klever, "A New Source of Spinozism"; Klever, "Proto-Spinoza"; Klever, "Introduction," in Van den Enden, *Free Political Propositions*, pp. 3–10, 70–82; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 788; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 168–9, 175–7). It has been rejected by Wiep van Bunge, Hermann De Dijn, and, in particular, Frank Mertens. Van Bunge takes issue with the originality of Van den Enden's work, tracing his ideas back to the collegiant Pieter Cornelisz Plochhoy and the *Consideration van Staat* by the brothers De la Court (Van Bunge, *Spinoza: Past and Present*, pp. 56–63; Van Bunge, "Introduction," pp. 7–8). Frank Mertens tends to minimize Van den Enden's influence on Spinoza while instead emphasizing a likely influence of Spinoza on Van den Enden (Mertens, "Franciscus van den Enden: Tijd voor een Herziening"; and Mertens, "ENDEN, Franciscus van den," in Van Bunge et al., *Continuum Companion*, pp. 68–71).

3 For my commentary, I have kept an eye on Wim Klever's curiously literal and sometimes quite strange translation from 2007, based on his 1992 edition of the original Dutch version (Van den Enden, *Free Political Propositions*). I do, however, often modify his choices. Page numbers are provided for both the original Dutch and Klever's English version.

4 Van Bunge, "Introduction," p. 8.

5 On this point, see also Rovere, "Honors and Theater."

6 Van Bunge, "Introduction," pp. 19–20.

7 Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 176–7. See also Van den Enden, *Korte Verhael*, p. 29, transl. by Klever in *Free Political Propositions*, pp. 96–7: "And in relation to civil as well as ethical control of our life's dealings and behavior among people, we would consider it very necessary for peculiar common utility that abundant or sufficient schools in the mother tongue of the same society are erected for adults as well as young people, in which one tries to ascertain and teach everything most clearly and surely by a fixed and indubitable reasoning, deduced from certain infallible principles."

8 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, p. 31, transl. Klever, pp. 179–80; modified.

9 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, p. 8, transl. Klever, p. 147; modified.

10 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, p. 8, transl. Klever, p. 147; see also Rovere, "Honors and Theater," pp. 812–14.

11 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, pp. 7–8, transl. Klever, pp. 147–8; modified.

12 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, p. 8, transl. Klever, p. 148.

As shown by Wiep van Bunge and others, Van den Enden's political reform program echoes similar programs already proposed by Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy and, more generally, the organizational structures of the collegiant movement.¹ This movement was born from the ban of Arminianism after the Synod of Dort. Its members rejected the orthodox Calvinist church and instead set up "colleges" where they were not taught doctrine by ministers, but instead taught each other.² These colleges were not new religious sects but pluralist associations whose members embraced a great variety of Christian orientations.³ Topics were fiercely debated, with everyone arguing on an equal footing.⁴ Generalizing this model, Plockhoy then developed a political model that aimed at implementing similar egalitarian structures on all levels of society. It was arguably this model that Van den Enden also adopted for his program of educational reform.

Van den Enden's collegialist program for civic education resonates strongly with Spinoza's understanding of "good education" as the exchange of "pious and brotherly advice" based on "one's own free judgment," and with Spinoza's political ideal of those "best citizens" whom "good education, integrity of character, and virtue have made more free."⁵ Perhaps with the exception of their seemingly different theoretical views on public funding, their ideas about the political aims of education are strikingly congenial.

This should not, of course, lead us to make any broader claims about the relations between Spinoza's and Van den Enden's respective theories of democratic republicanism. The philosophical backdrop of their thinking is clearly very different. For Jonathan Israel, Van den Enden's political theory relies on "a markedly more optimistic view of human nature and capabilities than one finds in Spinoza" because it "assumed the automatic onset of a harmonious coexistence of private interest and the common good in the people's commonwealth."⁶ Van den Enden indeed does argue that all the "oppressing and harmful passions" only follow from violent government and devious manipulation of people through superstitious doctrines that prevent their "ordinary passions of love and gladness" from being expressed.⁷ From nature, he argues, everyone is "well inclined and as if necessarily driven to mutual companionship."⁸ Spinoza, of course, does not think so well of human nature: "If human nature were so constituted that men desired most what is most useful, there'd be no need of skill to produce harmony and loyalty. But it's evident that human nature isn't at all like that."⁹

Still, they share a strong confidence in the political powers of a broadly educated citizenry. They both ascribe a formidable capacity and readiness of well-educated citizens to participate usefully in sovereign decision-making. Moreover, the concrete institutions and methods of learning promoted by Van den Enden make for an excellent fit with Spinoza's rudimentary rules for mutual teaching and public education. They both emphasize values of natural equality; of reason and argument; of integrity and freedom from prejudice and superstition; of nobility and a sense of civic duty toward the community. Finally, they both recommend that public education should be delegated to private

1 Van Bunge, *Spinoza: Past and Present*, pp. 51–66; Mertens, "Van den Enden and Religion," pp. 70–1; Israel, "Intellectual Origins," pp. 16–17.

2 See Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*; Meinsma, *Spinoza et son cercle*, pp. 109–31; Kolakowski, *Chrétiens sans église*, pp. 166–77; Frampton, *Spinoza*, pp. 70–1, 162–75; Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l'idée de citoyenneté*, pp. 60–1; Price, *Dutch Culture*, pp. 193–4.

3 Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, pp. 47–8.

4 Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, p. 52; Van Bunge, *Spinoza: Past and Present*, pp. 52–4. Such "collegial" organization of instruction was favored in the circles around Spinoza. The way Spinoza's friends went about discussing his philosophy provides a good example. It is described in some detail in a 1663 letter from Simon De Vries: "As for our group, it is arranged in this way: one of us (but each one takes his turn) reads through, explains according to his own conceptions, and then proves everything, following the sequence and order of your propositions. Then if it happens that one cannot satisfy the other, we have thought it worthwhile to make a note of it and to write to you, so that, if possible, it may be made clearer to us" (De Vries to Spinoza, February 24, 1663, Letter 8, G IV.39|C I.190). Spinoza deemed the group "very sensibly organized" (Spinoza to De Vries, March 1663, Letter 9, G IV.42|C I.194).

5 TTP VI, G III.136|C II.191, and TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

6 Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, p. 177.

7 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, p. 5, transl. Klever, p. 143; see also p. 2, transl. Klever, pp. 139–40.

8 Van den Enden, *Vrye Politijke Stellingen*, p. 7, transl. Klever, p. 145. Spinoza does, however, allow that the Aristotelian understanding of human being as a "sociable animal" has an application. For, as he argues somewhat tongue-in-cheek, by a kind of natural selection, those human beings who just happen to be sociable are likely to prosper in their communities, while those who just happen not to be are less likely to survive in their solitary state of nature (see E4p35s, G II.234|C I.564, and TP II.15, G III.281|C II.513–14).

9 TP VI.3, G III.297|C II.532; see also TP II.5, G III.277|C II.508.

citizens teaching each other—a form of education that in Van den Enden takes the concrete form of “community colleges.” Their only disagreement regards the question of public funding, which Van den Enden favors out of fear of financial abuse by private colleges, while Spinoza rejects it out of concerns for academic freedom.

Hobbes on Men of Leisure and Public Instruction

Spinoza’s understanding of “good education” can, as we have seen, be considerably sharpened by the comparison with contemporary Dutch efforts to rethink classical republican ideals of civic engagement and public instruction in accordance with the specific political circumstances of the young republic.¹ There is, however, yet another contextually well-motivated comparison with a contemporary political theorist that—this time by contrast rather than similarity—can help bring the systematic construction of Spinoza’s position into clearer focus. This helpful systematic contrast emerges, as is often the case, from a comparison with Hobbes. For Spinoza, the aim of civic education is to foster enterprising, independent, and noble citizens acting within the public sphere as a kind of popular lever of authority in relation to the state—as a source of friendly advice for noble sovereigns but also of resistance to violent rulers. It involves a remarkably upbeat vision of the increased rationality that will emerge from a public sphere of free philosophizing if permitted to flourish and properly cultivated and of how good education contributes to that. By contrast, as we shall see, Hobbes’s discussion of what occurs in a liberated public sphere conveys a considerably more pessimistic and cynical view of its basic dynamic. Hobbes’s public sphere is not made up of well-educated wise merchants who work out disagreements among themselves through friendly argumentative exchanges, or who interact with the governing authorities through broad public consultation. It is made up of incompetent men of leisure and political wannabes whose decadent thirst for glory in public office and bickering among themselves constantly tend to spread into the general public and degenerate into civil unrest. Given the circumstances, this is hardly surprising: Hobbes’s political theory is not informed by two decades of True Freedom to defend, expand, and deepen. It is informed by a decade-long civil war whose political anatomy required careful autopsy and whose political root causes had to be determined so as to avoid it ever occurring again.

Let us take a closer look at Hobbes’s argument. In *De Cive*, he singles out a certain class of citizens as particularly dangerous, namely men of leisure: “the men who are the greatest nuisance to their country are those who are allowed the greatest leisure; for men do not usually compete for public office, until they have won the battle against hunger and cold.”² Among those who, on account of wealth or other privileges, have sufficient time on their hands to nurture political ambitions and sufficiently high opinions of their ability to engage in such activity, competition for public office always ensues. Such jockeying for public office is essentially driven by personal ambition, not a concern for truth, morality, or the common good. The men of leisure therefore represent a constant internal threat to the stability of the commonwealth:

Another grievance that hurts the commonwealth is the discontent felt by those who with ample leisure at their disposal, fail to achieve a position of dignity. ... [Men] are driven by leisure to discuss politics with each other, and sometimes to superficial reading of books of History, Oratory, Politics and other things. And so they come to believe that they are well equipped by their intelligence and learning to handle affairs of the highest importance. But many of them have to be passed over; for they are not all what they believe themselves to be, and even if they were, there are too many of them to be all employed in public office.³

¹ For more on Spinoza’s place in the Dutch republican tradition and his defense of civic humanism, see also Blom, “Virtue and Republicanism,” pp. 209–12.

² Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, v.5, p. 72.

³ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xii.10, p. 138.

Hobbes does not consider political disagreement among citizens as a sign of a healthy public sphere, but as a symptom of privileged citizens with too much time on their hands competing with each other for undeserved public dignity. Indeed, he takes a dim view of public disagreement generally: it is necessarily pernicious, for “there is virtually no dogma either in religion or the human sciences, from which disagreements may not arise and from them conflicts, quarrelling and eventually, war” because “men want to believe themselves wise and appear so to others.”¹ Such “intellectual dissension” causes “the worst conflicts.”² People cannot disagree gracefully because they all invariably take the dissent of others as insulting; as “tantamount to calling [them] a fool.” This “is apparent in the fact that the bitterest wars are those between different sects of the same religion and different factions in the same country, when they clash over doctrines or public policy.”³ At this point, it is already clear that a construction of the public sphere like Spinoza’s free philosophizing, based on a conception of friendly disagreement, is not an option on Hobbes’s model. Human beings are constitutionally incapable of seeing disagreement as an occasion to learn, and will invariably interpret it in terms of personal insult.⁴

Hobbes’s description of the political wrangling among parliamentarians, courtiers, and ecclesiastics, in the upper levels of the English public sphere, in many respects resembles Thomas More’s description of a “court composed of people who envy everyone else and admire only themselves” in the first book of *Utopia*.⁵ This is by no means a coincidence. When denouncing the politically ambitious men of leisure, Hobbes situates himself in a key debate among the political theorists of both Ancient Rome and Tudor England, regarding the relative virtues of living a contemplative life (*otium*) and those of active citizenship and involvement in public affairs (*negotium*). In these debates, as shown by Quentin Skinner, some followed Cicero and Quintilian in commending a life of *negotium* on moral grounds, declaring involvement in public affairs a civic duty.⁶ Others, however, declared that a wise and virtuous person would do better to favor *otium* and live a life of scholarship since only lying, deception, and flattery count in public affairs.⁷ The unresolved dialogue in book I of More’s *Utopia* confronts exactly these two opposing views on political counsel.⁸ In relation to this debate, however, Hobbes adopts a starkly pessimistic third position, rejecting both of them. He suggests that only people who have the means to live a life of *otium* will ever find the time to engage in a life of *negotium*, but also that they will always do so for the wrong reasons. So what does he envisage as an alternative?

One possible but unpleasant option, still largely left open by De Cive, is to govern in such a way that no citizen has any leisure, making sure that they all, effectively, continue to “battle against hunger and cold.” A ruler taking that cynical route would have to deprive his subjects of anything over and above the basic amenities necessary for their subsistence, leaving them no opportunity or time to engage in public affairs. It is, however, difficult to see exactly how such a commonwealth could be governed. The sovereign cannot personally see to the execution of all his own commands. But when depriving all citizens of the leisure necessary to act on any ambition to take up public office, the scheme at the same time suppresses the entire class of possible state administrators. Such a commonwealth would have to be governed by the sovereign and a standing army alone. However, as Hobbes shall go on to write later in the “Review, and Conclusion” of the *Leviathan*, it is preferable that “the Governours themselves have the lesse cause, to maintain at the Common charge any greater Army, than is necessary to make good the Publique Liberty, against the Invasions and Encroachments of forraign Enemies.”⁹ In peacetime, the army must not assume any broader role in government. Why? Because transferring the public administration from the bickering men of leisure to the military command only precipitates the collapse into civil war because “all men that are ambitious of Military command, are enclined to

1 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, p. 81n.

2 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, i.5, p. 26.

3 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, i.5, p. 26.

4 On these passages in Hobbes, see also Bejan and Garsten, “The Difficult Work,” esp. pp. 28–9.

5 More, *Utopia*, I, p. 14.

6 Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric*, pp. 67–9, here 69.

7 Skinner, *The Foundations*, I, pp. 216–17.

8 See More, *Utopia*, I, pp. 13–14, 26–7; see also Hexter, “Thomas More on Political Counsel,” pp. 61–4.

9 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, “A Review, and Conclusion,” p. 1141.

continue the causes of warre; and to stirre up trouble and sedition: for there is no honour Military but by warre.”¹ So, a king who continually keeps all his subjects on a level of mere subsistence may succeed in eradicating the ambitious leisurely class, but at the same time either deprives himself of the public administrators necessary to execute his command efficiently or is obliged to replace them with equally ambitious warmongers, only hastening his own ruin. The remedy cures the illness but kills the patient.

Perhaps for this reason, the Leviathan does not insist on the attack on men of leisure. Indeed, here, leisure is rarely mentioned and, when it is, it is most often not as an impediment to the well-being of the commonwealth, but on the contrary as a necessary precondition for acquiring the skills necessary to govern or be a good judge.² One exception, however, is a passage where Hobbes complains that university-educated people with too much leisure have contributed to the spread of seditious teachings among the general population. I shall return to the passage later. Moreover, elements of the old argument can be detected in Hobbes’s state pathology, developed in chapter XXIX, where we learn that, in a well-ordered commonwealth, the public should not be allowed to read books by “antient Greeks, and Romans,” for that might infect people with a “Venime I will not doubt to compare to the biting of a mad Dogge, which is a disease the Physicians call Hydrophobia, or Fear Of Water,” where people suffer “continuall torment of thirst, and yet abhorreth water.”³ Only De Cive’s analysis of leisurely learning—learning, we recall, based on the “superficial reading of books of History, Oratory, Politics, and other things”⁴—explains why Hobbes compares liberal arts education with hydrophobia: a rejection of what one yearns for and a yearning for what one rejects. Constantly holding up Greek and Roman ideals as a mirror engenders a kind of politician’s madness, a spoiled discontent, among people in public office who cannot live up to their own expressed ambitions.⁵ Such hydrophobic men of leisure, their heads filled with classical ideals they cannot really aspire to, end up representing a poison that spreads throughout the commonwealth because, unable to gain public office of any importance, they end up as village preachers, school teachers, and local dignitaries. And from there on, their discontent

[creeps] into the minds of uneducated people partly from the pulpits of popular preachers and partly from daily conversation with others whose easy circumstances give them leisure for these pursuits and who in their turn got these errors into their heads from those who taught them in their young days at the Universities.⁶

Hobbes thus offers a strikingly cynical view of what occurs within the public sphere when left to its own devices. It contrasts sharply with Spinoza’s vision of how a well-regulated public sphere of free philosophizing will necessarily advance toward increased, collective rationality. This has important theoretical consequences for the way that Hobbes shall go on to conceive of the nature and purpose of public education. For the challenge he faces is this: how to conceive of a system of education that will allow for the training of qualified public servants while avoiding, at the same time, the emergence of a contentious public sphere constituted by discontented men of leisure among whom disagreement and dissent fester.

In De Cive, Hobbes mostly focuses on how the sovereign can legitimately curb, by means of laws, the dissemination of such opinions as he deems seditious, i.e., all “such doctrines which lead citizens imbued with them to the belief that they have the right and the duty to refuse obedience to the

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XI, p. 152.

2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XX, p. 322: “The skill of making, and maintaining Common-wealths, consisteth in certain Rules ... which Rules, neither poor men have the leisure, nor men that have had the leisure, have hitherto had the curiosity, or the method to find out”; XXVI, p. 438: “The things that make a good Judge, or good Interpreter of the Lawes, are, first A Right Understanding of that principall Law of Nature called Equity; which depending not on the reading of other mens Writings, but on the goodnesse of a mans own naturall Reason, and Meditation, is presumed to be in those most, that have had most leisure, and had the most inclination to meditate thereon.”

3 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIX, p. 508.

4 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, p. 80n.

5 For an alternative, but I think not incompatible, analysis of Hobbes’s resistance to the teaching of classical authors, see Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” pp. 612–13.

6 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xiii.9, p. 146.

commonwealth.”¹ The principal culprits are Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism, but also include, interestingly, “the liberty which even the lowest citizens claim for themselves on the pretext of religion.”² In any case, it is the prerogative of the sovereign to decide whether such doctrines are contrary to “civil obedience.” If deemed so, the authorities must “prevent them being taught.”³ Seditious teachers can legitimately be silenced by censorship. This is not, however, the solution favored by Hobbes: it is “a duty of those who administer sovereign power to root these doctrines out, not by threat of penalties but by clarity of argument.”⁴ Rather than wielding the sword, “the settlement of Sovereign Powers without any Army, must proceed from Teaching,” as he writes later in *Six Lessons*.⁵ The remedy must be equal to the cause. And the cause of sedition, as Hobbes sees it, is the education dispensed at the universities, given that the instruction of the people depends wholly on the instructors’ instructors: “The Instruction of the people, dependeth wholly, on the right teaching of Youth in the Universities.”⁶ This is why Hobbes “had reason to wish, that Civill Doctrine were truly taught in the Universities.”⁷ As he writes in the conclusion of the *Leviathan*, once again drawing on the water, drinking, and thirst metaphors that run as a red thread through his theory of civil education: “the Universities are the Fountains of Civill, and Morall Doctrine, from whence the Preachers, and the Gentry, drawing such water as they find, use to sprinkle the same (both from the Pulpit, and in their Conversation) upon the People,” for which reason “there ought certainly to be great care taken, to have it pure, both from the Venime of Heathen Politicians, and from the Incantation of Deceiving Spirits.”⁸

For Hobbes, reconstruction of the public sphere must therefore begin with reform of higher education, i.e., with reform of the education given to the teachers and ministers of the people:

Anyone who wants to introduce a sound doctrine has to begin with the universities. That is where the foundations of civil doctrine ... have to be laid; after the young men are steeped in them, they can instruct the common people in private and in public I hold therefore that it is a duty of sovereigns to have the true Elements of civil doctrine written and to order that it be taught in all the universities in the commonwealth.⁹

Within that new system, the sovereign alone “hath immediate Authority from God, to teach and instruct the people.”¹⁰ However, since he cannot personally attend to this, it is one of the “essential Rights of Sovereignty” to “appoin[t] Teachers, and examin[e] what Doctrines are conformable, or contrary to the Defence, Peace, and Good of the people.”¹¹ The appointed teachers are then “publique Ministers” who, in virtue of that appointment, are given “authority to teach, or to enable others to teach the people their duty to the Sovereign Power.”¹² Adding yet another institutional level,

1 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, pp. 80–1n.

2 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, pp. 80–1n.

3 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, p. 81n.

4 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xiii.9, pp. 146–7.

5 Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, in *The English Works*, VIII, p. 335. On this passage, see also Collins, *The Allegiance*, pp. 218–19.

6 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXX, p. 532.

7 Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, in *The English Works*, VIII, p. 335. For commentary, see Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” pp. 609–10.

8 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, “A Review, and Conclusion,” p. 1140. On Hobbes’s reappropriation of the traditional metaphor of the universities as “fountains” of learning, see Serjeantson, “Hobbes, the Universities,” pp. 116–17; Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” p. 618.

9 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xiii.9, pp. 146–7. Hobbes’s insistence that university education should be conducted according to the guidelines of written “elements of civil doctrine” gives away a personal ambition underwriting his three-part project of the *Elementa philosophiae*: it was, it seems, at least partly intended as a textbook for reformed university education, designed to educate qualified public servants while at the same time avoiding the creation of an unruly public sphere of querulous political dissenters. The ambition is even more explicit in the *Leviathan* when, in the “Review and Conclusion,” he writes, while referring to both *Leviathan* and what he “writ before of the same Subject in Latine,” that he thought what he had written “may be profitably printed, and more profitably taught in the Universities, in case they also think so, to whom the judgment of the same belongeth” (*Leviathan*, “A Review, and Conclusion,” p. 1140; see also the end of part II, in *Leviathan*, XXXI, p. 574; *Six Lessons*, in *The English Works*, pp. 343–8; Collins, *The Allegiance*, pp. 218, 223; Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” pp. 607–9). Hobbes’s personal interest in his program for educational reform was noted by Seth Ward who, mockingly, accused him of wanting to replace “Aristotelity” with “Hobbesity” (Seth Ward, *Vindiciae Academicarum*, pp. 6 and 51, cit. in Collins, *The Allegiance*, pp. 214–15).

10 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIII, p. 378.

11 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXX, p. 520.

12 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIII, p. 378.

however, practical considerations mean that the sovereign must delegate to others not only the charge of teaching the people, but also that of teaching the teachers of the people:

There is no doubt but any King, in case he were skilfull in the Sciences, might by the same Right of his Office, read Lectures of them himself, by which he authorizeth others to read them in the Universities. Neverthelesse, because the care of the summe of the businesse of the Common-wealth taketh up his whole time, it were not convenient for him to apply himself in Person to that particular.¹

Universities are required for this exact purpose: educating educators.² As such, however, they also represent a serious political risk. Indeed, as Hobbes says of the English universities, they are “to this Nation, as the wooden horse was to Troianes.”³ For, because of the hierarchical construction of the whole educational system, what is taught there quickly trickles down through the system from the highest to lowest, from the universities to the schools and the church pulpits, and out into the general population. As Hobbes complains in *Six Lessons*, “divinity may go on in Oxford and Cambridge to furnish the pulpit with men to cry down the civil power, if they continue to do what they did.”⁴ By the same token, however, Hobbes also rejects the *libertas philosophandi*, which he sees as little more than an excuse for university theologians to disobey the sovereign and as a foil for their allegiance to “foreign” ecclesiastical authorities.⁵ Hence, as he replies to John Wallis in *Six Lessons*, instead of “enjoying a liberty of philosophising,” university professors

are none of those which you say do freely philosophize; but ... both your philosophy and your language are under the servitude, not of the Roman religion, but of the ambition of some other doctors, that seek, as the Roman clergy did, to draw all human learning to the upholding of their power ecclesiastical.⁶

Hobbes’s hostility to the freedom of philosophizing is a direct consequence of his opposition to state-independent higher education. A university is “a Joyning together, and an Incorporation under one Government of many Publique Schools, in one and the same Town or City.”⁷ And the danger of all such corporations is that they turn into “factions,” i.e., that they turn against the government under which they are incorporated, becoming “like a commonwealth within the commonwealth.”⁸ Such worry applies in particular to university corporations which constantly threaten to evolve into “Operatories of the Clergy.”⁹ For, as Hobbes puts it in *Behemoth*, “an university is an excellent servant to the clergy; and the clergy, if it be not carefully looked to (by their dissension in doctrines and by the advantage to publish their dissensions), is an excellent means to divide a kingdom into factions.”¹⁰ In order to avoid these risks of sedition, Hobbes recommends the establishment of a deeply hierarchical structure of higher education. Its purpose should exclusively be to form efficient state administrators and public instructors of civic virtue. It leaves little room for the liberal arts and gives zero autonomy to institutions of higher education.

Conclusion: Spinoza vs. Hobbes on Counsel and Education

The hierarchical organization of Hobbes’s educational program forms a strikingly systematic contrast to the decidedly horizontal structure of Van den Enden’s and, I think, Spinoza’s promotion of liberal education, politically independent institutions of popular learning, and equality among students and

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 842.

2 See Serjeantson, “Hobbes, the Universities,” pp. 116–18.

3 Hobbes, *Behemoth*, p. 159; see also Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” p. 609.

4 Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, in *The English Works*, VIII, p. 345.

5 See Bejan, “Teaching the Leviathan,” p. 612.

6 Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, in *The English Works*, VIII, p. 348. On the controversy between Hobbes, Wallis, and Ward, see also Parkin, *Science, Religion and Politics*, pp. 159–62.

7 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVI, p. 1074.

8 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xiii.13, p. 149.

9 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLVII, p. 1122.

10 Hobbes, *Behemoth*, pp. 147–8; see also pp. 159–62, 179–80; Serjeantson, “Hobbes, the Universities,” pp. 135–6. See finally Hobbes, *Six Lessons*, in *The English Works*, p. 335: “I saw also that those Ministers, and many other Gentlemen who were of their Opinion, brought their Doctrines against the Civill Power from their Studies in the Universities.”

teachers. Hobbes's call for firm state control over higher education was a reaction to Anglican divines who had set themselves up at the universities as an additional political authority within a political system already fractured between king and parliament. As Jeffrey Collins writes, "throughout his life Hobbes implored civil sovereigns to free the universities from clerical control in the interest of promulgating proper political doctrine and ensuring civil obedience."¹ Spinoza responded to an almost diametrically opposed set of historical circumstances. Since the Great Revolt, popular education in the Dutch Republic had focused on moral and religious instruction and was dominated by the efforts to confessionalize the population.² While education was controlled by the states, the church played a central advisory role in determining both form and content. However, during the 1650s and 1660s, intense ideological struggles played out between, on the one hand, Nadere Reformatie ("Further Reformation") theologians seeking to further emphasize confessionalization and moral discipline characteristic of popular education since the early century, and, on the other hand, liberal members of the local councils and consistories who were pushing in the direction of more secular and practically oriented education of the kind perhaps best represented by the Illustrious Schools. As one Calvinist preacher observed with consternation in 1672, since the peace with the Spanish in 1648, "Arminians, together with their supporters, the Socinians and Atheists, have crawled into the consistories and town halls and, so as more easily to coax our youth into accepting novel opinions, encouraged the study in our universities of the seducer Descartes."³ He was not exactly mistaken. The liberal Dutch educational reformers did want the church to loosen its grip on the curriculum, and advocated instruction for the general citizenry in the arts and sciences, teaching the people more than just the catechism and moral discipline otherwise dominating public education in the Netherlands at the time.⁴

In sum, Hobbes feared the effects of leaving the universities free to shape public educators, because that was where the ecclesiastical factions he most abhorred were hiding out. Spinoza, for his part, feared the effects of leaving ecclesiastics free to shape public education and wanted to bring both practical and civic education to the people. Both wanted to free public education from ecclesiastical control. But the one, Hobbes, looked upward to the civil sovereign for a solution, while the other, Spinoza, looked downward toward the general citizenry. Hobbes's model of educational reform remains staunchly vertical and under strict sovereign control, while Spinoza's, as far as we can reconstruct it, is decidedly horizontal and proposes to create such institutional conditions as will allow the people to educate itself, by encouraging private citizens to publicly exercise their natural authority to teach so that they may provide each other with a good education.

An equally systematic contrast, prompted by different historical circumstances, exists between their respective views of political counsel, free philosophizing, and the uses of the public sphere. Hobbes's lack of confidence in the self-regulating capacities of a free public sphere reflects what happened in England during the early years of the English Civil War when the structures of censorship broke down. It produced a chaotic public sphere which, as Joad Raymond has observed, was "rhetorically manipulative rather than ideal-typically rational."⁵ No wonder that Hobbes declared disagreement politically intractable, freedom of philosophizing a tool of sedition, and the public sphere nothing but a seedbed of invective, insult, deception, anger, hate, and, eventually, civil war.

Spinoza's vision was a decidedly more positive one. Admittedly, we can hear echoes of Hobbes's critique of the men of leisure in the TP when he argues that "men who have too much leisure often spend their time contemplating wicked actions."⁶ It also shines through in his discussion of the so-called syndics—a kind of political watchdog—in an aristocracy, when he warns that they "can't see to it that vices the law can't prevent won't flare up, like those men fall into when they have too much

1 Collins, *The Allegiance*, p. 172.

2 Van Miert, "Education," pp. 336–7.

3 *Genees-Middelen voor Holland*, 1672, quoted in Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 697.

4 See Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 686–90.

5 See Raymond, "Describing Popularity," p. 127; Raymond, "The Newspaper"; Raymond, *Pamphlets*; Zaret, *The Origins of Democratic Culture*, pp. 27–35; Nexø, "Between Lies and Real Books."

6 TP VII.20, G III.316|C II.554; see also TP VII.23, G III.317|C II.555; TP X.4, G III.355|C II.598.

leisure,” even though “these vices often lead to the ruin of the state.”¹ Spinoza’s solution to the problem was, however, diametrically opposed to Hobbes’s. Rather than subjecting the public sphere and the institutions of higher education to a maximum of sovereign control in order to keep disagreement and sedition in check, he put his trust in an emerging broad class of well-educated citizens that he expected to engage in public affairs with the same straightforward wisdom and moral probity with which they allegedly engaged in their private business dealings.

The viability of Spinoza’s democratic model is predicated on the presumed integrity and nobility of this new breed of citizens. They represent a broad class entirely opposed to the idle, self-important, and querulous gentry denounced by Hobbes, namely such people who are willing to put their private skills of “friendly” business negotiation in the service of public affairs. Spinoza thus clearly welcomed the emerging structures of commercial republicanism, equally hailed by other liberal Dutch thinkers of his generation.² He was, however, not defending the political regime that had allowed them to emerge, namely De Witt’s thinly disguised oligarchy. After all, as Jonathan Israel puts it,

the republicanism of the regents, De Witt’s “True Freedom”, was never anything other than a weak and insecure edifice of liberty and toleration because it was too narrowly based ever to receive wide support. It was and was seen to be—especially by Van den Enden, Koerbagh, the brothers De la Court, and Spinoza—insufficiently broadly based and insufficiently “democratic” to use Spinoza’s term.³

Spinoza’s promotion of participatory democracy and broad public consultation in sovereign decision-making testifies to this opposition to De Witt. It is important to realize that, at the time in the Dutch Republic, the idea of broad public consultation was most often associated with the Orangist side of the political equation, in opposition to what was considered the elitist domination by the regents. In this respect, Spinoza’s promotion of a broad public sphere of free philosophizing is sufficiently popular in scope to represent a rebuke of the undemocratic republicanism embraced by the regents’ party. Still, we should not, on those grounds, go to the other extreme and declare Spinoza’s political theory of public consultation aligned with Orangist political strategies or, even worse, consider him to be anything like what would today be characterized as a “populist.” If he considered it to be in the self-interest of the sovereign powers to consult directly with as broad an array of citizens as possible, he also saw it as a necessary precondition for this that those citizens should be worth consulting, i.e., that they should be liberated from prejudice and in possession of their own free judgment. And this is why “good education” becomes such a central issue—a central issue, however, that, despite his best intentions, Spinoza never got around to addressing in much detail.

¹ TP X.4, G III.335|C II.598–9.

² Westeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*.

³ Israel, “Spinoza’s Formulation,” p. 336.

The Freedom to Disagree

People constantly “clash with one another in hatred, anger or deception, or deal inequitably with one another.”¹ Free philosophizing is under perpetual threat of being indirectly destroyed or hollowed out from within by prejudice and superstition, deception with evil intent, and flattery. The governing authorities in a free republic should give citizens the legal permission to speak their minds, and the reassurance that they will not use the commanding force of public authority to interfere in the public sphere. But they should first of all provide citizens with legal protection from violence perpetrated by other citizens trying to prevent them from exercising their natural authority to teach and advise. All this can be achieved through legislation on the condition that citizens genuinely believe in, and thus respect, the prerogatives of the state. We shall have occasion in Chapter 10 to show how, in a free republic, the narrative of the social contract helps create such an effective belief in the supremacy of the sovereign power and in the duty to abide in the binding laws emanating from it. In addition to this, free philosophizing also requires an institutional framework to regulate it from within, so that citizens do not use their natural authority to teach and advise for ignoble purposes, or for their private advantage alone. They must acquire a genuine interest in the well-being of other citizens, i.e., “nobility” (*generositas*). Human beings, of course, have a rational self-interest in being noble—after all, “to man ... there is nothing more useful than man.”² Adequate knowledge of this rational self-interest, which is the prerogative of the truly wise, is, however, not a requirement for acting nobly. Through good civic education, citizens can be taught to do so out of obligation toward the state and other citizens, “so that everyone, whatever his mentality, prefers the public right to private advantage.”³ Teaching citizens a common sense of civic duty is where the freedom of any republic begins.

Citizens need not, however, be taught to agree with each other. Agreement among citizens is not an item on the list of defining characteristics of a free republic. It is the opposite: “men must be so governed that they can openly hold different and contrary opinions, and still live in harmony.”⁴ This effort to accommodate difference is also reflected in the way Spinoza constructs his notion of free philosophizing: it is designed to manage disagreement without canceling it. It does not aim at creating consensus or even presuppose that such consensus can be reached by the means it makes available. Spinoza consistently depicts all efforts toward eliminating disagreement as violent and intolerant: those who “censure publicly those who disagree” are “the worst men”;⁵ “the real antichrists are those who persecute honorable men who love justice, because they disagree with them.”⁶ And he is not simply opposing certain ways of eliminating disagreement, such as persecution. In fact, he is taking issue with the aim itself, i.e., agreement, which he considers to be necessarily unattainable: “not all men can equally think the same things”;⁷ “it can’t happen that they all think alike and speak with one voice.”⁸ When it occurs, general agreement among citizens is not a sign of a healthy public sphere, but rather a sign of their free judgment being impaired. Consensus is thus not on the horizon of free philosophizing and claiming otherwise is already in itself a first step toward violence. The ideal of agreement is from the outset a foil for possible persecution. In this way, if we relate the reasoning to the key question of religion, Spinoza’s conception of free philosophizing is the exact contrary of irenicism. In fact, all attempts at establishing religious uniformity in a free republic, even seemingly

1 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

2 E4p35c, G II.233|C I.563.

3 TTP XVII, G III.203|C II.299.

4 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351; my italics. See also TTP XX, G III.246|C II.252.

5 TTP Preface, G III.8–9|C II.70–1.

6 TTP XIV, G III.176|C II.267; trans. modified.

7 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.373.

8 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

well-meaning, peace-seeking irenicism, will eventually be experienced by those concerned as intolerable violence—as attempts “to take this freedom [of philosophizing] away from men” by seeking to “bring to judgment the opinions of those who disagree with them.”¹

The freedom of philosophizing is, in short, essentially conceived as a freedom to disagree. This embrace of disagreement and diversity of opinion in the public sphere does not, however, apply universally to all republics in the same way. It applies only to such republics where citizens have already achieved some measure of freedom. In this respect, Spinoza’s theory of toleration—to the extent that he has one—involves a certain asymmetry between a weak conception of toleration, understood as the mere absence of religious persecution and freedom from fear which must prevail in any well-ordered republic, and a stronger conception of toleration, understood as an affirmation and embrace of diversity and a freedom of religious self-determination which he recommends only for republics whose citizens have attained some measure of freedom, and only to the extent that they have attained it. It is a central purpose of any state apparatus to prevent citizens from persecuting each other, including in republics that do not qualify as free. All states are created for the purpose of allowing citizens to live safely and without fear. It is of the very essence of statehood, which is why a violent state that engages in or permits persecution is doing as much violence to itself as it does to its citizens. It is, literally, operating in violation of a key aspect of its own nature and will consequently cause its own demise. Providing safety and freedom from fear can, however, be achieved in different ways depending on the people in question and does not always imply tolerating disagreement, including about religion. As the example of Moses and the Hebrew Republic shows, situations exist where a ruler rather ought to impose uniformity of religion by force of law, namely when dealing with people who, from habituation to bondage and submission to prejudice, are “not capable of being their own masters.”² Giving such people extended permission to speak their mind, especially about religion, will not result in free philosophizing, mutual teaching, and advising, but rather in the proliferation of superstitious beliefs and sectarian strife. By imposing an extremely detailed dogmatic framework, Moses thus sought to mitigate the harmful effects of possible disagreement among the Hebrews, establishing religious uniformity by divine decree, and creating a society where divine law and civil law completely merged. This theocratic strategy was effective in bringing peace, internal social cohesion, and external unity to a state composed of ignorant citizens and surrounded by enemies.

Still, as a lawgiver, Moses represented an exception, for he “had gotten the greatest prior control of the judgment of his people, not by deception, but by a divine virtue.”³ Rather than simply exploiting the credulity of the common man for his own benefit, he manipulated their beliefs in view of actually advancing piety and peace. However, later sovereigns who found themselves in the same circumstances did not display similar self-restraint but instead took advantage of common men’s wretched ignorance in order to have them “worship their kings as Gods.”⁴ In fact, as a general principle from which Mosaic theocracy diverges, “the greatest secret of monarchic rule, and its main interest, is to keep men deceived, and to cloak in the specious name of religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for their salvation.”⁵

State-imposed uniformity of religion can thus, depending on the moral quality of the lawgiver and the intellectual state of the people, be necessary and beneficial or abusive and violent. Imposing uniformity is, however, never an appropriate strategy for governing such people who are capable of being their own masters, who have acquired the kind of practical rationality that Spinoza designates as “sound judgment” and “right reason,”⁶ or who have achieved sufficient self-knowledge to take possession of their own free judgment. Those who have reclaimed this freedom for themselves cannot be returned to a state of mindless obedience: “nothing is more difficult than to take freedom away

1 TTP XX, G III.247|C II.353.

2 TTP V, G III.75|C II.146.

3 TTP XX, G III.239|C II.345.

4 See TTP Preface, G III.6|C II.68.

5 TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.68; trans. modified.

6 See Chapter 3, sect. “Sound Judgment and Right Reason.”

from men again, once it has been granted.”¹ They will necessarily resist any attempt to return them to subservience: “men are so constituted that they endure nothing with greater impatience than that opinions they believe to be true should be considered criminal and that what moves them to piety toward God and men should be counted as wickedness in them.”² This explains why it is “dangerous” for a sovereign power to “make laws about opinions, which people usually debate about, or can debate about.”³ To the extent that citizens are free—measured by what they “can debate about”—they will necessarily assert their power to judge about those matters according to their own mentality and to express that judgment. And, on the de factoist principle that one cannot and therefore should not forbid what is necessary, a sovereign power ought not attempt to deny them that. This holds for religious matters that “can be debated” as well as for any other matter. Consequently, wherever religious freedom already exists, or wherever people have in fact already judged for themselves about religion, and a variety of sects already exist, imposing religious uniformity is no longer an option for preventing mutual persecution and violence among them. Hence the central challenge Spinoza sets for a free republic, and which bears repeating: “men must be so governed that they can openly hold different and contrary opinions, and still live in harmony.”⁴

Spinoza’s solution to this tolerationist conundrum falls in two steps: a theoretical one concerned with the very definitions of religion and faith, and a more practical one concerned with the political management of sacred matters in a multi-religious state, or the question of *ius circa sacra*. In this chapter, I shall consider the theoretical side of the question, and then return to the practical question of *ius circa sacra* in Chapter 11.

Doctrines of Universal Faith

The first problem to address concerns how to define religion itself in such a way that it will accommodate a variety of religious orientations, sects, and confessions without reducing to any single one among them. Spinoza’s basic strategy for obtaining this result consists in conceiving of what he calls “doctrines of universal faith” (*fidei universalis dogmata*) which form a common doctrinal framework for all religions worthy of that name, i.e., “true” religions.

Spinoza formulates these doctrines in the context of an argument designed specifically to show how to mitigate the detrimental effects of confessional divergences within Christianity. In terms of content, the doctrines he gives are derived from Holy Scripture. Moreover, he traces the problem he aims at resolving specifically back to the New Testament. In the second part of TTP XI, after having shown in the first part how the Apostles claimed the natural authority to teach and advise that Spinoza sees as the very basis of free philosophizing, he now goes on to show how they used that authority in such a way that they caused all subsequent inter- and intra-confessional strife within Christianity. The reason is that “each of the Apostles chose his individual way” of teaching the Gospel and that “each built religion on a different foundation.”⁵ They did this because, in their different contexts of preaching, they “accommodated [their teaching] as much as they could to their contemporaries’ and constructed it on the foundations which were most familiar and accepted at that time.”⁶ Later, however, those original variations in the apostolic teachings gave rise to different confessional orientations within Christianity and, by the same token, to schism and violence:

the fact that the Apostles built religion on different foundations gave rise to many disputes and schisms, which have tormented the church incessantly from the time of the Apostles to the present day, and will surely continue to torment it forever.⁷

1 TTP V, G III.74|C II.144.

2 TTP XX, G III.244|C II.349.

3 TTP XVIII, G III.225|C II.327.

4 TTP XX, G III.245|C II.351.

5 TTP XI, G III.157|C II.246.

6 TTP XI, G III.157–8|C II.246–7.

7 TTP XI, G III.157–8|C II.247.

It was thus original discrepancies in the apostolic teachings that brought Christians to “persecute [each other] in a hostile spirit”¹ and give free rein to their “theological hatred.”² Spinoza gives as his key example the different understandings of predestination in Paul and James:

To strengthen men in religion, and to show them that salvation depends only on God’s grace, Paul taught them that no one can boast of his works, but only of his faith, and that no one is justified by works (see Romans 3:27–28). At the same time, he taught the whole doctrine of predestination. James, on the other hand, taught in his letter that man is justified by works and not by faith alone (see James 2:24); setting aside all those arguments of Paul, he expressed in a few words the whole doctrine of religion.³

The example is, of course, not chosen randomly. In the Dutch context, since the heated theological disputes between Arminians and Gomarists in the early part of the century, the contentious issue of predestination represented the very paradigm of an intra-confessional dispute gone awry. The breakdown of the political regime that ensued from it, in the wake of the Synod of Dort, represented for the liberal-minded thinkers of Spinoza’s generation a paradigmatic example of how political mismanagement of religious disagreement could threaten the stability of the republic. In Spinoza’s own political circumstances, the challenge, then, was to find a way of handling such doctrinal disagreements so that they do not degenerate into theological hatred.

The so-called doctrines of universal faith, developed in TTP XIV, are designed to address exactly such inter- or even intra-confessional divergences within the Christian religion by laying down a common religious foundation. Spinoza summarizes this common foundation in seven points, a “few and very simple doctrines”⁴ representing what he also sometimes describes as “simple faith”:⁵

- (1) God exists.
- (2) God is unique.
- (3) God is present everywhere, i.e., nothing escapes him.⁶
- (4) God has the supreme right and dominion over all things.
- (5) The worship and obedience to him consists only in justice and charity, or in love toward one’s neighbor.
- (6) Everyone who obeys God by living in this way is saved.
- (7) God pardons the sins of those who repent.⁷

For Curley, these seven doctrines represent “the common core of the monotheistic religions which take their origin in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.” For him, “there is nothing specifically Christian” about them.⁸ John Christian Laursen, on the contrary, describes them as forming “an abstract simplified Christianity, to which many Christians could agree.”⁹ Despite the absence of references to Christ or, a fortiori, to the divinity of Christ, I tend to agree with Laursen on this point, mostly because of doctrine (7) with its characteristically Christian emphasis on sin, repentance, and pardon. Moreover, Spinoza repeatedly speaks of the true religion that universal faith is associated with as “having the spirit of Christ.”¹⁰

1 TTP Preface, G III.8|C II.71.

2 TTP XVII, G III.213|C II.311.

3 TTP XI, G III.158|C II.247.

4 TTP XI, G III.158|C II.247.

5 TTP I, G III.15|C II.76; TTP XIV, G III.175|C II.265.

6 Curley has “everything is open to him” for Spinoza’s “omnia ipsi patere.” I follow Moreau and Lagrée who have “rien ne lui échappe.”

7 TTP XIV, G III.177–8|C II.268–9.

8 Curley, “Spinoza’s Exchange with Albert Burgh,” p. 24.

9 Laursen, “Spinoza, Strauss, and the Morality of Lying,” p. 172.

10 See TTP V, G III.79|C II.150; Spinoza to Burgh, end 1675/early 1676, Letter 76, G IV.318|C II.474.

Still, it is important to understand the reference to Christ in the rather abstract sense in which it is intended. As opposed to Hobbes, for example, for whom the proposition “Jesus is the Christ” forms the very basis of Christian creed,¹ Spinoza does not consider the belief in Jesus Christ’s divinity a core Christian doctrine. It is not part of what makes of Christianity a true religion: “it is completely unnecessary for salvation to know Christ according to the flesh.”² His exchanges with Oldenburg in 1676 clearly deny the literal understanding of an incarnated and resurrected Man-God, arguing that the resurrection of Jesus must have been only “spiritual.”³ And yet, “except for Christ no one has received God’s revelations without the aid of the imagination” and “in this sense we can also say that God’s wisdom, that is, a wisdom surpassing human wisdom, assumed a human nature in Christ.”⁴ The Ethics says almost nothing about the topic, but does include a brief passage from which we can also conclude that Spinoza identified “the spirit of Christ” with the divine intellect or “the idea of God” (*Spiritu Christi, hoc est, Dei idea*).⁵ Similar conceptions are more clearly spelled out in the KV where, after arguing that, in relation to matter, motion “is a son, product or effect, created immediately by God,” Spinoza states that “as for the intellect in the thinking thing, this too is a son, product or immediate creature of God, also created by him from all eternity.”⁶

For Spinoza, as it appears, asserting the divinity of Christ is not a requirement for declaring a creed to be “in the spirit of Christ.” Moreover, the Christian focus of Spinoza’s seven doctrines is arguably mostly a choice of context and circumstance. As Carlos Fraenkel notes, correctly I think, “since Spinoza is writing in a Christian context and for a Christian audience, his version of dogmatism is a philosophical interpretation of Christianity.”⁷ As we shall see, it does not imply that all doctrines of universal faith are Christian; even less that true religion cannot be had in another spirit than that of Christ, or that Christ holds a monopoly on the spirit in which he taught. But the seven doctrines listed by Spinoza form a coherent doctrinal system that should be familiar to any Christian, a basic narrative about a unique, ubiquitous God who governs and judges all according to merit but also exercises mercy in relation to those who regret their transgressions. In terms of content, it reduces obedience to the practice of charity and justice alone. In terms of form, it establishes a fundamental structure of inescapable justice but also benevolent mercy, the practical upshot of which is that it remains worthwhile for all men to obey God, including for repentant sinners.

Spinoza’s seven doctrines of universal faith are similar to several other contemporary attempts to reduce Christianity to a set of universally applicable religious notions. The most famous example in Spinoza’s intellectual context is the set of six core doctrines to which Hugo Grotius reduces Christianity in his *De veritate religionis Christianae* of 1629 (second ed. 1633; third ed. 1640).⁸ The perhaps most similar example is, however, Edward Herbert of Cherbury’s five “common notions of religion,” outlined in *De veritate* of 1624:

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLIII, p. 938: “The Onely Necessary Article Of Christian Faith, The (Unum Necessarium) Onely Article of Faith, which the Scripture maketh simply Necessary to Salvation, is this, that JESUS IS THE CHRIST.” See also *Leviathan*, XXXIV, p. 618; XXXVI, pp. 676–8; XLII, p. 788.

2 Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. December 1, 1675, Letter 73, G IV.309|C II.468.

3 Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. January 1, 1676, Letter 75, G IV.314|C II.472. On this point, for once, Albert Burgh is entirely right in his assessment of Spinoza’s position: “You deny that Christ, the son of the living God, the Word of the eternal wisdom of the Father, was made manifest in the flesh, suffered for mankind, and was crucified. Why? Because all that does not agree with your principles” (Burgh to Spinoza, September 11, 1675, Letter 67, G IV.283|C II.443). See also Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 126–8.

4 TTP I, G III.21|C II.84; see also TTP IV, G III.64|C II.133; Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. December 1, 1675, Letter 73, G IV.309|C II.468.

5 E4p68s, G II.262|C I.585.

6 KV I, ix, §3, G I.48|C I.92. In the long subtitle of the KV, not written by Spinoza himself, we learn that the KV was composed for the “disciples” (*Leerlinge*) of Spinoza so that they may follow “the example of the Lord Christ, our best teacher [*naa’t Vorbeld van de Heer Christus, onzen besten Leermester*]” (KV, Subtitle, G I.11|C I.59). The description characteristically makes no allusion to the divinity of Christ but only sets him up as an “example” (*Vorbeld*) and as a “teacher” (*Leermester*). The passage can be profitably compared with TTP VII, G III.103|C II.177: “Christ ... did not institute laws as a legislator, but taught doctrines as a teacher.”

7 Fraenkel, “Spinoza’s Philosophy of Religion,” pp. 379, 388–9, 396–7.

8 Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, I, sect. 2–7, pp. 31–40. The six doctrines are: (1) There is a God. (2) There is but one God. (3) All perfection is in God. (4) And in infinite degree. (5) God is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and completely good. (6) God is the cause of all things. On Grotius’s religious minimalism in *De Veritate*, see Nellen, “Minimal Religion”; Nellen, “Minimal Faith.” For a full study of the work, including of the sources of Grotius’s conception of Christianity in the work of Duplessis-Mornay, Socinus, and Vivès, see Heering, Hugo Grotius.

- (1) There is a supreme God.
- (2) The sovereign deity ought to be worshipped.
- (3) The connection of virtue with piety is the most important part of religious practice.
- (4) [Vices and crimes] must be expiated by repentance.
- (5) There is reward or punishment after this life.¹

Some of Spinoza's contemporary critics, such as Jacob Thomasius in his 1670 *Adversus anonymum de libertate philosophandi* and Christian Kortholt in his 1680 *De tribus impostoribus magnis*, picked up on these similarities and put Spinoza in the same basket as Lord Herbert.² It is an instructive comparison which, however, must be handled with caution for both biographical and theoretical reasons. There is no evidence that Spinoza was familiar with Lord Herbert's work over and above the very little information he could glean from Descartes's discussion of *De veritate* in the part of the correspondence with Mersenne available to him in the editions of Descartes's letters by Clerselier and Glazemaker.³ More importantly, however, substantial theoretical differences between them emerge on closer inspection. Lord Herbert's conception of the religious common notions is grounded in his recuperation of the originally Stoic understanding of *koinai ennoiai*, inseparable from the conception of innate principles common to all men, implanted by God in their minds and hearts and thus known by natural instinct.⁴ In the *De religione gentium*, written in 1645 and published posthumously in 1663 (English translation 1705), Herbert thus extends his argument into the domain of comparative religion, arguing on ethnological grounds that his five religious common notions are truly actualized in the *consensus gentium*.⁵ We find nothing comparable in Spinoza. In fact, if Spinoza too conceives of his seven doctrines of universal faith in terms of theological "common notions," he does so in a very different sense than Lord Herbert.

In order to understand how, we must return to Spinoza's understanding of reason and common notions in the *Ethics*. As we have seen in our discussion of Spinoza's critique of common prejudices,⁶ he sometimes employs the term "common notion" in the originally Stoic sense of universally accepted notions. This is the case in E1p38c where he is concerned with notions "common to all."⁷ However, in the surrounding propositions E2p37 to E2p40 which form the bulk of Spinoza's rudimentary theory of common notions, the adjective "common" means something quite different. Here, a common notion is the notion of a property common to several or all things. In this more objective sense, common notions are formed when the mind "regards a number of things at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions."⁸ Sometimes, they express universal properties common

1 Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, trans. Carré, pp. 289–307; see also Hutton, *British Philosophy*, pp. 107–8; Lagrée, *Le Salut du laïc*, pp. 79–95 (on the five doctrines); pp. 108–16 (comparison with Spinoza).

2 Thomasius, *Adversus anonymum*, p. 574; Kortholt, *De tribus impostoribus magnis*. Other critics who assimilated Spinoza and Lord Herbert include Friedrich Rappolt in his 1670 *Oratio contra naturalistas* and, following Kortholt, Michael Berns in *Altar der Atheisten, der Heyden und der Christen* (1692) and Domenico Bencini in his *Tractatio historico-polemica* (1720). See Israel, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction," p. 83; Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 628–9, 114; Lagrée, *Le Débat religieux*, p. 136; Lagrée, *Le Salut du laïc*, pp. 108–9; Laux, *Imagination et religion*, p. 200; Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 294–6.

3 The bulk of Descartes's discussion of Lord Herbert can be found in Descartes to [Eding?], August 1638, AT II.345–8; Descartes to Mersenne, August 27, 1639, AT II.570–1|CSMK III.137; Descartes to Mersenne, October 16, 1639, AT II.597–8|CSMK III.139; and Descartes to Mersenne, December 25, 1639, AT II.629|CSMK III.142. Spinoza owned a copy of Glazemaker's three-volume Dutch translation of Descartes's *Briefven* of 1661 (Van Rooijen, *Inventaire*, in-quarto no. 7, p. 140). He may very well also have had access to the edition that formed the basis for Glazemaker's translations, namely Claude Clerselier's *Lettres de M. Descartes* (3 vols. 1657, 1659, 1667). The August 1638, August 1639, and December 1639 letters are all included in both editions (resp. Descartes, *Lettres*, ed. Clerselier, vol. II, Letter C, pp. 458–60; Letter XXX, pp. 178–80; and Letter XXXIV, pp. 193–202; and Descartes, *Briefven*, ed. Glazemaker, vol. II, pp. 198–200; pp. 168–70 and pp. 183–92). However, the most substantial analysis of Herbert's position, found in the letter of October 1639, is not available in Clerselier and Glazemaker who both provide only a short version of the letter that does not include the relevant section (see Descartes, *Lettres*, ed. Clerselier, vol. II, Letter XXXII, pp. 183–8; and Descartes, *Briefven*, ed. Glazemaker, vol. II, pp. 173–9).

4 Herbert of Cherbury, *De Veritate*, trans. Carré, p. 106; for commentary, see Lagrée, *Le Salut du laïc*, pp. 32–6; Serjeantson, "Herbert of Cherbury before Deism," pp. 220–2; Hutton, *British Philosophy*, p. 106.

5 See Herbert of Cherbury, *The Ancient Religion*. For commentary, see Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions*, pp. 23–6.

6 See Chapter 6, sect. "Prejudice and the Preoccupied Mind."

7 E2p38c, G II.119|C II.474.

8 E1p29d, G II.14|C I.471; see also note 113 by Moreau in Spinoza, *Éthique*, ed. Steenbakkers and Moreau, p. 538.

to all things;¹ sometimes, they express proper properties common only to some things.² Universal common notions are exceedingly simple and known by all.³ Proper common notions, by contrast, require some work to discover.

To acquire proper common notions, adequate general conceptions described by terms such as “man,” “horse,” or “tree,” we must apply what the TTP describes as “the method of interpreting nature.” This method consists in “putting together a history of nature, from which, as from certain data, we infer the definitions of natural things.”⁴ For example, in order to discover the proper common notion of “man,” we must rely on a history of humanity that allows us to consider a number of men at once, to understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions. By “history,” Spinoza sometimes means “natural history” in the Baconian sense, i.e., a reliable record of all natural phenomena that forms the material for natural philosophical investigation. Sometimes, he means “history” in a more familiar sense for us. For example, in the TTP, he draws extensively on Roman historians—Curtius and Tacitus, in particular—in order to understand human nature, by extracting from their ancient histories common lessons about human behavior. In any case, proper common notions of things are identified by means of “legitimate inferences, as from certain data and principles,” i.e., through induction from experience and reliably recorded data.⁵

This same method can also be applied to Scripture which is exactly what Spinoza undertakes in the TTP’s “natural” reading of the Bible.⁶ I disagree with Andrea Sangiacomo when he argues that “the use of the traditional terminology of ‘common notions’ in the TTP does not entail that the specific doctrine of common notions introduced in E2p37–40s2 was already developed in the TTP” and that “there is no direct textual evidence suggesting that Spinoza employed that doctrine in the TTP.”⁷ Generally, given how intermingled the composition of these two texts was, I find it unlikely that Spinoza’s understanding of common notions should diverge substantially from one to the other. In any case, the burden of proof lies squarely with those who affirm that it does. But the fact is that closer consideration of the texts yields considerable evidence in favor of continuity. For example, Spinoza writes in the TTP that “the foundations of philosophy are common notions,”⁸ an assertion I find it very hard not to correlate with the passage in the Ethics according to which “those notions which are called common ... are the foundations of our reasoning.”⁹ More importantly, however, it is clearly the application to Scripture of the inferential method of natural philosophy—i.e., the identification of commonly shared properties through the comparison of things—that yields the list of doctrines of universal faith. Spinoza explicitly compares the doctrines of universal faith in Scripture with the “things

1 See E2p38, G II.119|C II.474. For example, it is a universal proper notion that “all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute, and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, than now they move, now they are at rest” (E2p13, Lemma 2, referenced in E2p38c). Without using the term, E2p49s gives “will” as an example of a universal common notion pertaining to all minds: “the will is something universal, which is predicated of all ideas, and which signifies only what is common to all ideas, viz. the affirmation, whose adequate essence, therefore, insofar as it is thus conceived abstractly, must be in each idea, and in this way only must be the same in all” (G II.135|C I.489).

2 For example, it is a common notion proper to all men that “all men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that they all want to seek their own advantage” (E1app, G II.78|C I.440). The conception of such “proper” common notions is clearly suggested by E1p39, where Spinoza discusses notions that are only “common to, and peculiar to [et proprium], the human body and certain external bodies.” The distinction between universal and proper common notions—often overlooked in contemporary commentary—was first stressed by Martial Gueroult (Gueroult, *Spinoza: l’âme*, pp. 327–47), but the point it is perhaps best articulated by Gilles Deleuze in his *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique* where he argues that “common notions oscillate between two thresholds, the maximal threshold of what is common to all bodies, the minimal threshold of what is common to two bodies, or at least, between my body and another” (Deleuze, *Spinoza. Philosophie pratique*, p. 155). More recently, Andrea Sangiacomo has defended a similar position, taking up Gueroult’s distinction and complaining—justifiably I think—that “commentators have developed a habit of ignoring or glossing over the little that [Spinoza] says about proper common notions” (Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason*, pp. 112, 130–6).

3 E2p38c, G II.119|C I.474.

4 TTP VII, G III.98|C II.171; see also TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278, where Spinoza argues that the “foundation of philosophy” is “the universal history of nature.”

5 TTP VII, G III.98|C II.171; see also TTP VII, G III.99|C II.172.

6 For this characterization, see Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 97–102; see also Chapter 3, sect. “The Natural Light.”

7 Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason*, 113. Note that the “already” in this analysis is a little misleading, because the passages on common notions in the Ethics were most likely written before Spinoza undertook the writing of the TTP (Akkerman, *Studies in the Posthumous Works*, pp. 152–3).

8 TTP XIV, G III.180|C II.271.

9 E2p40s1, G II.120|C I.475–6.

most universal and common to the whole of nature.”¹ Just as common notions do not express the essence of any singular thing,² so do the doctrines of universal faith not express the singularity of any particular narrative in Scripture, but only the shared features of them all; just as common notions capture properties that are equally in the part and the whole,³ so are the seven doctrines equally taught everywhere within Scripture.⁴ The doctrines thus represent “what is most universal, what is the basis and foundation of the whole of Scripture”;⁵ they are “the fundamental principles aimed at by the whole of Scripture”,⁶ “the universal teaching of Scripture.”⁷

Faith and Religion: Foundation and Standard

Spinoza’s reading of the seven doctrines of universal faith as the common notion of Scripture is his attempt at explaining how Scripture is divine, or how it contains “God’s Word,” a topic also treated at length in TTP XII.⁸ Indeed, in this chapter, we already find a list of religiously foundational notions that clearly prefigure the doctrines of universal faith, i.e. “that God exists; that he provides for all; that he is omnipotent; that in accordance with his decree, things go well with the pious, but badly with the wicked; and that our salvation depends only on his grace.”⁹ The Bible is divine because it teaches this common doctrine everywhere, in every part as in the whole. The apparent privilege that this analysis grants the Bible does, however, come with a number of caveats which immediately tend to relativize it.

First, nominally adhering to Scripture is by no means a guarantee that one conforms to the principles of universal faith it contains. This depends entirely on the way one reads it. For, if a reader, despite the simplicity of the message, does not perceive the doctrines of universal faith—as Spinoza alludes to Terence, “you can’t say anything so correctly that someone can’t distort it by misinterpretation”¹⁰—the text is no longer sacred: “It will be sacred only so long as men use it in a religious manner. If they cease to be pious, at the same time it too ceases to be sacred.”¹¹ Indeed, “the narratives contained in the Old and New Testaments are better than the other, secular narratives” only “in proportion as the opinions which follow from them are salutary” and “if someone has read the narratives of Holy Scripture” but had “not attended to the lesson Scripture intends to teach with those stories, nor improved his life, it is just the same as if he had read the Koran, or the dramas of the poets.”¹²

Second, if the seven doctrines of universal faith are everywhere expressed in Holy Scripture, they are not necessarily expressed only there, but may very well be found elsewhere, and are equally salutary when perceived independently of it. Spinoza does not see Holy Scripture as necessarily being the only possible set of narratives to which these seven doctrines are common. The seven doctrines of universal faith are contained in Scripture, but still transcend it, so that “someone who is completely unfamiliar with these narratives [of Holy Scripture], and nevertheless has salutary opinions and a true manner of living, is completely blessed and really has the spirit of Christ in him.”¹³ Hence, if the seven doctrines can be contained within a specific text, like the Bible, they are not consigned to some specific text, or tied to “paper and ink.”¹⁴ As Spinoza shows at length in TTP XII, “the revealed Word of God is not some certain number of books, but a simple concept of the divine mind revealed to the prophets: to

1 TTP VII, G III.103 | C II.176.

2 E2p37, G II.118 | C I.474.

3 E2p38, G II.118 | C I.474.

4 TTP VII, G III.103 | C II.176.

5 TTP VII, G III.103 | C II.176. Admittedly, Spinoza does not here speak directly of the doctrines of universal faith, but the examples he provides make it clear that they are exactly what he has in mind, i.e., “that a unique and omnipotent God exists, who alone is to be worshipped, who cares for all, and who loves above all those who worship him and who love their neighbor as themselves, etc.” (TTP VII, G III.103 | C II.176).

6 TTP XIV, G III.177 | C II.268.

7 TTP VII, G III.103 | C II.176.

8 TTP XII, chapter title, G III.158 | C II.248: “On the true original text of the divine law, why Scripture can be called Sacred, and why it can be called the word of God. Finally it is shown that insofar as it contains the word of God, it has reached us uncorrupted.”

9 TTP XII, G III.165 | C II.255.

10 TTP XII, G III.159 | C III.249.

11 TTP XII, G III.160 | C II.250.

12 TTP V, G III.79 | C II.150.

13 TTP V, G III.79 | C II.150.

14 TTP XII, G III.159 | C II.249.

obey God wholeheartedly, by practicing justice and charity.”¹ Indeed, Spinoza deplors all those “prejudices [that] have arisen from the fact that the common people ... worship the books of Scripture rather than the word of God itself.”²

Third, and last, the seven doctrines are not necessarily the only possible doctrines of universal faith.³ A doctrine of universal faith is such that, without it, piety and true religion are impossible: “those doctrines belong to the catholic faith, then, which obedience to God absolutely assumes, and ignorance of which makes obedience absolutely impossible.”⁴ We should, however, not conclude from this that only such narratives that include the specific seven items on Spinoza’s list—God’s existence, uniqueness, omnipresence, and so on—will ever qualify. His use of the adjective “universal” in this context is instructive in that regard. Generally, he uses it to qualify faith, religion, or divine law, as they are related to the practical side of true religion, to works, or the exercise of justice and charity.⁵ But he never uses it to qualify doctrines, let alone the seven Scriptural doctrines listed in TTP XIV: they are not universal doctrines of faith, but doctrines of universal faith. This suggests that Scripture does not exactly contain the but rather a doctrine of universal faith, identical to it only in the sense of falling entirely under its concept but without being of equal extension. The seven doctrines of Scripture form a particularly consistent configuration of mutually supportive propositions and, for that reason, they have proven to be a strong doctrine of universal faith, difficult to corrupt throughout its long history.⁶ But even if Spinoza provides no example, or may not even have thought of any other doctrines than those contained in Scripture that would qualify, he does not exclude that they could be conceived. This last point is crucial for understanding how Spinoza is situated in relation to both Christianity and to other religions.

Graeme Hunter has suggested that Spinoza was a “radical Christian,” quoting the doctrines of universal faith as evidence.⁷ And Spinoza was doubtless sympathetic to certain strands of Christianity, such as those that some of his closest friends adhered to, like Pierre Balling or Jarig Jelles.⁸ However, as Spinoza saw it, adhering to true religion in the spirit of Christ, i.e., conforming to the set of seven specifically Christian doctrines of universal faith, is a way to encourage the practice of true religion; it is not the way!⁹ In any case, Spinoza does not require, say, Muslims or Jews to conform to the seven (Christian) doctrines of faith, and even less to do so contrary to their actual beliefs or to lie about their faith for the sake of maintaining piety.¹⁰ He is calling for them to sincerely adhere to a doctrine of

1 TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.73; this is Spinoza’s summary of TTP XII, G III.158–66|C II.248–56.

2 TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.73.

3 On this point, I disagree with several commentators, including e.g. Matheron, “Politique et religion,” p. 346; Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, p. 113.

4 TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.268. Note that Spinoza uses the terms “catholic” and “universal” as synonymous in this context. No reference to the Roman Catholic faith is intended. See also TTP III, 177|C II.268: “doctrines pertain to the catholic or universal faith [catholicam, sive Universalem] which can be controversial among honest men.” See finally the discussion by Curley at C II.610–11.

5 For the expression “universal religion,” see TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.72; TTP XII, G III.162|C II.252; TTP VII, G III.116|C II.190; TTP XIX, G III.232|C II.336; TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587; Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671, Letter 43, G IV.226|C II.389. For “universal faith,” see TTP XIV, G III.174|C II.265; TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.268; Spinoza to Burgh, end 1675/early 1676, Letter 76, G IV.318|C II.474. For “universal divine law,” see in particular TTP IV, G III.61|C II.129; see also TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.72; TTP V, G III.69|C II.138; TTP V, G III.69|C II.139; TTP V, G III.71|C II.140.

6 TTP XII, G III.165|C II.255: “That Scripture has always taught [to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself], that here no error which could corrupt the meaning has crept in, is indisputable. That would be noticed immediately by everyone; no one could have distorted this without his wickedness being obvious. ... we must maintain that this foundation is uncorrupted.”

7 Hunter, *Radical Protestantism*. For a refutation, see Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, pp. 172–5. I agree with Nadler that “true faith has nothing to do with superstitious dogmas or empty ceremonies of any sectarian worship” (Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 175), but only on condition that we add the non-trivial provisos that not all dogmas are superstitious, all ceremonies empty, or all worship sectarian. Christianity—or “true” versions of Christianity at any rate, i.e., those that abide by the seven doctrines of universal faith—represents such “true faith,” including, as we shall see shortly, the accompanying worship, dogmas, and ceremonies that serve to keep believers to it with a constant heart.

8 On the religion of Balling and Jelles, see Kolakowski, *Chrétien sans église*, pp. 206–25; Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, pp. 185–214; Villaverde, “Spinoza’s Paradoxes,” pp. 22–3, 28–9.

9 I owe this efficient formulation to Karel D’huyvetters.

10 On this point, I disagree with Laursen. According to him, Spinoza embraces a theory of beneficial lying to be used by those who must, but in fact do not, believe in the seven doctrines (“Spinoza on Lying,” esp. p. 39; “Spinoza, Strauss, and the Morality of Lying,” pp. 171–2, 178–9, 183–5; “Spinoza on Toleration,” p. 189). Leo Strauss also believed that Spinoza promoted beneficial lying—even though he did not attribute lying to Spinoza directly but employed euphemisms like “ruses” and “caution or thrift in communicating” (Strauss, “How to Study,” pp. 108,

faith—an interpretation of their doctrine of faith—that is equally oriented toward the practice of true religion which is everywhere and always the same. As he writes: “as far as the Turks and the other nations are concerned, if they worship God with the practice of justice and with charity toward their neighbor, I believe they have the spirit of Christ and are saved.”¹ As for atheists, at least on Spinoza’s own understanding of who they are, they fall entirely outside this framework of universal doctrines and true religion, because “atheism” for Spinoza is not defined by the denial of the existence of God, or any other belief or lack of belief in some speculative doctrine,² but exclusively by a practice contrary to true religion. Atheists must be recognized by the “life they follow,” from the fact that they “seek honors and riches immoderately” rather than “cultivat[ing] true knowledge and true life.”³

Scripture, as we have seen, does not contain “philosophic speculation.”⁴ Its common core is exceedingly easy to perceive for anyone whose judgment is not entirely clouded by prejudice and superstition. And yet, in an alternative account of the doctrines of universal faith earlier in Spinoza’s text, in TTP V, he describes them as those “strictly speculative matters Scripture wishes to teach.”⁵ This description of the doctrines as “speculative” is important to retain for reasons that relate to the basic construction of Spinoza’s argument. He clearly does not mean to say that Scripture contains speculative theology or complex, philosophical reasoning about religious doctrine. This would be a straightforward contradiction of what he shall go on to affirm later. Rather, he wants to stress how doctrines take a particular form, namely as theoretical propositions that one can affirm as true or not true, as opposed to “moral teachings” (*documenta moralia*) or universal “precepts” (*praecepta*) that one can conform to or not in one’s actions.⁶ This distinction between speculative doctrines and “moral lessons” and “precepts” forms the background for a systematic distinction that Spinoza draws between “doctrines of universal faith” and “true religion” that even the best commentators sometimes tend to overlook or not respect.⁷ Each is associated with a distinct lexical field, but they are also related to each other in a very particular way that Spinoza formulates by means of the two notions of a “foundation” (*fundamentum*) and a “standard” (*norma*). Foundations are theoretical or speculative; standards are practical.

True religion is the practical standard of universal faith and consists in the conformity of our actions to divine law. That law is exceedingly simple: it consists in the universal moral lessons of charity and justice: “the whole law consists only in this: loving one’s neighbor. So no one can deny that one who, according to God’s command, loves his neighbor as himself is really obedient, and according to the law, blessed.”⁸ Now, Spinoza continues, “this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we to determine all the doctrines of that faith, the beliefs everyone

112; see also Hyman, “Spinoza’s Dogmas,” p. 192). The first to propose such a reading of Spinoza was perhaps Lambert van Velthuysen in his 1671 letter to Jacob Ostens on the TTP (see Letter 42, G IV.216|C II.383).

1 Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671, Letter 43, G IV.226|C II.389; trans. modified.

2 Certainly, according to Spinoza’s analysis of miracles, “belief in [something contrary to nature and its laws] would make us doubt everything and would lead to atheism” (TTP VI, G III.87|C II.199). Note, however, that this belief as such is not what defines atheism. It merely leads to it.

3 Spinoza to Ostens, February 1761, Letter 43, G IV.219|C II.386, and TTP Preface, G III.10|C II.94. See also Villaverde, “Spinoza’s Paradoxes,” p. 11. For the same opposition, see moreover TdE, §1–2, G II.5|C I.26.

4 TTP XI, G III.158|C II.247.

5 TTP V, G III.77|C II.148.

6 The notion *documenta moralia* (“moral lessons” or “moral teachings”) appears frequently in the TTP. See TTP V, G III.70–1|C II.139–40; TTP VII, G III.99|C II.171; TTP VII, G III.102|C II.175; TTP VII, G III.111|C II.185; TTP IX, G III.135|C II.217 (*documenta moralia*, eight occurrences, all given by Curley as “moral teachings”); TTP V, G III.71–4|C II.144 (*documenta moralia docere*, four occurrences, given by Curley as “to teach moral lessons”). We also find a couple of occurrences in the correspondence, in two practically identical passages both concerned with the TTP. See Spinoza to Ostens, February 1671, Letter 42, G IV.222|C II.387; Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. January 1, 1676, Letter 75, G IV.312|C II.471. “Moral teachings” are “precepts” (see TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278: “the precepts... or teachings concerning life [*praecepta sive documenta vitae*]”), but the former have a universal quality that the latter need not have (see TTP V, G III.70–1|C II.140). The expression *documenta moralia* is absent from the Ethics, which is no coincidence: the Ethics does not “teach moral lessons” because it is not a didactic but a demonstrative exercise; it does not teach precepts from experience, but deduces propositions from definitions (on this point, see Chapter 8, sect. “Texts on Teaching and Learning”).

7 See e.g. Curley, “Spinoza’s Exchange with Albert Burgh,” p. 24.

8 TTP XIV, G III.174|C II.265.

is bound to accept.”¹ No doctrine will qualify as being of “universal faith” unless it measures up to the practical standard of true religion.

Conversely, doctrines of universal faith form the speculative or theoretical foundation of true religion. They are conceived as perceived truths that one can believe in or not.² Subscribing to such doctrines is a necessary condition for obedience to the divine natural law: “If any of these doctrines is taken away, obedience also is destroyed.”³ This is because the practice of true religion, i.e., obedience to the divine law of justice and charity, requires a doctrinal framework, a speculative configuration of simple beliefs that will orient the believer in the right direction. For example, the common man will be encouraged to practice true religion if he believes that being charitable and just is pleasing to God, that doing so will bring him salvation, or that he can be forgiven for not doing so if he repents.

In sum, universal faith is the speculative foundation of true religion while true religion forms the practical standard of universal faith. True religion, or piety, is concerned with the conformity of our worship to the simple moral lessons of charity and justice, understood as rules of living. The doctrines of universal faith, by contrast, do not prescribe rules about how to live piously, but are speculative propositions that one must believe in order to be motivated by faith to live piously, such as believing that God exists, is unique, omnipresent, all-knowing, just, and merciful. True religion relates to works, universal faith to beliefs.

As simple speculative propositions whose standard is entirely practical, the doctrines of universal faith entertain a peculiar relation to their own truth content. Spinoza considers them to form the foundation of true religion. That, however, does not necessarily mean that they themselves are, or need to be, true in order to fulfill this foundational role. The truth of religion is a matter of practice and does not “require true doctrines, but only such doctrines as are necessary for obedience, which strengthen our hearts in love toward our neighbors.”⁴ And indeed, if we focus on the seven Christian doctrines of universal faith that Spinoza lists, it is clear that, by the philosopher’s own lights, not all of them can pass for philosophically true in any sense. Certainly, I cannot agree with Laursen who sees them merely as “beneficial lies” that Spinoza the atheist must necessarily reject entirely.⁵ Some of these doctrines will, in the Ethics, receive an interpretation that makes of them philosophically acceptable propositions. It is transparently the case for doctrines (1) and (2) which are both flatly asserted, respectively, in E1p11 and E1p14c1. Less evidently, it is perhaps also the case for doctrines (3) through (6). It is, however, hard to see how, on any interpretation, doctrine (7) with its emphasis on “repentance” could pass the test of philosophical truth. No matter how we interpret it, this doctrine seems rather to accommodate the kind of anthropomorphism that Spinoza clearly condemns in the Ethics.⁶ “Repentance” is, by Spinoza’s own lights, a violently sad passion inseparable from the fiction of a free will.⁷ A rational person will consider it useless, even harmful.⁸

¹ TTP XIV, G III.174 | C II.265.

² In this respect, Spinoza’s doctrines of universal faith are less similar to the “ethical precepts” that Grotius insists upon in the Meletius (§89, §133) than to the six speculative doctrines to which Grotius reduces Christianity in *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, I, sect. 2–7, pp. 31–40.

³ TTP XIV, G III.178 | C II.269.

⁴ TTP XIV, G III.176 | C II.267; see also TTP XIV, G III.177 | C II.268: “doctrines must be judged only by the works.” See also James, Spinoza, pp. 207–8.

⁵ See Laursen, “Spinoza on Lying.”

⁶ For a similar assessment of the truth value of the seven doctrines, see Garber, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” pp. 177–8.

⁷ See E3p51s, G II.179 | C I.523: “Repentance is Sadness accompanied by the idea of oneself as cause, and Self-esteem is Joy accompanied by the idea of oneself as cause. Because men believe themselves free, these affects are very violent.” For an excellent analysis, see Laux, *Imagination et religion*, pp. 156–7, 164–6.

⁸ According to the *Korte Verhandeling*, repentance is a sad passion, “injurious, evil, and to be shunned and fled” (KV I, viii, §2, G I.73 | C II.115). In the Ethics, repentance (*paenitentia*) is described as the sadness contrary to self-contentment (*acquiescentia in se ipso*) (E3p30, C II.163 | G I.511). The opposition stems from Desmarets’ Latin translation of Descartes’s *Passions de l’âme*: “Le repentir est directement contraire à la Satisfaction de soy mesme / *Paenitentia est directe contraria Satisfactione sive Acquiescentia in se ipso*” (Descartes, *Des passions de l’âme*, III, art. 191, AT XI.427 / *De Passiones, sive De affectibus animæ*, in *Opera*, vol. III, p. 84). See also the note by Moreau in Spinoza, *Éthique*, ed. Steenbakkers and Moreau, p. 564 n. 172.

But in the end, all this matters very little. The doctrines must be seen in the light of the interpretations of them that Spinoza himself provides in the TTP and, on those interpretations, the meaning of most, if not all, is stated without any regard whatsoever for philosophical truth. Spinoza, for example, takes the first doctrine to signify that God is “supremely just and merciful, or a model of true life”;¹ or he takes the fourth to mean that God “acts only from his absolute good pleasure and special grace.”² On the interpretation of them he himself gives in the immediate context, Spinoza clearly considered many of these doctrines to be strictly speaking false.³

This falsity, however, forms no obstacle to the doctrines fulfilling their purpose, since religion does not aim at truth but only obedience. In that respect, I agree with Michael Rosenthal’s functional interpretation of the doctrines as dialectical propositions that are true only insofar as they are practically useful.⁴ As long as people behave justly and charitably, that is to say piously, it matters little whether the doctrines that incite them to do so are true or false: “faith requires, not so much true doctrines, as pious doctrines, i.e., doctrines which move the heart to obedience, even if many of them do not have even a shadow of the truth.”⁵ The doctrines of universal faith may or may not be true, but are in their nature indifferent to the question: “The faith of each person should be considered pious or impious only on account of his obedience or stubbornness, not on account of its truth or falsity.”⁶ True religion may thus very well be—indeed often is—taught by means of philosophically false but pious doctrines, for “faith requires piety more than it does truth” and “the person who displays the best arguments is not necessarily the one who displays the best faith.”⁷ Indeed, a great many people are best incited to obey, to exercise charity and justice, by doctrines of faith that are, in fact, untrue:

we must not for a moment believe that opinions, considered in themselves and without regard to works, have any piety or impiety in them. Instead we should say that a person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel. So, if anyone becomes stiff-necked by believing truths, he is really impious; on the other hand, if he becomes obedient by believing falsehoods, he has a pious faith.⁸

We should finally, in relation to the precise epistemological status of the doctrines of universal faith, take note of how universal faith relates to what Spinoza in the TTP calls “universal ethics.”⁹ We can safely assume that the latter coincides with the ethics of the Ethics. Universal ethics represents such knowledge as will necessarily motivate us to freely conform to the divine law of justice and charity. This divine law is universal, i.e., common to all men: “divine law, which renders men truly blessed, and teaches a true life, is universal to all men.”¹⁰ It can be “understood simply by the consideration of human nature,”¹¹ which is exactly what Spinoza does in the Ethics, mostly by demonstrating that nothing is more useful to a human being than another human being when they live under the guidance of reason.¹² In demonstrating this, the Ethics proceeds according to reason. Mathematics, or geometry, provides the model. As Spinoza summarizes the procedure in the TTP, beginning with “intellectual axioms known through themselves” and “deducing all ... perceptions from a few axioms and connecting them together,”¹³ the demonstration in the Ethics tracks “the fixed and immutable

1 TTP XIV, G III.178|C II.268.

2 TTP XIV, G III.178|C II.268.

3 See Curley, “Spinoza’s Exchange with Albert Burgh,” pp. 25–6; Antognazza, “Truth and Toleration,” pp. 37–9. For a slightly different but I think compatible analysis, see Garber, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” pp. 179–80.

4 See Rosenthal, “Spinoza’s Dogmas”; see also Garber, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” pp. 171, 182; James, Spinoza, pp. 207–14.

5 TTP XIV, G III.176|C II.267.

6 TTP XIV, G III.176–7|C II.267–8.

7 TTP XIV, G III.179|C II.270.

8 TTP XIII, G III.172|C II.263.

9 TTP IV, G III.128|C II.128.

10 TTP V, G III.69|C II.138; see also TTP V, G III.70|C II.140.

11 TTP IV, G III.61|C II.129.

12 E4p35c1, G II.233|C I.563.

13 TTP V, G III.76–7|C II.147–8.

order of nature, or the connection of natural things,” in conformity with “the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen.”¹

By contrast, universal faith comprises such beliefs as will necessarily motivate obedience to the divine law of justice and charity. Here, divine law is not known by demonstration but taught by means of doctrines embedded in narratives. Such narratives teach “solely by experience” and do “not give any definitions.”² They appeal not to the understanding but only to the imagination. It is in this respect that Spinoza’s “universal ethics” differs from his “universal faith”: they both comprise the divine law, but in the first case expressed in terms of divine necessity, and in the second in terms of divine command: the former appeals to reason by means of geometrical demonstration, while the latter appeals to the imagination by means of doctrinal narratives. This is also why we should never assimilate Spinoza’s doctrines of universal faith to anything like a “rational theology.” Universal faith is designed neither to conform nor to appeal to reason. It is designed to structure the religious imagination in the absence of reason, to orient and harness it so as to operate in a particular way.

Still, if universal faith and universal ethics employ entirely different means, they are aligned in terms of their ultimate goals, namely the practice of charity and justice. When a person acts according to reason, as does in effect someone whose actions are governed by the demonstrative knowledge obtained through the deduction of a universal ethics, that person acts in accordance with the dictates of his or her own nature. That is to say, by definition, that person acts freely. However, since the practice of true religion that the doctrines of universal faith make possible closely tracks the practice of a person living under the guidance of reason, embracing universal faith is not just a means of obeying divine law, but also a means of acting as if free. Obeying the precepts of true religion is acting as if free. The modal construction of the theory of universal faith is thus to some extent correlated with Spinoza’s own philosophical understanding of freedom and necessity, although it elaborates a version of that modal construction which is less concerned with freedom in the strong sense of being truly active or self-determined. Instead, it focuses on a weaker sense of learning how to act as if one is free, even when one is not, or not yet, free in the truly active sense. The doctrines of universal faith serve to ensure that. Or, in the famous expression by Alexandre Matheron, they bring “salvation to the ignorant.”³

The conception places Spinoza’s argument in a peculiar position in relation to the dominant humanist tradition in the Netherlands for thinking about freedom of conscience and toleration. As we discuss in more detail in the following section, this tradition mostly favored a minimalist strategy, defending the view that only a few key doctrines are necessary while all other doctrines remain optional; that is to say, free to adopt or not.⁴ As Erasmus famously wrote to Carondelet in 1523: “The sum of our religion is peace and concord. This can hardly remain the case unless we define as few matters as possible and leave each individual’s judgement free on many questions.”⁵ Similarly, according to Castellio, “it is sufficient to accept the fundamental points of true religion.”⁶ Grotius also argues that the solution to confessional strife would “consist in limiting the number of necessary articles of faith to those few that are most self-evident.”⁷ In all of them, the basic modal construction at work opposes necessity to freedom, religion being considered freer as it imposes fewer necessary doctrines. By contrast, when establishing the minimal requirements for what is necessary to believe for true religion, Spinoza’s doctrines of universal faith indicate what a doctrine of faith must contain in order to encourage people to act as if they were rational and self-determined; that is to say, as if they were free in Spinoza’s own, more positive sense. This is why Spinoza—who never opposes the necessary to the free—defends a

1 TTP III, G III.46|C II.112; see also TTP XVI, Annotation XXXIV, G III.264|C II.292.

2 TTP V, G III.77|C II.148.

3 Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*.

4 Remer, *Humanism*, p. 3.

5 Erasmus, *Letter to Carondelet*, January 5, 1523, trans. in Ohlin, *Six Essays*.

6 Castellio, *Concerning Heretics*, pp. 139–40. Note that this passage is from the second dedicatory letter, only present in the first French edition, and not necessarily by Castellio himself, but perhaps by his translator. See also Curley, “Sebastian Castellio,” pp. 59–60; Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, pp. 18–19.

7 Grotius, *Meletius, Epilogue*, §91, p. 133; see also Grotius, *Ordinum pietas*, p. 171.

view different from the minimalists. He does not argue that his necessary doctrines of faith constitute minimal restrictions on freedom. He argues that acting freely—or more precisely, acting as if free—out of a religious motivation requires embracing a minimal number of doctrines. So these doctrines are necessary conditions of acting freely as long as one is not yet truly free. And this, i.e., to act as if free because guided by universal faith, is the only thing that a “free” religious conscience can be on Spinoza’s conception. Freedom of religious conscience, then, does not consist in the fact that only a few key doctrines are obligatory. Instead, a few obligatory core doctrines exist exactly because it is through them that we learn to act as if we were free, but out of obedience. The exercise of the freedom of conscience thus moves from the periphery of religious doctrine to its very core, from the individual choice of things indifferent to the collective embrace of core doctrines.

De reliquis, or, On Things Indifferent

Still, Spinoza acknowledges that no actual religion exists whose foundational belief system consists solely in the barebone doctrines of universal faith. They all come with additional beliefs about the appearance of God, his character and actions, his commitment to us, and our obligations toward him—beliefs that differ from one person to the next, from one sect to the next, from one religion to the next. Spinoza declares all such doctrines indifferent:

As for the rest [Caeterum], it doesn’t matter, as far as faith is concerned It’s all the same, whatever each person maintains about these things. ... It doesn’t matter, I say, as far as faith is concerned, how each person understands these and similar things, provided he does not conclude that he may take a greater license to sin, or that he should become less obedient to God.¹

The same goes for the accompanying ceremonies: “[Natural divine law] does not require ceremonies, i.e., actions that in themselves are indifferent, and are called good only by institution.”²

Such secondary doctrines and ceremonies, indifferent in themselves, constitute what the humanist tradition generally designates by the originally Stoic notion of *adiaphora*. Their role and importance is one of the main points of contention in post-Reformation theological controversy. Many important protestant controversialists in the minimalist tradition—Hugo Grotius is probably the most prominent example, but the tradition is long and deep, from Erasmus and Jacob Acontius to Dirck Coornhert and Isaac d’Huisseau—argue that the secondary doctrines should either be entirely subordinated to the core doctrines, or done away with altogether in the definition of faith. The faithful ought to focus exclusively on the essential natural religion, a practical religion of the heart focused on the exercise of charity and the love of God.³ Hugo Grotius’s condensed *Meletius* (written 1611; first published 1988) is perhaps the clearest expression of this theological school. Another example, exactly contemporary with the publication of the TTP, is the Saumur theologian Isaac d’Huisseau’s *La Réunion du Christianisme* of 1670—a work well known in Spinoza’s circles because a Dutch version was published in 1671 by Jan Hendriksz Glazemaker, a key member of those circles who also contributed substantially to the translation of Spinoza’s works.

The religious minimalists have two basic reasons for relegating everything but a few practical doctrines to the realm of “indifferent things.”

The first reason concerns the accessibility of saving Christian religion to all believers. For example, in discussing the Christian faith, Grotius insists on the simplicity of doctrine that “enables all people, even the uneducated, to find out in a straightforward way enough to attain salvation,” for “God, whom all people have in common and who is the same for everybody, has undoubtedly made the means to

¹ TTP XIV, G III.178 | C II.269–70.

² TTP IV, G III.62 | C II.130; see also TTP V, G III.70 | C II.161: “[Ceremonies] are good only by institution, and not by nature; so they are not written in minds.”

³ For a study of the religions of the *credo minimum*, see Lagrée, *La Raison ardente*. See also Remer, *Humanism*, especially chapters 2 and 3 on Erasmus and Acontius, pp. 43–136.

come to Him such that it is equally accessible and easy for everybody.”¹ Along similar lines, d’Huisseau complains that Christian doctrine has been depicted as “difficult, tricky, filled with and burdened by innumerable subtle questions and curious and useless doctrines” in a way that has “rendered it unrecognizable by entirely deforming its natural beauty.”² In order to overcome these evils, he proposes to adopt “a method which is familiar and adapted to the capabilities of all kinds of minds,” making it his “primary aim to make all Christians, even the simplest and most ignorant, understand the nature of the religion they profess, by returning to its principles, and to its fundamental doctrines.”³

The second reason is irenic: embracing minimalism is a way to neutralize the confessional differences that give rise to intolerance, persecution, and war. Grotius thus writes about sectarianism that the “remedy for this disease will ... consist in limiting the necessary articles of faith to those few which are most self-evident.”⁴ As for d’Huisseau, he deplores how sacred religion has been “miserably torn apart by so many sects” because “everyone remains closely attached to their prejudices and preconceived opinions,” and proposes instead to “distinguish what is fundamental in the Christian religion from what is not, in order to see how we can still get along with each other.”⁵

Spinoza can certainly be said to have one foot in that tradition.⁶ His remarks quoted above about beliefs that “do not matter” and ceremonies that “in themselves are indifferent” testify to this, as does also his constant insistence upon the simplicity and accessibility of true religion. In most formulations in the humanist tradition, however, the indifference of secondary doctrines and ceremonies is put forward as a rationale for toleration: everyone should be allowed to adopt whatever doctrines and ceremonies they please. Spinoza proposes no such argument. In fact, in a discussion of the Christian ceremonies in TTP V, he takes an entirely different approach:

As for the Christian ceremonies, viz., baptism, the lord’s supper, the festivals, public statements, and whatever others there may be which are and always have been common to all Christianity, if Christ or the Apostles ever instituted these (which so far I do not find to be sufficiently established), they were instituted only as external signs of the universal church, not as things which contribute to blessedness or have any holiness in them. So though these ceremonies were not instituted with respect to a state, still they were instituted only with respect to the whole society. So someone who lives alone is not bound by them at all. Indeed, someone who lives in a state where the Christian religion is forbidden is bound to abstain from these ceremonies. But he can still live blessedly.⁷

Ceremonies and particular doctrines, Spinoza seems to argue here, are not individual or private choices but tied to forms of social interaction. As such, they must remain under the control of the state and the sovereign powers, which can forbid them or allow them as they see fit. Spinoza, it seems, defends a conception of adiaphora with strong Erastian implications at first sight not unlike what we find, for example, in Hobbes’s *Leviathan* or in the young Locke’s two Tracts on Government. On the grounds that adiaphora are concerned with the public, collective expression of religion, they all argue, adiaphora should fall under the public authority of the state which should be able to allow or forbid such particular external signs of worship at its discretion.⁸

1 Grotius, *Meletius*, §55, p. 120.

2 d’Huisseau, *La Réunion*, Preface, [unpaginated].

3 d’Huisseau, *La Réunion*, Preface, [unpaginated]. For the Dutch translation of 1671, see d’Huisseau, *De Vereeniging Van’t Christendom*. D’Huisseau’s work, even though it was published anonymously and he always denied writing it, earned him an accusation of Socinianism that got him expelled from the Reformed Church of France. On the d’Huisseau affair, see Stauffer, *L’Affaire d’Huisseau*; Soman, “Arminianism in France”; Lagrée, *La Raison ardente*, pp. 58–9.

4 Grotius, *Meletius*, §90, p. 133.

5 d’Huisseau, *La Réunion*, Preface, [unpaginated].

6 See Rosenthal, “Spinoza’s Dogmas.”

7 TTP V, G III.76 | C II.146–7.

8 For Hobbes, see *Leviathan*, XXXI, p. 572: “whereas there be an infinite number of Actions, and Gestures, of an indifferent nature; such of them as the Common-wealth shall ordain to be Publicly and Universally in use, as signes of Honour, and part of Gods Worship, are to be taken and used for such by the Subjects.” For Locke, see the two Tracts of 1660 and 1662 in *Political Essays* where he argues that “no one will deny that the magistrate can determine indifferent things in the worship of God and impose them on his subjects” (*Political Essays*, p. 57; see also pp. 7, 9, 15–16, 29–30, 39–40, 51 [First Tract] and 57, 64, 62–72 [Second Tract]). Locke’s position starkly differs from the later

In reality, however, Spinoza does not simply put inessential doctrines and ceremonies to one side as irrelevant to true religion and important only in relation to state regulation of civil society. He considers them useful, even necessary, for making common man truly embrace the doctrines of universal faith. Rather than being an instrument serving political purposes alone, adiaphora have to be politically managed in order to make sure that they serve their genuinely religious purpose, or to ensure that they “tend to this point: that there is a supreme being, who loves justice and charity, and whom everyone, if he is to be saved, is bound to obey and to worship by practicing justice and charity toward his neighbor.”¹

To grasp Spinoza’s thought here, we must return to the idea—already discussed in Chapters 3 and 4—that, via the narratives of Holy Scripture and the experiences they relate, people can be brought to “embrace with moral certainty” their foundation, i.e., the Christian doctrines of universal faith.² The narratives are not intended to make people understand, but only to “teach and enlighten men enough to imprint obedience and devotion on their hearts.”³ Embracing the Christian doctrines requires a kind of moral conviction that makes us internalize them and act in accordance with them. In order to produce such conviction, however, the doctrines must be taught in a way that appeals to each man’s individual experience and mentality. But most people are unlikely to feel inspired to obey God by being served a mere list of seven skeletal doctrines. As Isaac d’Huisseau puts the point colorfully, “people ask for a lot of seasoning of even the best meats.”⁴ However, contrary to d’Huisseau who shows little taste for spicy food, Spinoza realizes that if the minimal structure of universal faith is necessary for any authentic religious narrative to serve its practical purpose, this cannot be sufficient. In order to gain practical efficacy, doctrine must be dressed up in a fuller attire of narratives and ceremonial practices. The imagination must be summoned in order for a profession to translate into works. And the things “in themselves indifferent” that separate the different Christian confessions and sects from each other represent exactly such adaptations of universal faith, designed to make people embrace the doctrines of universal faith which, in themselves, do not engage sufficiently the individual imagination to prompt the appropriate religious response. Adiaphora may thus be indifferent in themselves, but they still play a crucial role relative to those who believe in them and practice them.⁵ They “enabl[e] each person to most easily perceive” the fundamentals of religion by “relating these matters in a style and with expressions most apt to move ordinary people’s hearts.”⁶ And this is why, Spinoza writes, over and above having universal faith, “as for the rest [de reliquis], since each person knows himself better [than anyone else does], he must think as he sees will be better for him, to strengthen himself in his love of justice.”⁷

When pointing to this significant role of the adiaphora, Spinoza diagnoses a serious weakness in the minimalist program, namely a curious blindness to the fact that religious doctrines should not only guide our actions but also provide sufficient motivation for embracing them. By adjusting universal faith to the individual imagination, auxiliary beliefs and ceremonies make it “easier for [each person] to accept them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart.”⁸ Doctrinal variation necessarily follows: “No one doubts that the common mentality of men is extremely variable, and that not everyone is equally satisfied by all things. Opinions govern men in different ways: those which

Letter Concerning Toleration, p. 61, according to which “things in their own nature indifferent cannot, by any human authority, be made any part of the worship of God, for this very reason: because they are indifferent.” For a recent commentary, see Bejan, *Mere Civility*, pp. 92–3 (on Hobbes) and pp. 115–20 (on Locke).

1 TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.268; trans. modified.

2 TTP VII, Annotation VIII, G III.253|C II.185; see also TTP XV, G III.185|C II.278.

3 TTP V, G III.77–8|C II.148–9.

4 d’Huisseau, *La Réunion*, Preface, [unpaginated].

5 Spinoza’s point is not unlike the one that John Locke makes in the additions to his 1667 *Essay Concerning Toleration* when declaring that “in religious worship nothing is indifferent ..., however they may be in their own nature perfectly indifferent, yet when I am worshipping my god in a way I think he has prescribed & will approve of I cannot alter omit or adde any circumstances in that which I think the true way of worship” (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Toleration*, p. 308). Nothing is indifferent for those who believe.

6 TTP XIII, G III.167|C II.257.

7 TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.268.

8 TTP XIV, G III.178|C II.270.

move one person to devotion, move another to laughter and contempt.”¹ Depending on the mentality of individuals, groups, or peoples, doctrines of faith will thus—while maintaining a common core—assume different shapes and contours at the periphery as they each gain the fuller narrative body that makes them appealing to the individual imagination, allowing them to fulfill their practical function efficiently.

Most if not all believers require this additional motivation provided by secondary doctrines and ceremonies in order to be obedient. Religious minimalism may thus be a goal in the effort to overcome disorderly schism, but must subsequently form the starting point for renewed doctrinal diversification:

because men vary greatly in their mentality, because one is content with these opinions, another with those, and because what moves one person to religion moves another to laughter, from these considerations, together with what has been said above, I conclude that each person must be allowed freedom of judgment and the power to interpret the foundations of faith according to his own mentality.²

It is important not to confuse this freedom of interpretation with a mere option, to be taken up or not at will. People are not just allowed, but obliged to seek out those secondary doctrines and ceremonies that will provide them with the required support to live a religious life. The doctrines of universal faith alone constitute “the beliefs that everyone is bound to accept.”³ In order to embrace them with the requisite fervor, everyone is, however, equally “bound to [tenetur] accommodate [the faith] to his own opinions, so that he can accept it without any mental conflict and without any hesitation.”⁴ Indifferent things are not optional. Every person even has a duty to seek out the particular form of worship which will best incite them to live a religious life.⁵ Admittedly, in the TTP, Spinoza does not speak of a “duty” (*officium*) in this context.⁶ In the TP, however, he affirms that “everyone ... can worship God in accordance with true religion, and look out for himself, which is the duty of a private man [*viri privati officium*].”⁷ Seeking out the specific kind of worship that will ensure our individual salvation is exactly what is at stake here.

We are now in a better position to understand what Spinoza means in TTP V when recommending that the indifferent aspects of religious worship should be subjected to some state control, or why he argues that a Christian who lives in a state where the Christian religion is forbidden is bound to abstain from the Christian ceremonies. Contrary to Hobbes or the young Locke, Spinoza does not just argue that indifferent things such as ceremonies are public aspects of worship that ultimately are irrelevant to people’s internal worship. In fact, in view of their own salvation, everyone has a private duty to embrace the secondary doctrines and ceremonies that will best help them practice true religion wholeheartedly. Nonetheless, if such doctrines and ceremonies are “not instituted with respect to a state [*non ratione imperii*], still they [are] instituted only with respect to the whole society [*ratione integrae societatis*].” And therefore, Spinoza continues, if the state forbids them, we are still “bound to abstain” from them.⁸

The key to the argument lies in the distinction between state (*imperium*) and civil society (*societas*). Indifferent things are a private matter with which the state should in principle not concern itself. And

¹ TTP XIV, G III.177|C II.268.

² TTP Preface, G III.11|C II.73.

³ TTP XIV, G III.174|C II.265.

⁴ TTP XIV, G III.179|C II.270; trans. modified. See also TTP XIV, G III.178|C II.270 (trans. modified): “each person is bound to [tenetur] accommodate these doctrines of faith to his own capacities, and to interpret them for himself, as it seems to him easier for him to accept them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart, so that he may obey God wholeheartedly.”

⁵ What springs to mind here, of course, is the famous anecdote related by the Calvinist pastor Johannes Colerus in his 1704 *Life of Spinoza* about Spinoza’s landlady in The Hague, Ida Margarete van der Spuyck, who was also a member of Colerus’s congregation. Ida Margarete had asked the philosopher whether he thought she “cou’d be saved in the Religion she profest,” to which he replied: “Your Religion is a good one, you need not look for another, nor doubt that you may be saved in it, provided, whilst you apply yourself to Piety, you live at the same time a peaceable and quiet Life” (Colerus, *The Life*, p. 41).

⁶ In Curley’s translation, Spinoza writes in TTP XV that “Scripture does not teach philosophic matters, but only religious duty,” but “religious duty” here translates *pietas*: “*Scripturae non res philosophicas, sed solam pietatem docere*” (TTP XV, G III.180|C II.272).

⁷ TP III.10, G III.289|C II.522.

⁸ TTP V, G III.76|C II.146–7.

yet, because they have implications for civil society, the state should be concerned after all. The reason why such implications for civil society exist harks back to a particular feature of Spinoza's understanding of the boundaries between the private and the public, already discussed in some detail in Chapter 5.1 Contrary to Hobbes or the young Locke, Spinoza does not think that private religion is silent or a matter of internal worship alone. People cannot hold their tongues; it is in their nature to express themselves. Their private beliefs will necessarily and constantly spill into the public sphere, in both speech and action, producing effects that can be beneficial or pernicious, conducive or not to peace and security. Whether they are one or the other depends on the degree to which these private beliefs also help orient society as a whole toward the collective practice of justice and charity. Some state control over the public expression of private beliefs is therefore necessary. The state must ensure not only that, individually, citizens embrace such doctrines and ceremonies as will encourage them to live a religious life, but also that the global effect of these diversified efforts proves beneficial to the advancement of charity and justice in civil society as a whole. The public authorities must therefore—as we shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 11—actively encourage appropriate diversification of religious doctrines and forms of worship for individuals, but also curb such diversification whenever it proves detrimental to the practice of true religion within civil society as a whole. In return, all citizens must fulfill their duty as private men and seek out for themselves how to best adapt universal faith to their particular mentality, but only in such ways that it does not interfere with the advancement of true religion within civil society as a whole. And when all these conditions are fulfilled, Spinoza claims, “no room is left for controversies in the Church.”²

The Genesis of Schism

As we have seen, we must distinguish three levels in Spinoza's conception of religion and faith: (1) True religion prescribes obedience to the simple precepts of natural, divine law, namely the moral lessons of charity and justice; (2) Doctrines of universal faith constitute a set of beliefs that are necessary but not sufficient to motivate the common man to obey the precepts of true religion; (3) Beliefs and actions indifferent in themselves motivate people to embrace the doctrines of universal faith wholeheartedly by adapting the doctrinal framework of true religion to individual mentalities. This three-layered conception of religion and faith allows Spinoza to construct a persuasive argument in favor of broad latitude for different forms of worship within a free society; it allows him to show that such variation is conducive to both individual salvation and social peace. However, when claiming that, on this conception “no room is left for controversies in the Church,” or that he has found a recipe for complete religious peace, he is certainly too optimistic for his own argument.

Globally, Spinoza's reasoning is predicated on his separation of philosophy from theology, or on the idea that “there are no dealings, or no relationship, between faith, or [sive] theology, and philosophy. ... For the goal of philosophy is nothing but truth. But the goal of faith, as we've shown abundantly, is nothing but obedience and piety.”³ In virtue of this separation, Spinoza can claim that true religion, not philosophical truth, is the exclusive standard of universal faith. The truth content of a doctrine of faith is irrelevant to its piety and foreign to its function. And yet he cannot—and in fact does not, on closer inspection—entirely do away with the question of truth. For, if true piety does not require true doctrines, it still requires belief in the truth of those doctrines.⁴ The doctrines of universal faith are only practically efficacious “provided the person who accepts them does not know they are false.”⁵ No one is motivated to act in accordance with a religious doctrine they do not consider true. Indeed, “if men did not firmly believe [it], there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than pleasures.”⁶ The practical efficacy of doctrines of faith and religious ceremonies relies crucially

1 See Chapter 5, sect. “The Authority to Teach and Advise.”

2 TTP XIV, G III.177|CII 268.

3 TTP XIV, G III.179|C II.271; see also TTP XVI, G III.184|C II.277: “each rules its own domain. As we've said: reason's domain is truth and wisdom; theology's is piety and obedience.”

4 Garber also stresses this point in “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?,” pp. 173–4.

5 TTP XIV, G III.176|C II.267.

6 TTP XIV, G III.178|C II.269.

on the belief that those doctrines are in fact in conformity with God's will and the ceremonies in fact pleasing to him.

If, however, one believes in the truth of one's own particular form of worship, then that implies, on pain of self-contradiction, the belief in the falsity of other, different kinds of worship.¹ Whereas the practical upshot of my faith and my neighbor's different faith, insofar as they are both forms of true religion, is in principle one and the same—they both, in different ways, incite us to practice justice and charity—their relative truth value differs from one perspective to the other, rendering my neighbor's religion false for me and mine false for them, on account of our differences in mentality. As Spinoza replies to Albert Burgh's claim to have the one, true religion, i.e., the Roman Catholic one:

you will say that you are trusting in the internal testimony of the spirit of God, and that the others are led astray and deceived by the prince of wicked spirits. But all those who are outside the Roman Church will make the same claim about their church as you do about yours, with equal right.²

We end up in the situation later so acutely described by John Locke in the Letter Concerning Toleration according to which "every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical," but where "the controversy between these churches about the truth of their doctrines, and the purity of their worship, is on both sides equal."³ The figure of thought was already exceedingly common among humanist writers in favor of religious toleration. Castellio, for example, notes in *De haereticis* that "we regard those as heretics with whom we disagree. This is evident from the fact that today there is scarcely one of our innumerable sects which does not look upon the rest as heretics, so that if you are orthodox in one city or region, you are held for a heretic in the next."⁴ Similarly, Coornhert notes in the Synode over de Gewetensvrijheid how "many claim that the mark of the true church is true doctrine" but all the Christian churches refuse to accept that any of the others "have true doctrine, but claim that only they teach it and therefore that all the other churches are false and only theirs is the true church."⁵ Finally, the point is put with particular precision in the passage from Salvianus about heretics that concludes Grotius's *Meletius*: "what they are in our eyes, we are in theirs. ... We have the truth but they presume they have it."⁶

The resulting situation is not necessarily paradoxical, but invites us to perform a very delicate balancing act. For, because of it, within a tolerant state providing broad latitude for religious worship, there is a constant risk that the secondary doctrines associated with some particular sect or church faction become, for the members of that sect or faction, the standard of faith. And if that sect or faction insists upon the unique truth of its particular doctrines to the point of imposing them upon others, they become a major obstacle to true religion. Spinoza describes the mechanism vividly in TTP XIV:

we don't want to accuse the sectaries of impiety just because they accommodate the words of Scripture to their own opinions. For as Scripture was accommodated to the grasp of the common people, so everyone is permitted to accommodate it to his own opinions, if he sees that in that way he can obey God more wholeheartedly in matters of justice and charity. We do censure them, though, for being unwilling to grant this same freedom to others, and for

1 For a somewhat similar point, see Halper, "Spinoza on the Political Value," p. 172.

2 Spinoza to Burgh, end 1675/beginning 1676, Letter 76, G IV.320–1|C II.476.

3 Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration, pp. 34–5.

4 Castellio, *Concerning Heretics*, p. 129.

5 Coornhert, *Synod*, book I, Fifth Session, p. 70.

6 Grotius, *Meletius*, §91, p. 134. Grotius quotes from Salvianus Massiliensis, *De gubernatione Dei*, V, ii, a text he also references in *The Rights of War and Peace*, II, chap. 20, p. 1047. The passage is used by other authors inclining toward toleration, for example the Socinian Johann Crell in his 1637 *Vindiciae pro religionis libertate* (for the 1646 English translation, see *A Learned and Exceeding Well-Compiled Vindication of Liberty of Religion*, pp. 60–1); Louis Ellies Dupin in his 1703 *Traité de la Doctrine chrétienne et orthodoxe* (I, xix, pp. 536–7); and John Locke in his 1685 *New Method of Making Common-Place-Books*, entry on "Heretics," p. 22 (originally in French; English edition 1697; I reference the 1706 edition). On this passage in the context of Grotius, see Nellen, "Minimal Religion," p. 32; see also Lecler, *Histoire*, pp. 81–2, 394, 669.

persecuting, as God's enemies, everyone who does not think as they do, even though they are very honorable and obedient to true virtue.¹

Such sectaries end up violating true religion exactly by reference to unessential doctrinal beliefs the initial and only justification of which is to promote true religion.² Moreover, Spinoza cautions, such violations of the divine law of charity and justice will invariably invite retaliation: "As is natural, no hatred can be greater or more stubborn than one born of great devotion or piety, and believed to be pious. And they did not lack the usual cause which invariably inflames hatred more and more: its reciprocation."³

This point, too, is somewhat of a post-Reformation commonplace. Already in his famous letter to Jean Carondelet of 1523, Erasmus regrets how "the defense of the Catholic faith is put forward as a pretext, and in the meantime personal feelings become involved and the devil's business is pursued in the name of Christ."⁴ Jacob Acontius dramatically describes a similar phenomenon as "Satan's stratagems" in his famous 1565 book of the same name: such a stratagem is exactly in place when concerns for secondary doctrines of faith are invoked as justification for violating the practical precepts or moral lessons that form the primary content of religion.⁵

Spinoza gives distinct accounts of how such reciprocal persecution and sectarianism have come about in the Jewish context and in the Christian context. Among the Hebrews, Spinoza argues, the sectarian divisions between Pharisees, Sadducees, and so on occurred after the sovereign powers had lost their undivided control over sacred matters but had relinquished it to the high priests: "There were no sects in their religion until after the high priests in the second state had the authority to make [religious] decrees and to handle the affairs of the state."⁶ Sectarianism among the Hebrews, then, was caused by corrupt ecclesiastical leaders who "began to seek the glory of [their] own name both in religion and in other matters, determining everything by priestly authority," causing religion to "declin[e] into a deadly superstition."⁷ In a straightforward manner, the division into sects was the consequence of a declining state and a corrupt class of power-greedy church leaders, pitting religious laws against civil laws in the political arena.

In the Christian context, the situation is more complex. It is inseparable from the introduction of philosophy into theology and, by the same token, more intimately intertwined with the problem regarding the epistemological status of secondary doctrines analyzed earlier. The appearance of sectarian strife and schism within Christianity must be traced back to the way that Christianity was originally taught by the Apostles. In another context, we have already encountered the passage in TTP XI where Spinoza explains how "the fact that the Apostles built religion on different foundations gave rise to many disputes and schisms, which have tormented the church incessantly from the time of the

1 TTP XIV, G III.173 | C II.264; trans. modified.

2 For another good example, see also Coornhert, *Synod*, book I, Third session, p. 56: "The people are bent on externals and cannot be easily entertained except by external gestures and ceremonies. Still, it would be preferable to have none of these, except for what God himself has instituted. Now things are different, alas. Thus in this regard one either has to tolerate or defeat the other. Oh, if only we could tolerate each other! ... If each of us were diligent in acquiring the thing itself instead of being so bent on using the signs, then we would start to love each other, to suffer each other patiently and to improve one another by giving a good example, instead of embittering each other by this partisan bickering."

3 TTP XVII, G III.212–15 | C II.310–14, here G III.215 | C II.314.

4 Erasmus to Carondelet, January 5, 1523, trans. in Ohlin, *Six Essays*, p. 107.

5 Acontius, *Satan's Stratagems*. Spinoza never mentions Acontius explicitly, but he was an important reference in Dutch freethinking milieus. Acontius figures as the principal authority in Jarig Jelles's "Profession of the Universal and Christian Faith," the first draft of which he shared with Spinoza in 1673. Rieuwertsz published an amended version in 1684 after Jelles's death which is included in Curley's translation as Letter 48A (C II.398–403; for the reference to Acontius, see C II.398; for some commentary, see C II.267–8). From various reports, it appears that Spinoza generally approved of Jelles's text (Letter 48B, C II.403–5). For a succinct formulation of a "satanic stratagem" provided by an interlocutor who gave the idea an entirely different turn, see Nicolas Steno's 1675 open letter to Spinoza, which speaks of a situation where "wicked men are misusing indifferent things to subvert those that are necessary" (G IV.296 | C II.456). The argument was a standard humanist response to religious violence and helped shape the doctrines of toleration in the later seventeenth century, in John Locke in particular. See e.g. Marshall, *John Locke*, p. 324; Loconte, *God, Locke, and Liberty*, pp. 21–5. For commentary on Acontius, see Jacquot, *Acontius and the Progress of Tolerance*; Remer, *Humanism*, pp. 103–68.

6 TTP XVIII, G III.222 | C II.323.

7 TTP XVIII, G III.222 | C II.324.

Apostles to the present day, and will surely continue to torment it forever.”¹ The basis for the different sects and confessions within Christianity were original divergences among the apostolic teachings of the foundations of faith. But why did the Apostles teach different doctrinal foundations, and why did this give rise to so much intolerance and persecution throughout the history of Christianity?

It has to do with the epistemological status that the Apostles bestowed upon the different foundations they teach. Moses adapted the doctrines of universal faith to the Hebrew mentality by couching them in terms of civil laws, legal precepts demanding obedience, consolidated by ceremonies demanding strict observance. Christ, on the contrary, separated religion from law: “Christ was [not] concerned about anything but teaching moral lessons, and distinguishing them from the laws of the Republic.”² The reason he did so was that civil laws were associated with particular nations and that Christ intended the Gospel to be a universal doctrine:

Christ was sent to teach, not only the Jews, but the whole human race. So it was not enough for him to have a mind accommodated only to the opinions of the Jews; [he needed a mind accommodated] to the opinions and teachings universal to the human race, i.e., to common and true notions.³

If the Hebrew prophets “were not called to preach and prophesy to all nations, but only to certain particular ones,” those in charge of spreading the word of Christ, i.e., the Apostles, “were called to preach to absolutely everyone and to convert everyone to religion.”⁴ These universal ambitions of Christianity prevented the Apostles from appealing to the imagination of individual peoples. They also “set aside ceremonies.”⁵ Instead, like Christ, they sought to appeal to what is common to all, namely the natural light. And this is why, in their Letters, the Apostles preached *ex cognitione*: they related the doctrines of the Christian religion by means of arguments, attempting to convince their interlocutors not only of their piety and conformity to the law, but also their truth and universal conformity to reason.⁶

Contrary to Moses and the Hebrew prophets, the Apostles thus gathered the elements of their teaching from the “storehouse of reason.”⁷ In their mission to spread the Gospel to the nations, they did, however, hit upon the exact same problem described earlier: the doctrines of universal faith represent what a strictly rational approach to the Gospels will reveal as their true meaning, the common notion of the Christian religion. Teaching those doctrines alone will, however, not suffice to produce the embrace of doctrine necessary for people to actually conform to it. Something additional is required. This is why the Apostles ended up going beyond their rational remit and began to “teach, solely on the basis of natural knowledge, things which don’t fall under it.”⁸ In order to “confirm” their interlocutors in their religion, the Apostles had to “accommodate to men’s common capacities [communi hominum captui ... accommodandam] the religion they had previously confirmed by signs, so that each one would easily accept it from the heart.”⁹ However, since they “were able to teach men these things as they pleased,”¹⁰ the Apostles adopted different ways of doing so. They “chose the way of teaching each of them judged best,”¹¹ and thus introduced variations into the teachings of Christian

¹ TTP XI, G III.157–8|C II.247; see also Chapter 4, sect. “Preaching from Revelation and Knowledge.”

² TTP V, G III.71|C II.140; see also TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245.

³ TTP IV, G III.64|C II.133; see also TTP V, G III.70–1|C II.140: “Christ was sent, not to preserve the state and to institute laws, but to teach the one universal law.”

⁴ TTP XI, G III.155|C II.244; see also TTP V, G III.72|C II.142: “after the destruction of their state ... God requires nothing special of the Jews, and that henceforth he will not ask of them anything beyond the natural law which binds all mortals. The New Testament completely proves this. For as we have said, it teaches only moral lessons, and promises the kingdom of heaven in return for adherence to them.”

⁵ TTP V, G III.73|C II.142.

⁶ See Chapter 4, sect. “The Epistolary Style.”

⁷ TTP XI, G III.153|C II.242.

⁸ TTP XI, G III.155|C II.245.

⁹ TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245; trans. modified. See also TTP XI, G III.158|C II.247: “Lest the novelty of its doctrine greatly offend men’s ears, they accommodated it as much as they could to their contemporaries’ mentality ... and constructed it on the foundations which were most familiar and accepted at that time.”

¹⁰ TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245.

¹¹ TTP XI, G III.156|C II.246; see also TTP XI, G III.156|C II.245.

doctrine. And this is why, even if “in religion itself the Apostles indeed agree, ... they differ greatly in the foundations.”¹

By thus introducing particular adaptations into a teaching otherwise designed to appeal universally, the Apostles invited schism and confrontation. The Hebrew prophets taught adaptations of the divine law that were openly devised to appeal to a specific people alone and thus restricted to a particular sphere of application. The Apostles, by contrast, ended up producing competing accounts of the Christian doctrine with equal ambitions of universality: Paul would teach that no one “can boast of his works, but only of his faith” while James, to the contrary, would proclaim that all men are “justified by works and not by faith alone.”² And here is the rub. By teaching different foundations of the Gospel, and each of them backing up their particular teachings with claims to universal truth, the Apostles sowed the seeds of all discord. For, as the history of Christianity progressed, and as theology was combined with pagan philosophy, the church ended up losing sight of the original purpose of these various doctrines, i.e., to teach true religion, and began instead to associate them with “Aristotelian and Platonic speculations.”³ And in the end, the ecclesiasts had “introduced into religion so many matters of philosophic speculation that the church seems to be an academy, and religion, science, or rather, a disputation,”⁴ with the consequence that “the most savage hatreds and disagreements arise.”⁵ In this way, by teaching different speculative foundations, the Apostles set Christianity up for constant confrontation between different sects and factions, each staking their claim to universal truth in their particular way, exactly the sort of complex epistemological conflict among Christian sects also described by Acontius, Coornhert, Grotius, Locke, and many others.

In the Christian context, then, as opposed to the late degenerated Hebrew Republic, internal religious strife did not result from conflicting laws and competing lawgivers, but from conflicting perceptions of universal truth. The differing apostolic teachings established competing speculative doctrines within Christianity, with divergent conceptions of universal truth destined to constantly clash with each other. But that is not all. They also made those doctrinal conflicts transcend the question of law, putting them beyond political regulation. In this respect as well, Spinoza breaks with traditional tolerationist arguments according to which sectarian violence could be quelled by realizing, as Coornhert puts it in his Synode over de Gewetensvrijheid, that “true religion can be protected by the truth, not by a sword, for the sword cannot accomplish this, but the truth can.”⁶ For Coornhert, evaluating religion by going beyond politics, and focusing on the epistemological status of the Christian doctrines, their simple truth, was a way to eventually generate toleration and concord. By contrast, for Spinoza, it was exactly because the different Christian doctrines were pitted against each other on the epistemological terrain, because the proponents of them mutually evaluated their differing doctrines in terms of truth and not piety, and because the management of those differences had been set beyond the pale of civil law and political regulation, that theological hatred had been allowed to run amok among Christians.

1 TTP XI, G III.157 | C II.246–7.

2 TTP XI, G III.157 | C II.247.

3 TTP Preface, G III.9 | C II.71; see also TTP XIII, G III.167–8 | C II.258.

4 TTP XIII, G III.167 | C II.258.

5 TTP Preface, G III.9 | C II.71.

6 Coornhert, Synod, II, Nineteenth Session, pp. 227–8; the phrase is uttered by Jezonias, the chair of the sessions, but in explicit agreement with Gamaliel, Coornhert’s alter ego. See also pp. 225–6.

Doctrines, Narratives, Fictions

By the foundations of true religion, i.e., the doctrines of universal faith, Spinoza understands the “strictly speculative matters Scripture wishes to teach.”¹ We have already briefly discussed this characterization in Chapter 9.2 The term “speculative” is most often used by Spinoza in contexts where it carries pejorative connotations. It is, for example, the term he employs to describe the way that Christian theologians had appropriated the pagan philosophers for theological purposes, having “introduced into religion ... matters of philosophic speculation” by referring to “the inventions of Aristotle or Plato or someone else like that.”³ Theological speculation is also a root cause of religious strife: rather than aiming at true religion, “schismatics” have introduced “speculative matters” into religion only to “prop up [their] own inventions by abusing divine authority,”⁴ which is part of the reason why “disputes and schisms, will surely continue to torment [the church] forever, until at last someday religion is separated from philosophic speculations.”⁵ However, when characterizing the doctrines of universal faith as “strictly speculative,” Spinoza makes no such evaluation. He only wants to stress that they take the form of theoretical propositions. Their role is to provide theoretical support to the practice of good works. More precisely, the purpose of universal faith is to reconfigure the religious imagination, i.e., to replace the “lofty speculations” of the ecclesiastics with a set of simple doctrines or articles of faith that will contribute to the practice of true religion, rather than the contrary.⁶ Establishing such a simple doctrinal foundation of faith is required to guide everyone toward this common practical goal, and this common practical goal is the sole standard of any doctrine of faith. Without it, the religious imagination loses sight of true religion and slides into superstition.

As shown in Chapter 9, the conceptual folding of a speculative foundation into a practical standard, and vice versa, formally structures the theological side of Spinoza’s theological-political argument. This somewhat counterintuitive conception of speculative matters and doctrinal foundations—in many ways, on Spinoza’s understanding, the practical standard of religion is more foundational than the foundations of faith which rather represent something like a speculative superstructure—also plays a role on the political side of his argument. In certain specific contexts, it is quite obvious that some kind of symmetry in his use of the term “speculation” is at work. For example, introducing laws about speculative matters leads to civil unrest in a way that is exactly analogous to the way that making doctrines and articles of faith out of speculative matters in theology leads to schism: “rebellions surely arise only because laws are made about speculative matters.”⁷ But if this analogy holds up more generally, must some “strictly speculative” political doctrine not still be taught, analogous to the doctrines of universal faith, taking the form of a universal doctrine about the “foundations” of the republic? I think so. This simple, foundational political doctrine, I shall argue in this chapter, is the doctrine of the social contract, developed in TTP XVI, entitled exactly “On the Foundations of the Republic [De Reipublicae fundamentis].”⁸ Structurally, I argue, the contract is the foundation of a free republic in exactly the same way as the doctrines of universal faith are the foundation of true religion. In both cases, they constitute minimal narratives designed to structure, respectively, the religious and the political imagination in a particular way. They are useful fictions devised to channel citizens’ sense of religious obligation and civic duty in a free republic, narratives that people, absent perfect

¹ TTP V, G III.77 | C II.148.

² See Chapter 9, sect. “Faith and Religion: Foundation and Standard.”

³ TTP X, G III.167 | C II.257–8; see also TTP Preface, G III.9 | C II.71.

⁴ TTP XII, G III.166 | C II.256.

⁵ TTP XI, G III.158 | C II.247.

⁶ See TTP XIII, G III.167 | C II.257: “the doctrine of Scripture does not contain lofty speculations, or philosophical matters, but only the simplest things.”

⁷ TTP Preface, G III.7 | C II.69.

⁸ TTP XVI, G III.189 | C II.282.

knowledge of their own rational self-interest, must believe in order to be constantly motivated to act in view of piety and security. The doctrines of universal faith, we have seen, function as a standard of true religion and piety that helps mitigate the inherent dangers of religious diversity by consolidating a shared commitment to toleration. Correlatively, the doctrine of the social contract, as a foundational narrative, helps instill in the citizens of a free republic a collective belief in an unconditional obligation toward the sovereign powers, which, in turn, helps ensure that they will act in accordance with the standard or norm of collective security even in such situations where they do not possess sufficient knowledge of their own rational self-interest to properly understand the utility of doing so.

The social contract, in sum, is a social fiction designed to structure the political imagination in view of collective security.¹ By security, we should here understand a legally protected right to think what one pleases and to say what one thinks without fear of persecution and violence. Security is a basic condition for a public sphere of free philosophizing to emerge, i.e., a sphere where citizens will freely exercise their natural authority to teach and advise both each other and the sovereign powers. Demonstrating this point is the principal aim of this chapter. It is to clarify the foundational status of the contract in the TTP and to determine what exactly it contributes to Spinoza's overall defense of the freedom of philosophizing. However, I also want to show how reading the doctrine of the social contract as a fictional narrative can help resolve certain deep conceptual tensions between the TTP and the later TP—tensions that, until now, have been most convincingly explained in terms of a fundamental evolution in Spinoza's political theory.

Seeds Sown by Hobbes

Critics contemporary with Spinoza quickly seized upon the similarities between the contract theory outlined in TTP XVI and the theory developed by Hobbes in the *Leviathan*. In May 1670, Jacob Thomasius, a prominent philosophy professor in Leipzig, published what was arguably the first public refutation of the TTP. It was a short "program"—a broadsheet or poster—describing the anonymous author *de libertate philosophandi* as a dangerous naturalist, libertine, and contractualist, to be refuted along with other ungodly writers such as Edward Herbert of Cherbury and Thomas Hobbes.² Shortly after, in September 1670, Thomasius's most famous student, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, wrote his former professor, reiterating the association of Spinoza with Hobbes:

I have recently seen a program from Leipzig, doubtless by yourself, where you treat as it deserves the intolerably licentious book on the freedom of philosophizing. The author seems to follow closely not only the politics, but also the religion of Hobbes, as the latter has outlined them well enough in the same way in his *Leviathan*, a book as monstrous as the title suggests. All the seeds of the marvelous critique of sacred Scripture developed by this impudent man have already been sown by Hobbes in an entire chapter of the *Leviathan*.³

Not long after, in April 1671, Johann Georg Graevius, Cartesian professor at the University of Utrecht, wrote a letter to Leibniz which, independently of Thomasius, included a very similar judgment:

Last year appeared this pestilential book the title of which is *Discursus Theologico Politicus* and which, following in Hobbes's footsteps, goes even further, does great injustice to natural law and, overturning the authority of the sacred book, opens the window to atheism.⁴

Unsurprisingly, Leibniz enthusiastically echoed Graevius's assessment in his response a few weeks later: "I am saddened that a man of his evident learning should have fallen so far into error. Hobbes's

1 For the notion of social fictions, see Lloyd and Gatens, *Collective Imaginings*, p. 90.

2 See Thomasius, *Adversus anonymum*, pp. 571–84; Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 94–5; 183; Lærke, *Leibniz and Spinoza*, p. 11. The same triumvirate of despicable authors forms the "three impostors" in Christian Kortholt's 1680 *Tribus impostoribus magnis liber*, Michael Berns's 1692 *Altar der Atheisten, der Heyden und der Christen*, and Domenico Bencini's 1720 *Tractatio historico-polemica*. On Kortholt, see Lagrée, *Le Débat religieux*, pp. 130–45.

3 Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften*, II, i, p. 106.

4 Graevius to Leibniz, April 1671, in *Leibniz, Sämtliche Schriften*, I, i, p. 142.

Leviathan has laid the foundations of the critique he carries out against the sacred books.”¹ Already in the very first commentaries, Spinoza’s TTP was thus closely associated with Hobbes, most often in relation to their reading of the Bible, but also in relation to their political theories. A great many others followed suit.

Were Spinoza’s contemporary critics right? Were the seeds of Spinoza’s critique sown by Hobbes? To some extent, they were. Spinoza clearly profited from *De Cive*. A copy of the 1647 edition figures in the inventory of his library.² It is notoriously difficult to establish with any certainty whether he had read and used the *Leviathan* when writing the TTP in 1665–70. An edition of the *Leviathan* in a language known to Spinoza was not available before Abraham van Berkel’s 1667 Dutch translation.³ The Latin version appeared the year after, in the 1668 *Opera*, also published in Amsterdam. No direct evidence indicates that Spinoza read the work at any point. Nonetheless, given the circles Spinoza moved in, which included such figures as Koerbagh and Van Berkel,⁴ it is practically impossible that he should have been unaware of the existence of the *Leviathan*, and more than just a little unlikely that he was unfamiliar with at least some of its contents.⁵ Moreover, Spinoza knew well—indeed, was an important part of⁶—the republican Dutch reception of Hobbes.⁷ The *De la Court* brothers’ *Politieke Discoursen* of 1662 and the *Consideratien van Staat ofte Politike Weegschaal* in the 1662 edition (first edition: 1660) both stood on Spinoza’s shelves.⁸ He alludes to their work on numerous occasions.⁹ Spinoza’s political thought was indisputably informed by Hobbes and the Dutch Hobbesians.

This, however, should in no way induce us to follow Thomasius, Leibniz, and Graevius and simply declare Spinoza a disciple of Hobbes. As many more recent commentators have noted, significant differences between them exist even on the most fundamental levels of their conceptions of natural right, natural law, and human nature.¹⁰ In this chapter, I am interested in their respective conceptions of a social contract. More precisely, I am interested in knowing whether Spinoza’s early critics were right in considering Spinoza’s contract theory to be identical with the one developed by Hobbes in the *Leviathan*.¹¹ My aim is to show that the TTP indeed does include a conception of a social contract very similar to the one found in the *Leviathan* but that, within his overall political theory, Spinoza gives this conception a very different epistemological status and a very different function than Hobbes does. For Hobbes, the theory of the social contract is the principal upshot of what he sees as a rational demonstration of a commonwealth’s logical basis, drawn from his definitions of natural right and natural law and his conception of human nature. For Spinoza, as we shall see, the doctrine of the social

1 Leibniz to Graevius, May 1671, in Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften*, I, i, p. 148, translated in C II.64. See also Lærke, *Leibniz lecteur de Spinoza*, pp. 95–6; Lærke, “Leibniz’s Two Readings,” pp. 102–7; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 503–4; Israel, “The Early Dutch and German Reaction,” pp. 79–80; Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 221.

2 *Servaas van Rooijen*, *Inventaire*, vol. in–12° no. 9, pp. 188–9.

3 On the first Dutch translations of Hobbes, see Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, pp. 46–62. On Van Berkel and his contribution to the radical Enlightenment, see Wielema, “Abraham van Berkel’s Translations.”

4 On these circles, see Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, pp. 9–10; Westeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 149.

5 For a helpful discussion of this point, see Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 145–51.

6 Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought*, p. 277.

7 On the reception of Hobbes in the Dutch context, see Schoneveld, *Intertraffic of the Mind*, pp. 29–45; Secretan, “Partisans et détracteurs,” pp. 2–13; Secretan, “La reception de Hobbes,” pp. 27–49; Secretan, “Premières reactions,” pp. 137–65; Secretan, “Introduction [to Van Velthuysen 1],” in Van Velthuysen, *Des principes*, pp. 7–39; Secretan, “Introduction [to Van Velthuysen 2],” in Van Velthuysen, *A Letter on the Principles*, pp. 1–53; Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, pp. 515–18; Visentin, “Between Machiavelli and Hobbes,” pp. 234–7. For a detailed study relativizing the importance of Hobbes for the development of the core positions of the brothers De la Court, see Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, pp. 142–57.

8 *Servaas van Rooijen*, *Inventaire*, vol. in-folio no. 11, pp. 142–3, and vol. in-octavo no. 11, p. 174.

9 Spinoza is arguably using the *Consideratien* at TTP XVII, G III.220|C II.321; TTP XVIII, G III.327|C II.330; TP II.6, G III.275|C II.506; TP III.14, G III.290|C II.523; and TP VI.6–7, G III.299|C II.534. See also Blom, “Spinoza en De La Court.”

10 The literature is extensive. For studies I have found particularly helpful, see Lazzeri, *Droit, pouvoir et liberté*; Rutherford, “Spinoza’s Conception of Law”; Rosenthal, “Spinoza’s Political Philosophy,” pp. 418–20; Matheron, “La fonction théorique,” pp. 155–66; Matheron, “Le droit du plus fort,” pp. 131–54; Matheron, “Le problème de l’évolution.”

11 I shall leave to one side the comparison of the TTP with the political theory in Hobbes’s *De Cive*. I do not do so because such a comparison would be irrelevant; indeed, far from it. Arguably, Spinoza’s views in the TTP are as, or more, informed by *De Cive* than by the *Leviathan*. I am only asking, however, whether Spinoza’s first critics were right and, as we have seen, they compared the TTP with the *Leviathan*, not *De Cive*. Moreover, the aim of the comparison is mostly to clarify Spinoza’s views by contrasting them with those of Hobbes, not to establish which texts by Hobbes influenced Spinoza, or how. Finally, including the consideration of *De Cive* would require a complex assessment of the similarities and differences between Hobbes’s two works that would lead us too far afield.

contract is a foundational but ultimately fictive narrative designed to structure the collective imagination of the citizens in a free republic, orienting their political beliefs toward a communal life that is secure and free from fear.

The Origins of the State: Hobbes and Spinoza

According to the *Leviathan*, the social contract is established when a number of human beings freely agree to transfer, formally and entirely, to a sovereign power the natural right they each otherwise have to preserve their own interest and life. They do this out of a rationally motivated acknowledgment that this is what is required to obtain peace, which they necessarily seek out of concern for their own life. With this theory, Hobbes does not intend to account for the actual origins of a given commonwealth. It is designed to retrace the logical genesis of any commonwealth, or provide a rational demonstration of how it can come about by means of logical inferences from initial definitions, following Hobbes's own basic conception of what a demonstration amounts to.¹ It is, in this respect, a highly abstract theory. Nonetheless, it has concrete application to the extent that it explains real political effects. What Hobbes shows is that a commonwealth is a conventional artifice whose continued existence and well-being rely crucially on the logical consistency of its institutional set-up. Most importantly, his deduction highlights the requirement that sovereignty must be indivisible and absolute, leading Hobbes to favor a political model inclining toward absolute monarchy. Any actual commonwealth setting up a "mix't government" is doomed because it implies performing a logical contradiction that will necessarily manifest itself concretely, giving rise to a monstrous political body similar to "a man that had another man growing out of his side," ultimately causing the commonwealth to self-destruct.²

Spinoza's notion of a social contract, developed in TTP XVI, also takes its point of departure in man's natural concern for self-preservation. In order to survive, "men had to agree in having one purpose,"³ "rein in their appetites,"⁴ and "transfe[r] to the sovereign power all their power to defend themselves."⁵ The contract thus grants the sovereign power the absolute right to preserve and direct the republic which "the citizens have agreed unconditionally ... belongs only to the sovereign power."⁶ By assuming citizenship, individuals must thus renounce their natural authority to impose their own law and exercise their natural power on their own behalf, so that the sovereign power alone is enabled "to compel everyone by force, and restrain them by fear of the supreme punishment."⁷ The account comes through as very similar to that of Hobbes.

And yet, when read in the context of Spinoza's conception of natural right and natural law, it is not clear how much of the Hobbesian theory in fact subsists. Unlike Hobbes, Spinoza does not consider a republic an artificial man, created by the transfer of rights and commitment to the contract, and held together by logical consistency. Instead, he treats it as he would any other natural individual whose creation and continued existence depend essentially on the natural powers underpinning its existence. Famously, in a 1674 letter to Jarig Jelles, he emphasizes how, contrary to Hobbes, he does not believe that a social contract is really binding except as a consequence of the relations of power that continue to obtain between sovereign and citizens: "In each city-state [Urbe] the supreme magistrate has no more right over its subjects than it has greater power over them."⁸

How these power relations are established and settled, but also undermined, destabilized, and eventually undone, results from a complex and dynamic political geometry of affects which at any given time determines the attitude that citizens will adopt vis-à-vis the state apparatus they are

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, V, p. 66: "The Use and End of Reason, is not the finding of the summe, and truth of one, or a few consequences, remote from the first definitions, and settled significations of names; but to begin at these; and proceed from one consequence to another."

2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXIX, p. 514.

3 TTP XVI, G III.191 | C II.284.

4 TTP XVI, G III.191 | C II.285.

5 TTP XVI, G III.193 | C II.287.

6 TTP XVI, G III.197 | C II.292.

7 TTP XVI, G III.193 | C II.287.

8 Spinoza to Jelles, June 2, 1674, Letter 50, C IV.239 | C II.406; slightly modified: Curley has "state" for Urbs.

subjected to, basically establishing whether they fear or love the sovereign, and in what relative proportion. It is a point Spinoza also stresses in the rudimentary account of state formation that can be found in a scholium in the fourth part of Ethics:

In order, therefore, that men may be able to live harmoniously and be of assistance to one another, it is necessary for them to give up their natural right and to make one another confident that they will do nothing which could harm others. ... No affect can be restrained except by an affect stronger than and contrary to the affect to be restrained, and everyone refrains from doing harm out of timidity regarding a greater harm. By this law, therefore, society can be maintained, provided it appropriates to itself the right everyone has of avenging himself, and of judging concerning good and evil. In this way society has the power to prescribe a common rule of life, to make laws, and to maintain them—not by reason, which cannot restrain the affects (by P17S), but by threats. This society [societas], maintained by laws and the power it has of preserving itself, is called a commonwealth [civitas], and those who are defended by its law, citizens [cives].¹

For Spinoza, the unity and stability of a republic thus depends on a very complex political psychology. This psychology has been studied in some depth by Justin Steinberg in recent work and we need not engage with it in any detail here.² What we need to note is only that, within this scheme, no absolute transfer of natural right ever actually takes place. In fact, such a transfer is not even possible. For “men have never surrendered their right and transferred their power to another in such a way that the people who received the right and power from them did not fear them.”³ And, for this reason, “it must be granted that each person reserves to himself many things of which he remains the master.”⁴

These differences between Hobbes’s and Spinoza’s conceptions of the origins of society can ultimately be traced back to their respective conceptions of natural right, natural law, human nature, and the way they construe the relations between these three terms.

In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes’s account turns on his anthropology. The social contract, understood as a transfer of the natural right of all to a single sovereign power, arises out of a reflection on the relation between natural right and natural law. Natural right consists in a liberty to defend oneself: “The Right of Nature, which writers commonly call *jus naturale*, is the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature; that is to say, of his own life.”⁵ Natural law is a corresponding law, i.e., an obligation to defend oneself: “The Law of Nature, *lex naturalis*, is a precept or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same.”⁶ How he gets from one to the other turns on his conception of human nature and the way that it relates to reason. Reason, says Hobbes, is not essential to, or a necessary component of, human nature: “Reason is not as Sense, and Memory, borne with us; nor gotten by Experience onely, as Prudence is; but attained by Industry.”⁷ What basically separates humans from animals—men from beasts in Hobbes’s vocabulary—are “forms of speech” and “remembrance,” i.e., language and recollection.⁸ These primitive abilities allow us to conceive of such “regulated trains of thought” where “when imagining any thing whatsoever, wee seek all the possible effects, that can by it be produced.”⁹ In other words, language and recollection allow us to engage in the kind of causal reasoning, proceeding “from one consequence to another,” which defines the use of reason.¹⁰ Like humans, beasts engage in both deliberation and voluntary action.

1 E4p37s2, G II.237–8|C I.567; trans. modified: Curley has “state” for *civitas*, a term I think is best reserved for the translation of *imperium*, in accordance with the practice adopted by Curley himself in C II.

2 Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*.

3 TTP XVII, G III.201|C II.296.

4 TTP XVII, G III.201|C II.297.

5 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV, p. 198.

6 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV, p. 198.

7 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, V, p. 72.

8 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, II, p. 36 and III, p. 42.

9 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, III, pp. 40–2.

10 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, V, p. 66.

Unlike humans, however, they do not use reason.¹ Contrary to beasts, then, the judgments and actions of human beings can be—although they obviously do not have to be—determined by dictates of right reason, i.e., by true inferences.²

Within Hobbes's own political deduction, the very first such dictate of reason is that "precept or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life."³ Without being an obligation proper—Hobbes denies that we can oblige or "bind" ourselves in any proper sense⁴—natural law is thus a general rule to which we submit ourselves to the exact extent that we act as human beings and not as animals. Natural law acquires the force of obligation as a criterion of humanity. This quasi-obligation—a rule that we subject ourselves to insofar as we are human beings—prompts people to adopt what Hobbes designates as the first law of nature, which is to seek peace, and which, further down the deductive line, prompts them to establish the contract.⁵ The contract is thus rationally grounded in human nature, because only human beings are endowed with the two abilities—language and recollection—that are necessary to acquire reason and, a fortiori, right reason. It is certainly possible that human beings do not establish a contract, or that they do not respect it when established. Human society is not a given; the state of nature and civil war constantly lurk in the background. Still, it is the case that if a contract is established and respected, it can only be among human beings. It is in this sense that Hobbes's social contract theory is grounded in his anthropology.

Spinoza's conception of natural law and natural right is developed in TTP III, IV, and XVI, in EIVp37s2, and in TP II and III. Now, contrary to an influential reading first proposed by Alexandre Matheron, I do not think that any substantial development in Spinoza's position on natural right and law occurs between these political works. Rather, from one to the next, from the TTP to the rudimentary political theory found in the Ethics, and on to the TP, he develops distinct aspects of the same theory. In particular, I think we should see the TP as complementing the TTP, not correcting it. Spinoza himself presents the theory of natural right in the TP as a mere extension of the theory of natural and civil right of the TTP.⁶ So what is that theory? At the beginning of TTP XVI, Spinoza defines as follows *jus naturalis* and *lex naturalis*:

By the right ... of nature I mean nothing but the rules of the nature of each individual, according to which we conceive each thing to be naturally determined to exist and have effects in a certain way. ... From this it follows that each individual has a supreme right to do everything it can, or that the right of each thing extends as far as its determinate power does. Now the supreme law of nature is that each thing strives to persevere in its state as far as it can, and does this, not on account of anything else, but only of itself. From this it follows that each individual has the supreme right to do this.⁷

At first sight, these definitions strongly resemble those laid out by Hobbes in the Leviathan. On closer inspection, however, two crucial differences come into view. First, Spinoza does not derive natural law from natural right but the contrary: he derives natural right from natural law. Second, he does not see natural law as comparable to a rule or precept, a quasi-obligation that we reflexively subject ourselves to through right reason. He sees it as a necessary truth that follows immediately from the individual's

1 Hobbes, Leviathan, VI, p. 92: "In Deliberation, the last Appetite, or Aversion, immediately adhaering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is that wee call the Will; the Act, (not the faculty,) of Willing. And Beasts that have Deliberation, must necessarily also have Will. The Definition of the Will, given commonly by the Schooles, that it is a Rationall Appetite, is not good. For if it were, then could there be no Voluntary Act against Reason."

2 Hobbes, Leviathan, V, p. 66.

3 Hobbes, Leviathan, XIV, p. 198.

4 Hobbes, Leviathan, XXVI, p. 416: "Nor is it possible for any person to be bound to himselfe; because he that can bind, can release; and therefore he that is bound to himselfe onely, is not bound."

5 Hobbes, Leviathan, XIV, pp. 200–4.

6 TP II.1, G III.276 | C II.507.

7 TTP XVI, G III.189 | C II.282–3; trans. modified.

power to persevere, similar to the *conatus* that the Ethics describes as the actual essence of things.¹ Unlike Hobbes, then, Spinoza does not take his point of departure in a natural right conceived as a liberty to act in view of self-preservation from which natural law is then reflexively derived. He begins with a natural law stipulating the essential necessity of striving for self-preservation from which he then derives a basic right to do so, so that “whatever each thing does according to the laws of its nature, it does with supreme right.”²

This reversal in the logic of derivation between natural right and natural law in relation to Hobbes is the fundamental reason why Spinoza does not, in the final analysis, recognize that any genuine transfer of natural right to a sovereign power can ever take place. It is because our natural right to act in view of self-preservation is not reflexively derived by right reason from a natural liberty to do so, but immediately given as an essential necessity from which no individual can be separated without ceasing to exist. In Spinoza, we find no trace of this very human reflection of right reason by means of which Hobbes gets from natural right to natural law. Spinoza operates in an entirely different, naturalist register on this level of his theory. Whereas Hobbes’s theory of natural law immediately places itself within a sphere that concerns only human beings, Spinoza’s theory of natural law is, in the first instance, an integral part of his general theory of nature and of the necessary laws operating within it. It is concerned not with rational action governed by self-imposed rules, but with necessary action according to those eternal decrees of God he describes as “the rules of the nature of each individual.”³ These rules are “determined not by sound reason, but by desire and power.”⁴ Hence, as Christian Lazzeri observes, Spinoza “gives a new reconstruction of the relation between natural right and natural law, at the same time as he eliminates the rationality of a natural law understood as a precept of reason that obliges.”⁵

Admittedly, if we turn to TTP IV, Spinoza distinguishes between two meanings of the word “law” that at first seem somewhat at odds with the naturalistic approach outlined above. Here, he explains that “law” is sometimes understood as dependence “on a necessity of nature” and sometimes as dependence “on a human decision.”⁶ This distinction also applies to the notion of laws of human nature. Donald Rutherford has argued that this introduces a “systematic ambiguity” in Spinoza’s conception of the laws of human nature, separating law in the descriptive sense of a principle accounting for a universally applicable regularity, i.e., a necessary law of human nature, from law in the sense of a prescriptive rule originating in human volition or decree.⁷ If that latter conception is allowed to stand at the deepest level of Spinoza’s conception of the laws of human nature, it is at odds with his most considered philosophy of mind, according to which any conception of an action originating from the will only expresses ignorance of the determining causes necessitating our desires.⁸ However, as Rutherford continues, we should not subscribe too hastily to such an overly voluntarist understanding of Spinoza’s understanding of human decision.⁹ What Spinoza has in mind when speaking of laws that depend on a human decision are not actions originating in a human free will, but only such laws that follow from actions of God “through human nature,” as opposed to actions of God “through things outside human nature.”¹⁰ Spinoza also says that they are such laws that spring from “God’s internal aid” when we act through our nature alone, as opposed to the kind of “external aid” that God provides when acting from causes that are external to us and that appear to us as mere

1 E3p6, G II.146|C I.498. I shall not here engage with the long and complex discussion of the difference between the notion of “persevering in one’s state” that we find in the KV and TTP, and the notion of “persevering in one’s being” that we find in the Ethics and TP. The difference is real but not of our concern here. For the original point of departure of that discussion, see Matheron, “Le problème de l’évolution,” pp. 116–17.

2 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283.

3 TTP XVI, G III.189|C II.282.

4 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283.

5 Lazzeri, *Droit, pouvoir, et liberté*, p. 103.

6 TTP IV, G III.57|C II.125.

7 Rutherford, “Spinoza’s Conception of Law,” pp. 150, 155.

8 E1p32 and E1p32c2, G II.72–3|C I.435–6.

9 Rutherford, “Spinoza’s Conception of Law,” pp. 155–6.

10 TTP III, G III.46|C II.135.

“fortune.”¹ Ultimately, Spinoza holds that the prescriptive laws of human nature can depend on a human decision. But this is not because they depend on an independent human volition in any constitutive sense, but only because such laws are grounded in our nature alone and “mainly [in] the power of the human mind, insofar as it perceives things as either true or false,” i.e., in the human understanding.² The reason why such laws come through as prescriptive and normative—as opposed to merely descriptive—is exactly because they are anchored in, and formulated from, the particular viewpoint of human nature. Consequently, they include an evaluation of the ethical quality of human actions from that particular viewpoint, of whether they are good or bad for human beings, i.e., an evaluation of their utility for human beings.³ In fact, Spinoza never steps outside his naturalist metaphysics of power, even when accounting for such human laws that “depend on a human decision.” He simply moves from the indeterminate and therefore ethically neutral perspective of nature in general to the determinate and thus ethically charged perspective of human nature.

By associating the natural right of human beings with their power to persevere, and by conceiving of this power as tied up with their actual essence by natural law, Spinoza relativizes the binding force of any possible social contract. Any conceivable transfer of right must be less “absolute” and “unconditional” than some of Spinoza’s formulations admittedly proclaim it to be.⁴ As Spinoza also wrote to Jelles, the balance of power between sovereign and citizens is in fact constantly questioned and reevaluated in terms of perceived utility: “A contract can have no force except by reason of its utility. If the utility is taken away, the contract is taken away with it, and remains null and void.” Indeed, Spinoza continues, “it’s foolish to demand of someone that he keep faith with you forever, unless you try at the same time to bring it about that breaking the contract you’re entering into brings more harm than utility to the one who breaks it.”⁵ People only honor their promises by fear of some evil or by hope of some greater advantage.⁶ If there is a social contract, its ability to bind the contracting parties therefore always remains dependent upon the fluctuating state of the perceived power relations between them:

An assurance given to someone by which someone has promised only in words that he will do something ... remains valid just as long as the will of the person who has given the assurance does not change. For if he retains the power to cancel his assurance, he really hasn’t surrendered his right; he’s only given words.⁷

In the TTP, Spinoza thus ends up subjecting the binding force of the social contract to so many conditions that its original function—i.e., to hold citizens to the law on account of a promise they have initially given to obey it—is entirely underwritten by his naturalist ontology of power, making the reference to the conventional artifice of a social contract seem redundant. This result is consistent with the fact that, later, in TP II and III, Spinoza proposes a “deduction” of the state that makes no use at all of the artifice of contract, but explains the origin, subsistence, and destruction of states exclusively by reference to the “power of natural things by which they exist and have effects.”⁸ Moreover, in the TP, without entirely disappearing,⁹ contractualist language—references to transfer of rights and so on—tends to recede into the background of Spinoza’s argument.

1 TTP III, G III.46|C II.113.

2 TTP IV, G III.58|C II.126.

3 The relativity of ethical judgments belongs among Spinoza’s most famous theses. See e.g. TdIE, §12, G II.8|C I.10: “good and bad are said of things only in a certain respect, so that one and the same thing can be called both good and bad according to different respects”; CM I, vi, G I.247|C I.313: “Good and bad are only said in respect to something”; E1app, G II.82–3|C I.445: “what seems good to one, seems bad to another”; E3p39s, G II.170–1|C I.516: “each one, from his own affect, judges, or evaluates, what is good and what is bad”; E4preface, G II.208|C I.564: “good and evil [are] notions we form because we compare things to one another”; etc.

4 TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287.

5 TTP XVI, G III.192|C II.286.

6 TTP XVI, G III.192|C II.285.

7 TP II.12, G III.280|C II.513.

8 TP II.2–3, G III.276|C II.507.

9 See e.g. TP VII.5, G III.309|C II.547.

In sum, as has frequently been noted by commentators, if we take Spinoza's contract theory in the TTP to be part of a rational demonstration of any republic's origin, comparable to Hobbes's account, it comes through as redundant at best.¹ But perhaps we should not take Spinoza's theory to be part of such an account, but bestow upon it a different status and function. That is the suggestion I will explore in the following two sections.

Security as the Standard of Contract

The question now is this: what explanatory work does Spinoza's conception of a social contract do if, ultimately, it contributes nothing to a rational account of how societies come about and subsist? In order to answer this, it is crucially important not to separate the theory outlined in TTP XVI from the totality formed by the last five political chapters of the TTP. Spinoza himself clearly indicates, at the beginning of TTP XVI as well as in TTP XX, what is the global purpose of those chapters:

Now it's time for us to ask how far this freedom of thought, and of saying what you think, extends in the best republic. To examine this in an orderly way, we must discuss the foundations of the republic.²

Our task here, then, is to inquire how far this freedom can and must be granted to each person consistently with the peace of the republic and the right of the supreme powers. As I noted at the beginning of Chapter 16, pursuing this inquiry is my main purpose in these final chapters.³

Spinoza's inquiry into the foundations of the republic in TTP XVI is undertaken for the specific purpose of determining how far the freedom of philosophizing should extend. This also becomes increasingly clear as one follows his discussion of the contract throughout the political chapters.

In TTP XVI, the focus is mostly on the constitution of the vertical relation that a contract establishes between the sovereign power and the citizens. Its aim is "to show that those who have the sovereignty have the right to do whatever they can do," "that everyone else ought always to act according to their decree alone," and that "they alone are the defenders of right and freedom."⁴ It explains how each citizen "transfers his power to defend himself,"⁵ trading off their power of self-defense in return for the security provided by the more powerful sovereign power, but also how the sovereign power becomes more powerful in virtue of the power transferred to it. As we have already seen, this narrative is to be taken with more than just a grain of salt. In fact, the binding power of the promise upon which that transfer depends ultimately rests on the very same relation of power that it is designed to account for, namely the actual supremacy of the sovereign. The redundancy of contract here comes through as the immediate consequence of a circular argument: the supremacy of the sovereign power is established by a contract whereby citizens collectively promise to submit to it; but the binding force of a contractual promise depends on the supremacy of the sovereign power without which citizens have no good reason to submit to it. The reader is left wondering why the whole theory is even there.

Moving on to TTP XIX, however, the contract is presented in a less general light. Here, its stated purpose is to ascertain that even prophecy cannot have the authority of law, except on the basis of "common agreement."⁶ All claims to religious authority, even those stemming from genuine prophets, only acquire the force of law through a sovereign power instituted by common agreement. It is a point that Spinoza repeats incessantly throughout the first half of the chapter.⁷ His concern is that, if the

1 See Matheron, *Individu et communauté*, pp. 307–30; Matheron, "Le problème de l'évolution"; Matheron, "Politique et religion," pp. 347–8; Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," p. 324, etc.

2 TTP XVI, G III.189|C II.282.

3 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.236.

4 TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.74.

5 TTP Preface, G III.11|C II.74. See also TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287: "as much of his power as he transfers to another ... so much of his right he also necessarily give up to the other person"; TTP XVI, G III.193|C II.287: "they transferred to the supreme power all their power to defend themselves, i.e., all their right."

6 TTP XIX, G III.230|C II.334.

7 TTP XIX, G III.228|C II.333: "Religion receives the force of law only from the decree of those who have the right to rule"; TTP XIX, G III.229|C II.333: "Religion acquires the force of law only by the decree of those who have the right to rule"; TTP XIX, G III.230|C II.334: "God has no kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty"; TTP XIX, G III.230|C III.335: "religion acquires the force of law only from the

exclusive power to command vested in the sovereign power alone, including when it comes to sacred matters, is not honored in a free republic which allows for a plurality of sects, that power to command will end up being fragmented and divided, and will ultimately flow back to the different religious factions, “giv[ing] rise to quarrels and disagreements which can never be restrained.”¹ Spinoza is here mostly interested in the work the notion of a social contract can do when it comes to the relations between different groups of citizens; to wit, different religious sects present within society. The unity of the sovereign power must be maintained for the purpose of preventing religious strife among such groups.

This change in outlook is confirmed when we get to TTP XX, where Spinoza’s perspective on the contract has completely shifted toward the consideration of how it affects the horizontal relations between citizens. He now presents the contract not as a means to consolidate sovereignty, but entirely as a means to mitigate the harmful effects stemming from necessary differences in opinion among citizens:

To form a republic this one thing was necessary: that either everyone, or some people, or one person, possessed the whole power of making decrees. For since the free judgment of men varies a lot, and everyone thinks he alone knows everything, and it can’t happen that they all think alike and speak with one voice, people could not live peaceably together unless each one has surrendered his right to act solely according to the decision of his own mind.²

Here, the contract figures as a structural mechanism specifically designed to prevent disagreement about how to live and what to believe from degenerating into violent conflict and persecution among citizens. In this way, says Spinoza, “from the foundations of the republic explained above [i.e., the doctrine of the social contract] it follows most clearly that its ultimate end is ... to free each person from fear, so that he can live securely.”³

To grasp Spinoza’s idea correctly, it is important to note in this last formulation the reference to the emotion of fear. If citizens think that the republic is founded on a basic social contract that everyone is legally obliged to honor, then they feel they can live securely and without fear, even among peers who live and believe differently than they do about matters such as religion. Now, to the extent that the contract in reality always remains underwritten by the ontology of powers, this feeling of security may not in itself be rationally justified. It may only be imaginary. This, however, does not prevent it from producing the desired effect if only that belief is collectively embraced, i.e., that citizens can and will speak their minds without fear, or that they will feel secure enough to exercise their freedom of philosophizing. In sum, if everyone believes that they have subscribed to a contract, it matters little whether such a contract actually ever existed, be it logically or historically, for it will still produce the same practical effect of a collective, and therefore justified, commitment to mutual security.

This, I think, is the main point of Spinoza’s doctrine of the contract. It does not aim at explaining the establishment and consolidation of sovereignty—something that, as we know already, it is in fact not really capable of explaining, historically, logically, or otherwise. Instead, within an already constituted republic, teaching the existence of such a contract helps instill, in the imagination of citizens, the belief that the sovereign power alone has the right to enforce commands by means of coercion, as a function of the indivisibility of sovereignty. By implication, such a belief involves that if anyone else has recourse

right of the state”; TTP XIX, G III.230|C II.235: “revealed religion ceased to have the force of law when the Hebrew state was destroyed”; TTP XIX, G III.331|C II.336: “among the Hebrews religion acquired the force of law only from the right of the state”; TTP XIX, G III.331|C II.336: “[religion] acquires the force of a command only by the decree of those who have the right to rule”; TTP XIX, G III.331|C II.336: “the divine teachings, whether revealed by the natural light or by the prophetic light, don’t get the force of a command directly from God, but must get it from (or by the mediation of) those who have the right to rule and make decrees”; TTP XIX, G III.332|C II.336: “divine law depends only on the decree of the supreme powers.”

¹ TTP XIX, G III.235|C II.340; see also TTP XX, G III.242|C II.348.

² TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

³ TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

to such means—for example, ecclesiastics who attempt to coerce others into adopting a given religious doctrine—they are encroaching illegitimately upon an exclusive prerogative of the sovereign power.

The secure coexistence of citizens in a free republic where all entertain different opinions about all sorts of speculative matters, including and importantly about matters of faith, is thus crucially dependent on the collective embrace by all citizens of the principle of indivisible sovereignty. Moreover, if we approach this same contractual relation from the opposite end, i.e., from that of sovereignty, this same notion of contract also allows Spinoza to elaborate a powerful argument why a sovereign power, for the sake of its own preservation, ought to protect citizens from persecution—an argument fully in line with his general conviction that political action is always, at bottom, motivated by a drive for self-preservation. For, on this conception of the relation between sovereignty and harmonious coexistence, it will not be moral obligation or some divinely ordained mission to protect the people that explains why the sovereign powers “alone are the defenders of right and freedom.”¹ The sovereign powers will undertake this in order to maintain their own most important prerogative, i.e., the exclusive right to enforce laws which is at the heart of indivisible sovereignty itself. For, as Spinoza explains in the TP, if this power becomes divided, “the commonwealth no longer remains.”² It is thus in the sole interest of their own preservation that the governing authorities should guarantee that “there is absolutely no sect so hated that its followers are not protected by the public authority of the magistrates and their forces.”³ The reason why the state guarantees freedom of (religious) conscience is ultimately egoistic, a “reason of state,” even though the consequence appears altruistic: in order to maintain its own exclusive prerogative to make laws and enforce them which is essential to its own existence, the sovereign power in a free republic must protect all citizens from those “real antichrists ... who persecute honorable men [virov honestos] who love justice, because they disagree with them, and do not defend the same doctrines of faith they do.”⁴

With this understanding of the contract, Spinoza responds to a set of particular political circumstances in the late seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Given the way that freedom of religious conscience was originally established by political decision rather than popular commitment, there is nothing surprising about Spinoza arguing that the state should form the first line of defense for citizens against religious persecution by other citizens.⁵ Spinoza’s argument is, however, also one of philosophical principle and necessitated by the internal structure of his overall political theory.

We have already seen in Chapter 9 how, within a religiously diversified public sphere, emerging conflicts between diverging sects and their particular conceptions of doctrinal truth become unavoidable.⁶ On his conception, it is a conceptually necessary drawback of any free republic that a “hostile spirit of persecution” will begin to overtake civil society unless active legal measures are taken to prevent it.⁷ But the reason why, without state regulation, such hostility naturally and unavoidably arises within a religiously diversified civil society ultimately stems from Spinoza’s anthropology which, on this point, smacks of Hobbesian pessimism. It has to do with Spinoza’s identification of essence or nature with power, and his equation of power with right.⁸ By nature, human beings have no good reason not to engage with others in unfriendly ways, using violence and force. Indeed, by Spinoza’s lights, nature grants them the right to do so as long as it suits their advantage, simply because they

¹ TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.74.

² TP III.3, G III.285|C II.517–18: “If a commonwealth grants a right to someone, and consequently, the power to live according to his own mentality ... by this act it has surrendered its own right and transferred it to the person to whom it gave that power. Moreover, if it has given this power to two or more people, so that each of them may live according to his own mentality, by this act it has divided political authority. Finally, if it has given this same power to each of the citizens, by this act it has destroyed itself. The commonwealth no longer remains, and everything reverts to the natural state.”

³ TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

⁴ TTP XIV, G III.176|C II.267; trans. modified.

⁵ See Chapter 2, sect. “Freedom of Conscience I: The Political Circumstances.”

⁶ See Chapter 9, sect. “The Genesis of Schism.”

⁷ TTP Preface, G III.8–9|C II.71; slight paraphrase.

⁸ TTP XVI, G III.189|C II.282: “each individual has a supreme right to do everything it can, ... the right of each thing extends as far as its determinate power does”; TP II.4, G III.277|C II.508: “the natural right of the whole of nature, and as a result, of each individual, extends as far as its power does.”

can, or have the requisite power. On account of human nature, which includes a natural propensity to use all available means to gain advantage and pursue one's own interests, the state must therefore exist in order to mitigate whatever harmful effects this natural propensity occasions:

If human nature were so constituted that men desired most what is most useful, there'd be no need of skill to produce harmony and loyalty. But it's evident that human nature isn't at all like that. As a result, it's been necessary to set up a state, so that everyone—both those who rule and those who are ruled—does what's for the common well-being, whether they want to or not. That is, it's been necessary to set it up so that everyone is compelled to live according to the prescription of reason, whether of his own accord, or by force, or by necessity.¹

Compelling citizens to live reasonably in spite of their natural inclinations and curb their desires in order to render coexistence possible is just the role of the social contract. It binds citizens to the authority of the state but also frees them from fear of other citizens. Spinoza's real focus is on the second aspect. And this is the reason why, as we have seen when retracing his reformulations of the contract theory throughout the political chapters of the TTP, it figures in his overall theory less as a principle of political subjection (to the state) than as a principle of political freedom (from other citizens). More precisely, his entire theory of contract is predicated on the notion that political freedom—understood as freedom from the fear of being persecuted by others, also called security—depends on our subjection to the sovereign power and not on avoiding it. In short, it is predicated on the idea that our political freedom exactly consists in the sense of security that our allegiance to a sovereign power and our belief in the inviolability of its prerogatives procure us.

The Contract as a Foundational Narrative

A free republic protects free philosophizing by permitting citizens to speak their mind but also by prohibiting citizens from employing other means than speaking their mind to impose their decisions: it permits citizens to exercise their private authority to teach and advise in public, but prohibits them from exercising a public authority to command and coerce. This latter aspect of political freedom is secured by the doctrine of the contract, which ensures that coercion remains the exclusive prerogative of the sovereign power. By agreeing to submit to the commanding authority of the sovereign power, citizens subscribe to the idea that they have no such commanding authority themselves. Contract or not, however, citizens will not submit to the authority of the state unless they consider it useful to do so, i.e., unless they consider it to their advantage. They cannot divest themselves of their power of judgment and will, consequently, continually reevaluate their commitment to the political arrangement under which they live. This universal principle applies even to citizens who already live in a free republic. Consequently, even citizens in a putatively free republic will value the political freedom they have achieved only as long as they perceive it to be useful. And to the extent that people often ignore their "true advantage" (*verum utile*),² their minds often being preoccupied with prejudices, they will frequently arrive at the mistaken conclusion that defending their own freedom is not always to their advantage in the specific circumstances where their judgment is called upon.

This is a key insight for Spinoza: absent complete rationality, people will often perceive political freedom as an obstacle to the fulfillment of their desires rather than the contrary. This is the case for the common man who, living under the sway of prejudices and deceptions, will direct his efforts not toward the "true good" but toward "wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure" by which "the mind is so distracted that it cannot give the slightest thought to any other good," as we can paraphrase the famous opening sections of the TdIE.³ But even enlightened citizens generally in favor of freedom will find themselves in specific situations where particular decisions going against the general principles of political freedom present themselves as a real temptation. Their passions, and their immediate desire to prevail over those with whom they disagree, in particular those who are averse to freedom, will in

¹ TP VI.3, G III.297–8|C II.532.

² For this expression, see TTP XVI, G II.191|C II.284, and TP II.8, G III.279|C II.511.

³ TdIE, §1–3, G II.5|C I.7–8.

some situations prompt them to violate the very same principles of freedom that they otherwise generally adhere to.

A political version of the theological “satanic stratagems” diagnosed by Acontius now comes into view: in their eagerness to defend political freedom against those who oppose it, partisans of political freedom can, in the heat of the battle, so to speak, sometimes be misled to employ means of defending it that violate the political freedom of their opponents. One can imagine, for example, otherwise liberally minded Arminian theologians in league with republican politicians who, while the political conjuncture is in their favor, attempt to deny orthodox Calvinist theologians their right to speak their minds, using their political leverage to silence their opponents because they see an immediate but circumstantial advantage for their liberal agenda in doing so. Indeed, this was exactly what happened in Holland in 1614 when, on the recommendation of Wtenbogaert and Grotius, Oldenbarnevelt interfered politically in the theological controversies about predestination in the Dutch Reformed church. Political catastrophe ensued: in 1619, the Gomarists prevailed at the Synod of Dort; Oldenbarnevelt was beheaded; Grotius was imprisoned at Loevestein Castle. As Spinoza comments on this traumatic episode in the history of the Dutch Republic:

when the religious controversy between the remonstrants and the counter-remonstrants was being stirred up by the politicians and the estates of the provinces, in the end it degenerated into a schism, and many examples made it manifest that laws passed to settle religious controversies aggravate people more than they correct them.¹

Such situations of course only arise in societies that are not fully rational—in civil societies whose dynamics remain more or less governed by the imagination and passions of those who operate within them. For example, if Oldenbarnevelt and his counselors had realized—as a fully adequate assessment of their own historical circumstances would have taught them—that encroaching upon the general principle of freedom of religious conscience for the sake of thwarting the current agenda of illiberal Gomarists would produce serious backlash, Oldenbarnevelt would have thought twice before issuing the *Resolutie tot den Vrede der Kercken*, drafted by Grotius in 1613 and adopted in 1614, which banned pastors from addressing the theologically controversial question of predestination in public.² Of course, by Spinoza’s lights, it was entirely within Oldenbarnevelt’s legal right to issue such a ban. But ultimately it proved detrimental to himself. Oldenbarnevelt and his allies ought to have refrained from acting upon their punctual desire to silence the Gomarists and instead acted consistently according to the general principle of political freedom.

True, rational self-interest will always incline toward political freedom. All members of a fully rational society will collectively and constantly recognize political freedom, not just as a legally protected right, but as a rational principle that is demonstrably beneficial for all, including themselves. In a society consisting of such members alone, it thus becomes pointless to believe in the existence of a social contract or in a sovereign power’s exclusive prerogative to make and enforce laws: “if nature had so constituted men that they desired nothing except what true reason teaches them to desire, then of course a society could exist without laws.”³ This also to some extent applies to individuals. A wise man, like Solomon, need not believe in a social contract in order to commit to political freedom.⁴ He will, however, realize that his fellow nonrational citizens, those “who are ignorant of true reason,”⁵ do need such a belief to govern their actions. And the wise man will also recognize that this implies that he himself must, at least externally, submit to the terms of the contract his fellow citizens subscribe to, recognizing—and knowing, rationally—the great usefulness of others’ belief in it, even when the commands of the contractually instituted sovereign power run counter to what he knows would be a

1 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352.

2 [Grotius], *Resolutie*; see also Beal, “Grotius et le ius circa sacra,” p. 712.

3 TTP V, G III.73|C II.144.

4 For the notion of the “wise man,” see TTP III, G III.47|C II.114; TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283. On Solomon as Spinoza’s best example of a wise man, see TTP IV, G III.66|C II.135, where Solomon is described as someone “who spoke from the power of the natural light, in which he surpassed all the other wise men of his age.” See also TTP II, G III.29|C I.93; TTP IV, G III.67|C II.134–5.

5 TTP XVI, G III.190|C II.283.

rationaly better course to take. For he also knows that the general allegiance to the sovereign power generates greater societal benefits than violating that allegiance in any particular situation could ever do, even if that violation was perpetrated in view of adopting a more rational course of action.¹ Hence, even the wise man does not disobey the commands of the sovereign power, although he obeys for different reasons than do ordinary people. It is a point that Spinoza stresses in an annotation added to TTP XVI, the Annotation XXXIII, where he argues that “the more a man is led by reason, i.e., the more he is free, the more will he steadfastly maintain the state’s laws and carry out the commands of the supreme power to which he is subject.”²

But how about such people in a free republic who are not quite wise yet and who do not always understand adequately the true advantage of the political freedom they have achieved—people who are prone to squander that true advantage whenever their present desires orient them in another direction with sufficient force? If not the consideration of rational self-interest, what will motivate them to “steadfastly maintain” the principles of political freedom? This is exactly the function Spinoza calls upon the contract to fulfill: it orients ordinary people to act in accordance with their true advantage even when they have no adequate knowledge of what that is, by helping to restructure their political imagination in a certain way. The apparent discrepancy between the accounts of the social order in TTP XVI and the TP in terms of contract theory—which the former embraces, while the latter does not—should thus not, as is often argued on the basis of a suggestion first made by Alexandre Matheron, be solved in terms of an evolution in Spinoza’s thought.³ The two theories have completely different aims. Contrary to the rational “deduction” of the state from natural right and power in TP II,⁴ which seeks to elucidate the “natural foundations of the state ... from the common nature, or condition, of men,”⁵ Spinoza’s contractual argument in TTP XVI is not a theory intended to give adequate knowledge about the origins of society. It is a doctrine describing a socially necessary belief. It has no genuine appeal for the understanding, and is only superficially rationally motivated. Any adequate rational reconstruction of society will in fact always be in terms of relative power relations and ongoing considerations of utility alone. This means that, if the idea of a social contract is to have any binding force in and of itself and not be entirely redundant, this force must entirely derive from the powers of the imagination, i.e., from the way that it helps restructure our inadequate ideas about the foundations of the republic.⁶

In that respect, I generally concur with a set of analyses offered by Susan James. After presenting Spinoza’s social contract theory as a “philosophical conception of the basis of the state,” she argues how he eventually “shifts away from the claim that our contractual obligation to obey the law is ultimately grounded on philosophical argument, and acknowledges that it can also be justified in imaginative terms.” For, as James continues, “political narratives can encourage [people] to live in ways that enhance peace and security. And one of the most powerful of these narratives represents individuals as having contracted to obey the law.”⁷ Once this narrative becomes embedded in the political imagination, established as “an established aspect of everyday life,” it “can be used to articulate and examine reasons for obeying the law” so that “even when people do not fully understand the reasons for contracting, the fact that it is presented as a rational course of action can be enough to persuade them to adopt the stance of contractors, and view themselves as having

1 See TTP XVI, G III.194|C II.287–8: “we’re bound to carry out absolutely all the commands of the supreme power—even if it commands the greatest absurdities. For reason commands that we carry out even those orders, so as to choose the lesser of two evils.”

2 TTP XVI, G III.195|C II.289.

3 Matheron, “Le problème de l’évolution.”

4 TP I.5, G III.274|C II.505.

5 TP I.7, G III.276|C II.506.

6 The interpretation I offer of Spinoza’s contract theory is akin to that of Edwin Curley, according to whom we should understand it with an eye on Hobbes’s affirmation in *Behemoth* that “the Power of the mighty has no foundation but in the opinion and beleefe of the people” (see Curley, “Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan,” pp. 322–7; for Hobbes, see *Behemoth*, I, p. 128). The point is that the binding power of the contract is tied to the belief in the existence of such a contract, not to the actual existence of any such contract. Curley does not, however, discuss the contract theory in relation to Spinoza’s understanding of the imagination or see it, as I do here, as a doctrinal mechanism for structuring the collective, political imagination of a people.

7 James, Spinoza, pp. 248 and 250; see also James, “Democracy and the Good Life,” pp. 128–46; James, “Narrative,” pp. 250–67.

voluntarily bound themselves to obey the law.”¹ In this way, the belief in a contract provides one of the most important answers that Spinoza gives to “the problem of how the members of societies can be motivated to sustain harmonious and empowering forms of communal life” and “what sort of knowledge is most efficacious in enabling people to reconcile their individual desires with the requirements of their collective life.” It is a key example of how “our capacity to live cooperatively grows out of a situationist capacity for constructing narratives.”²

James’s analysis is very illuminating. Still, I would go further. On her interpretation, the notion of the contract is designed to appeal to both the understanding and the imagination in such a way that “the rational grounds for contracting, which provide the strongest justification for obeying the law, are mirrored in the ways that we imagine ourselves as contractually bound, and that these in turn exercise justificatory force.”³ But as we have seen, in the final analysis, from the point of view of rational demonstration, the idea of a contract with its associated notion of a transfer of natural right is redundant at best, if not outright misleading. It is in reality impossible for us to transfer a natural right that remains inextricably wound up with our very essence. The idea of a transfer must therefore be an inherently imaginary one, and the contractual narrative entirely justified in imaginative terms. Admittedly, there is little direct, textual support for such an interpretation in TTP XVI. The chapter does not contain a single occurrence of the term *imaginatio* or any of its cognates. Still, essential justification for the view can be offered by correlating Spinoza’s foundational political doctrine of the social contract with his foundational theological doctrine of universal faith.⁴ Moreover, adopting this perspective allows some otherwise blatant inconsistencies within Spinoza’s text to be resolved. We shall consider each point in turn.

Let us first take a closer look at Spinoza’s notion of the contract, on the systematic assumption that it likely has a structure and function analogous to that of universal faith because both represent “doctrines” aiming at establishing “foundations.” On the theological side, the doctrines of universal faith represent the common notion of Scripture, i.e., a common foundation of true religion that must minimally be included in any Christian teaching that will motivate the faithful to conform to the practical precepts of true religion, i.e., the moral lessons of justice and charity. In the same way, I suggest, on the political side of the argument, the doctrine of the social contract represents the common foundation of a free republic, i.e., an element that must minimally be included in any political narrative about the origins of society that will motivate citizens to always uphold their commitment to the principles of political freedom, or security. This structural parallel indicates how the narrative of the social contract is intended neither as a political theory nor a political history, but a political doctrine. As such, it is rooted neither in the understanding nor in historical experience, but in the imagination. It also indicates how the doctrine of the social contract is specifically designed to appeal to and structure the collective imagination of the citizens in a free republic, by strengthening the continuous commitment of citizens to their own freedom by means other than rational.

On this systematic reading, the contract is a social fiction designed to structure the political imagination of the people in a free republic. More particularly, it is a social fiction designed for the kind of republic which, by its nature, is naturally most likely to be or become free and with which Spinoza therefore chooses to be principally concerned, namely a free democratic republic.⁵ This is why, in TTP XVI, he concludes his account of the social contract by stressing that he has not accounted for the foundations of just any kind of republic, but that he has “shown sufficiently clearly what the foundations of the democratic state are.”⁶ The doctrine fulfills this foundational function not because any free democracy is actually founded on a contract, but because citizens in a free democracy have been taught, by doctrine, to act as if it was founded on a contract. This imaginary belief enshrines the

1 James, Spinoza, pp. 249–50.

2 James, “Narrative,” pp. 250–1.

3 James, Spinoza, p. 251.

4 See Chapter 1, sect. “Elements of Method.”

5 TTP XVI, G III.195 | C II.289: “I preferred to treat [the democratic state] before all others.”

6 TTP XVI, G III.195 | C II.289; my italics.

collective commitment of all citizens to accept the prerogatives of sovereign power, making them abide by the principles of political freedom and refrain from employing means other than their natural authority to teach and advise for purposes of political persuasion or from “introduc[ing] something into the republic on the authority of [their] own decision.”¹ Making citizens believe that they are themselves submitted to a social contract by their own choice ensures that they will neither persecute other citizens nor rebel against the state. At the same time, making them believe that everyone else is equally submitted to the same contract liberates citizens from the otherwise justified fear that fellow citizens might persecute them or rebel against the state. In short, by means of this fictional but useful doctrinal or dogmatic belief in the contract, the collective and continuous commitment to the political freedom of all will be guaranteed.

Similar conclusions follow from remarks Spinoza makes about democracy in the context of his study of the Hebrew Republic. In TTP XVII, he thus recounts how the Hebrews, after the escape from Egypt, “promised equally, in one voice, to obey all God’s commands absolutely And this promise, or transfer or right, to God, was made in the same way as we’ve conceived it to be done in ordinary society, when men decide to surrender their natural right.”² Indeed, the way that the Hebrew Republic was initially contracted had a particular resemblance to the way that, for Spinoza, a democratic republic is established:

The Hebrews didn’t transfer their right to anyone else, but everyone surrendered his right equally, as in a democracy, and they cried out in one voice “whatever God says” (without any explicit mediator) “we will do”. It follows that everyone remained completely equal by this covenant.³

However, moving a few chapters forward to TTP XX, we now learn that

since the free judgment of men varies a lot, and everyone thinks he alone knows everything, and it can’t happen that they all think alike and speak with one voice, people could not live peaceably together unless each one has surrendered his right to act solely according to the decision of his own mind.⁴

Following an influential analysis by Étienne Balibar, Spinoza’s account of how the Hebrews contracted “with one voice” is often understood to make of his social contract theory a more historical account than Hobbes’s logical, demonstrative account, albeit in a particular sense. According to Balibar, Spinoza’s contract theory is not a logical construct but a causal one, or something like a genetic concept of the state that spells out the causal forces at play in the production and reproduction of a state. It “does not have as function the thinking of an absolute origin of human societies, nor an ideal foundation of the juridical order, but the explanation of a complex of causes that permits a given state to preserve its own form.” In this sense, the doctrine is an abstract “historical study,” a “concept of a history” of which the Hebrews’ collective contracting provides a concrete, historical instantiation.⁵

On Balibar’s reading, however, Spinoza’s overall account of the social contract comes through as patently circular, and viciously so. For, comparing the two passages quoted above, in TTP XVII we are taught that the establishment of a contract requires that all “cry out in one voice.” In TTP XX, however, we learn that, without a contract already in place, “it can’t happen that men speak with one voice.”

1 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.347.

2 TTP XVII, G III.205|C II.302.

3 TTP XVII, G III.206|C II.303.

4 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.346.

5 Balibar, “Jus-Pactum-Lex, pp. 176–8. Steven Nadler also describes the contract as the “justificatory origin of the state” which holds “in principle if not in historical fact,” arguing that the Hebrews out of Egypt found themselves in a state comparable to the state of nature, so that the subsequent contracting between them represented a historical example of social contracting (see Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 192, and p. 260 n. 31). Nadler, however, also confesses that he is “not sure how to reconcile [the fact that through the social contract citizens confer on the sovereign only their power, preserving their natural rights even in the state] with Spinoza’s claim ... that in the state the citizens have transferred ‘all their right’, suggesting Spinoza may have had some (muddled) distinction between power and right in mind” (Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, p. 194 and p. 261 n. 31). My reading of the contract as a doctrine designed to appeal to the political imagination of the people in a free republic proposes one possible solution to this problem: no real transfer ever took place, but in a free republic it is paramount that people believe that it did.

This circle only becomes avoidable when we realize that what counts for Spinoza is not that a contract was in fact established, but only that the Hebrews believed that it was. It was thus “by the very fact that they believed [nam hoc ipso ... crediderunt] they could be preserved by the power of God alone” that “they transferred to God all their natural power to preserve themselves, which previously they perhaps had thought they had of themselves.”¹ As it appears, the Hebrews did not really enter a contract with each other, “speaking with one voice.” In fact, the contract was embedded in a belief, namely their collective belief in God’s absolute power. And it was this collective belief that made the Hebrews act as if their republic was founded on an original contract, as if they had “cried out in one voice” to establish it.

Spinoza, then, does not argue that all republics are historically or causally founded on a social contract. He does not argue that they are rationally or logically founded on a social contract either. He argues that it is useful for citizens in a free republic to believe or imagine that the state is founded on a social contract because it strengthens their commitment to political freedom. Even in a free republic, being ignorant about their true advantage, citizens will often prove willing to sacrifice the principle of political freedom for the sake of gaining an immediate advantage under particular circumstances. They will, however, be less prone to act upon such damaging political impulses if they have been taught to believe that, as citizens, they are contractually committed to uphold the principle of political freedom absolutely, in and by an unconditional transfer of their natural right to the sovereign power that they have implicitly agreed to qua citizens. Such a belief is contrary to fact, but represents a uniquely useful fiction. This is why, while insisting that the “right of commanding whatever they wish belongs to the supreme powers only so long as they really have the supreme power,”² i.e., while insisting on the conditionality of the contract on the actual relation of power that exists between sovereign power and citizens, Spinoza can also stress that, in transferring their right by contractual promise, the citizens “submitted themselves absolutely to the will of the supreme power” and that “they did this unconditionally.”³ These various affirmations are not mutually inconsistent because the absolute, unconditional transfer Spinoza refers to is not real, but imaginary.

We are here finally brought back to Hobbes. For an absolute and unconditional principle of sovereignty is exactly what is at the basis of the Hobbesian contract theory. This principle here acquires its rightful place within the political theory of Spinoza, namely as a doctrinal foundation grounded in belief rather than as a rational principle grounded in knowledge, designed to structure the political imagination in a free republic rather than to account for the logical, historical, or causal origins of civil society as such. In a sense, then, Leibniz, Thomasius, and Graevius were absolutely right when they claimed that the political theory of Spinoza was built on a “foundation laid down by Hobbes.” Only Spinoza has an entirely different conception than Hobbes of what such a foundation consists in. He puts Hobbes’s theory to entirely different use and bestows upon it an entirely different theoretical status. Hence, Spinoza teaches us, Hobbes was wrong in thinking that a transfer of natural right was possible or that sovereignty could be absolute. Nonetheless, for the sake of political freedom, it is useful for citizens in a free republic who have no firm grasp of their rational self-interest to believe in such a transfer and such absolute sovereignty. At the same time as Spinoza shows how a Hobbesian contract theory remains constantly underwritten by an ontology of power, he also shows how such a Hobbesian contract has an alternative application as a regulative narrative that can serve to consolidate the commitment of citizens to political freedom. The contract theory is thus the centerpiece in a foundational theory about useful political beliefs, specifically designed to structure the political imagination within the public sphere of a free republic, including the free democratic republic that Spinoza sets out to explore in TTP XVI. And this is, we recall, exactly how Spinoza himself concludes his

¹ TTP XVII, G III.206 | C II.302.

² TTP XVII, G III.194 | C II.288; my italics.

³ TTP XVI, G III.193 | C II.287; see also TP II.17, G III.282 | C II.514: “Whoever, by common agreement, has responsibility for public affairs ... has this right absolutely.”

exposition of the contract theory in TTP XVI: “With this I think I have shown sufficiently clearly what the foundations of the democratic state are.”¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me briefly return to the methodological basis for the interpretation of Spinoza’s political theory I have offered. It relies on what, in Chapter 1, I describe as a “systematic assumption” according to which the ordered use of given terms in one domain of investigation can be legitimately assumed to be used in a similarly ordered fashion in other domains of investigation, unless there is proof to the contrary. In this case, the principal basis for my interpretation is the structural parallel I have established between Spinoza’s theological understanding of the foundations of true religion, i.e., the doctrines of universal faith, and his political understanding of the foundations of a free republic, i.e., the doctrine of a social contract. Spinoza’s political doctrine of the contract only concerns what people in a free republic must believe are the foundations of the state in order to consolidate their own commitment to political freedom. It has no actual truth to it. It is a fictional narrative that speaks to the imagination alone. But truth is irrelevant to its purpose or, as we can put it in Spinoza’s own terms, truth is not the standard of the contract. The standard of the social contract is security, or freedom from fear, which exists wherever people feel that they can think what they want and say what they think without fear of being persecuted by other citizens or being forced to profess opinions contrary to what they actually believe. And the social contract helps generate such a sense of security. In order to efficiently produce this practical effect, however, a contract need not actually have been agreed upon. It suffices that citizens believe it to have been agreed upon, or that they embrace it as a foundational political narrative. Just as it matters little for their practical efficacy whether the doctrines of faith that people adopt are true as long as they promote true religion, so it matters little for the social contract whether it actually exists as long as people’s belief in it consolidates political freedom. Within Spinoza’s overall theological-political system, the social contract theory thus stands to security as the doctrines of universal faith stand to piety. In both cases, the second term constitutes the basic practical “standard” of the first and the second the speculative “foundation” of the first, in Spinoza’s technical use of those terms. And, as Spinoza cautions about the contract, “if this foundation is removed, the whole structure will easily fall.”²

¹ TTP XVI, G III.195 | C II.289.

² TTP XVI, G III.194 | C II.288.

The Right Concerning Sacred Matters

Ius circa sacra

The overall construction of Spinoza's theological-political model begins to come into view. As we have seen, in a religiously free republic, doctrines of universal faith form the speculative foundation of true religion, while true religion, i.e., justice and charity, is the practical standard of the doctrines of universal faith. This curious way of folding a foundation into a standard and vice versa formally defines the theological side of the model. On the political side of the equation, we find a similar construction. The contract is the speculative foundation of a free republic, while security is the practical standard of the contract. If, on either side of the model, the relation between foundation and standard is disrupted or skewed by some evil "stratagem," as we can call it using Acontius's term, the freedom of philosophizing will suffer from it. Most frequently, however, such deterioration of the theological-political organization of a free republic does not originate from just one side of the model, the theological one or the political one. It occurs rather when the relation between them is corrupted or distorted, often deliberately in view of private goals pursued by sovereigns, citizens, or sects. Spinoza's account of the alliance between flattering high priests, violent rulers, and the mob is paradigmatic in that regard. Between them, they engage in an oppressive theological-political dynamic directly opposed to the liberating dynamic of free philosophizing, forming an "unhappy agreement ... between the church and state," as Locke later put it.¹ The question then arising is how, exactly, the two halves of Spinoza's model should relate so as to avoid such "unhappy agreement." How do Spinoza's theological model of true religion and his political model of security come together in the single, unified theological-political model of the freedom of philosophizing announced in the very title of the work?

The first question we must ask in this context is the following: should any one side of the model be subordinated to or determined by the other? Spinoza develops his doctrine of universal faith (TTP XIV) before he develops that of the social contract (TTP XVI). In this very straightforward sense, the theological side of his argument has a kind of priority. On the reconstruction of Spinoza's doctrinal models that I have offered in Chapters 9 and 10, it also has a certain explanatory priority. The doctrines of universal faith and Spinoza's account of how they relate to the standard of true religion provide the explanatory structure for understanding the nature and function of the political doctrine of the social contract and the relation it entertains with the standard of security. Still, I would resist taking this explanatory priority to indicate that the theological side somehow determines the political one, or to imply that the institution of the social contract and the security of citizens it entails are somehow subordinated to the theological goal of ensuring the exercise of true religion, justice, and charity. I would equally resist the opposite suggestion that the political doctrine ultimately determines the theological doctrines, or suggest that both universal faith and all the particular doctrines we each adopt in order to better embrace it are ultimately subordinated to the social contract and the political goal of bringing security to the citizens of a free republic.² Instead, I think we should see these two doctrinal models as established independently in view of a common aim, namely a society where citizens are legally permitted to express whatever views they have as long as they do not coerce or persecute others, and where they can profess whatever religion they favor as long as it encourages them to exercise justice and charity. It is the aim of this chapter to spell out how Spinoza thought that such a "happy agreement" between state and church in view of freedom can come about.

¹ Locke, Letter Concerning Toleration, pp. 106–7: "For who does not see that these good men are indeed more ministers of the government than ministers of the Gospel, and that by flattering the ambition and favouring the dominion of princes and men in authority, they endeavour with all their might to promote that tyranny in the commonwealth which otherwise they should not be able to establish in the church! This is the unhappy agreement that we see between the church and state."

² See e.g. Halper, "Spinoza on the Political Value," pp. 178–9.

In TTP XIX, Spinoza discusses how the political and the theological should be related under the heading *ius circa sacra*, i.e., “the right concerning sacred matters.” When appealing to this common expression—*ius circa sacra*—he situates his argument squarely within a controversy reaching back to the founding of the United Provinces and the last decades of the sixteenth century.¹ We find the first occurrences of the notion—or sufficiently similar notions—in Thomas Erastus’s *Explicatio gravissimae quaestionis* and in Lipsius’s *Politicorum sive Civilis doctrinae libri sex*, both published in 1589.² When we get to the works of the Arminian thinkers in the political circles around Oldenbarnevelt in the early decades of the seventeenth century, the notion had become part of the standard vocabulary of Dutch political philosophy. The theories of *ius circa sacra* all recommend firm political control over the religious landscape in the name of public order and the unity of the sovereign power. They adopt what is often—for better or for worse—described as an Erastian position.³ A particularly clear-cut example is Johannes Wtenbogaert’s 1610 *Tractaet van t’ampt ende autoriteyt eener hoogher Christelicher overheydt in kerckliche saecken*, or “A treatise on the office and authority of a high Christian government in matters of the Church.” Wtenbogaert analyzes three basic models of church–state relations: the “papist” model of *plenitudo postestatis* subordinating the state to the church; the “collaterality” model separating and correlating them, favored by the Gomarists and more orthodox Calvinists;⁴ and, finally, the “true design of God” subordinating the church to the state.⁵ This third model is, for all intents and purposes, a paradigmatic theory of *ius circa sacra* in the Dutch tradition.⁶ Another frequently quoted example from the early century is Grotius’s *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, a work we have already encountered. Jeffrey Collins, for example, describes *De imperio* as “a standard natural rights Erastianism” of the Dutch Remonstrant variety.⁷ And in some respects, it is. The broad defense of the civil magistrate’s prerogatives in religious matters looms large in Grotius’s work. Still, a closer look at the text quickly reveals that it cannot be reduced to being only such a paradigmatic text, representative of the entire Dutch Erastian tradition; it contains a

1 For two classic studies, see Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration*, esp. chap. 2; Lecler, *Histoire*, pp. 651–74. For some more recent assessments, see Caspani, “Alle origini”; Rabbie, “Grotius, James I and the *Ius Circa Sacra*”; Moreau, “Spinoza et le *ius circa sacra*,” Beal, “Grotius et le *Ius circa sacra*”; Lærke, “La Controverse”; Lærke, “Leibniz, Spinoza, et *ius circa sacra*”; Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophet*, pp. 152–81.

2 See Erastus, *Explicatio Gravissimae Quaestionis*, pp. 162–3: “*universam gubernationem reipublicae visibilem, sive circa res civiles et profanas, sive circa res sacras cultumque divinum versaretur, uni solique magistratui politico tradidisse*” (my italics; I owe the reference to P.-F. Moreau). For Lipsius, see *Six Bookes of Politickes*, IV, ii, 61: “the Prince has not free power in holy matters [Non principi liberum in sacra ius]; God forbid he should; but a certain insight, and that rather for their defense, then to attribute to himself, as judge to determine of them.” See also Heckel, “*Cura Religionis*”; Schneider, *Ius reformandi*, p. 313; Krop, “The General Freedom,” p. 75.

3 See e.g. Lecler, *Histoire*, p. 660; Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration*, chapters II and V.

4 Wtenbogaert’s understanding of “collaterality” should not be confused with the “collaterality” (collateraliteit) or “equality” (evengheljkheid) among all Christians later promoted by the collegiant and Spinozist Johannes Bredenburg in his 1672 (?) *Heylzame raad tot Christelijke vrede*, pp. 4–9, 13, 23, 30, 48. See Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, p. 125.

5 Wtenbogaert, *Tractaet van t’ampt ende autoriteyt*; see also Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration*, pp. 25–49; Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 18–24; Krop, “The General Freedom,” pp. 73–4.

6 Later, the notion of *ius circa sacra* acquired a somewhat different meaning in the German context. Here, *ius circa sacra*, concerned with the governance of the church within a state, was defined in opposition to *ius in sacra* which designated the internal political and juridical management of the church. The distinction was first explicitly formulated by a Jena theologian in the early eighteenth century (Krop, “The General Freedom,” p. 75), but can be traced back to Samuel Pufendorf’s 1687 *De habitu religionis christianae ad vitam civilem*. Pufendorf proposed a system of *ius circa sacra* in which the church was conceived as a kind of free society, autonomous with regard to the state in its internal organization but also liberated from the ecclesiastical hierarchy of an Episcopal church: it is the theory also sometimes called “collegialist,” later elaborated further by Christoph Matthäus Pfaff. Pufendorf’s famous student Christian Thomasius studied *ius circa sacra* extensively in his various critical examinations of the confessional state of Saxony, notably his *Historia contentiois inter imperium et sacerdotium* of 1722. According to Thomasius, the ecclesiastical right belongs to sovereigns but religion in the proper sense is a matter of interior faith only and remains, as such, free. In Thomasius, the theory originally described as “territorialist” enshrined in the principle *cujus regio, ejus religio*, tying the legitimacy of the church to the territorial hegemony of the civil sovereign, was thus used to argue in favor of religious toleration of individuals while restricting ecclesiastical instrumentalization of the state for confessional purposes. The debates about *ius circa sacra* between territorialists and collegialists form the backdrop for the discussions of church right among German legal scholars in the eighteenth century that Moses Mendelssohn still discusses in the first part of his 1783 *Jerusalem*. On these debates, see Heckel, “*Cura Religionis*”; Schneider, *Ius reformandi*, pp. 313–16; Döring, “*Untersuchungen*”; Zurbuchen, “Samuel Pufendorf’s Concept”; Dreitzel, “*Christliche Aufklärung*”; Ahnert, “The Prince and the Church”; Hunter, “The Secularisation.”

7 Collins, *The Allegiance*, p. 128; see also Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, p. 41; Gunnoe, “The Evolution of Erastianism,” p. 42; Lærke, “Leibniz, Spinoza and the *ius circa sacra*,” p. 146 n. 26.

sophisticated, systematic argument entirely its own.¹ We have already had the opportunity to consider some of the specifics of Grotius's position in Chapter 7.2

In the second part of the century, in addition to the Arminian tradition represented by Wtenbogaert and Grotius, Hobbes's work on ecclesiastical right in *De Cive* and the *Leviathan* played a central role in the further elaboration of the Dutch theories of *ius circa sacra*.³ Hobbes never uses the expression "right concerning sacred matters," although he does come very close in *De Cive* when writing that "sacred civil laws are human laws (also called ecclesiastical) about sacred things [*leges civiles sacræ sunt humanæ (quæ & ecclesiasticæ dicuntur) circa res sacras*]."⁴ Instead, he discusses church–state relations under the heading "Power Ecclesiasticall," most importantly in chapter XLII of the *Leviathan*.⁵ Nonetheless, Hobbes's demonstrative approach to political theory was quickly put to the task of supporting the theories of *ius circa sacra* advanced by Dutch republicans.⁶ The incorporation of Hobbes into the Dutch debates was, however, not straightforward but involved important adjustments. After all, Hobbes wrote *De Cive* and the *Leviathan* in view of resolving English, not Dutch, problems. Apart from Spinoza himself, Pieter and Johan de la Court, Lambert van Velthuysen, and the Dutch translator of Hobbes, Abraham van Berkel, are the best known among these Dutch Hobbesians. The clearest example of a Dutch republican appropriation of Hobbes specifically concerned with the question of *ius circa sacra* is, however, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, a brief treatise which appeared in 1665 under the pseudonym Lucius Antistius Constans.⁷ When Spinoza published the TTP five years later, some seventeenth-century commentators suggested that the anonymous authors of the two books were, in fact, one and the same.⁸ Johannes Colerus, one of Spinoza's first biographers, and Leibniz in his 1710 *Essais de theodicée*, both argued that the attribution was mistaken.⁹ Contemporary commentators still disagree about the identity of Antistius Constans, with Pieter de la Court and Lodewijk Meyer as the most frequently suggested candidates, but Spinoza it was not.¹⁰ This said, the two authors were clearly moving in the same intellectual circles and pursuing similar intellectual goals.

Hobbes and Antistius Constans

Wtenbogaert, Grotius, the De la Court brothers, Van Velthuysen, Antistius Constans, and Spinoza were all republican thinkers with tolerationist sensibilities who believed that the best way to prevent religious persecution perpetrated by a dominant church was to subject the public exercise of religion to some kind of state control. This broad agreement among thinkers spanning some six decades of controversy about *ius circa sacra* should, however, not overshadow important differences in argumentation or lead one to downplay the originality of Spinoza's position.

In order to tease out the particularities of Spinoza's specific solution to the problem, it is particularly helpful to compare him with the author closest to him in both historical circumstances and in the basic motivation of their argument, namely Antistius Constans. Doing so does, however, imply also considering Hobbes, whose work the latter clearly draws on without ever actually mentioning him by name. It is unclear exactly which texts by Hobbes Antistius Constans had read. *De Cive* is the most obvious candidate. It was widely known and was generally, as Noel Malcolm observes, "the work that

1 For details, see Lærke, "Grotius on Ecclesiastical Counsel"; Lærke, "La controverse," pp. 413–16.

2 See Chapter 7, sect. "Public Consultation and Political Resistance."

3 Van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza*, p. 85.

4 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, XIV, v, p. 157.

5 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 774.

6 Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, p. 7.

7 See Antistius Constans [pseud.], *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, reprinted with a French translation in *Du droit des ecclésiastiques*, including commentaries by Blom, "Le contexte historique," pp. ix–xxi, and Lazzari, "L. A. Constans," pp. xxiii–xli. See also Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration*, pp. 245–50; Lagrée, *La Raison ardente*, pp. 228–32; Moreau, *Spinoza. État et religion*, pp. 65–70; Lavaert, "Lieutenants," pp. 150–64.

8 For the identification of Spinoza and Antistius Constans, see Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, XIII, art. "Spinoza," note L.

9 Colerus, *The Life*, pp. 52–5; and Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée*, §375, *Philosophische Schriften*, VI, p. 339. Leibniz attributes the work to Pieter de la Court.

10 Lavaert, "Lieutenants," pp. 150–1; Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, p. 550; Krop, "The General Freedom," p. 74. On the authorship of *De jure*, see also the long note summarizing the available evidence in Mertens, "Van den Eenden and Religion," pp. 74–5 n. 43. Mertens deems it impossible to reach any firm conclusion and does not favor any of the traditional candidates. Note that Pieter de la Court refers his reader to *De jure ecclesiasticorum* in his 1669 *Aanwysing*, I, chap. 14, p. 61.

dominated the European understanding of Hobbes on the Continent.”¹ By the time *De jure ecclesiasticorum* was published in 1665, *De Cive* had appeared in two widely available editions in 1647 and 1657, both published in Amsterdam. By contrast, the *Leviathan* existed only in the English-language version: the Dutch translation by Van Berkel was published in 1667; Hobbes’s own Latin version first appeared in the *Opera* of 1668. If Antistius Constans was using the *Leviathan*, he must then have known how to read in English, which only few continental thinkers did at the time.² Still, *De jure ecclesiasticorum* occasionally suggests some familiarity with the *Leviathan* and at least one of the likely candidates of authorship, Pieter de la Court, knew English well from having spent almost half a year taking language classes in London during his youth. Moreover, De la Court used the *Leviathan* extensively while revising his *Politike Weeg-schaal* for one of the several editions of 1662.³

Be that as it may, let us first briefly consider Hobbes’s position before moving on to Antistius Constans. Hobbes allows for no difference at all between church and state but, as he puts it in *De Cive*, “a Christian church and a Christian commonwealth are one and the same thing.”⁴ Ecclesiasts are civil servants in charge of managing a state church of which the sovereign is the sole head. As for the citizens, they are held to profess whatever religion the sovereign orders them to profess. At the same time, however, Hobbes allows freedom of religious conscience as long as dissenting beliefs are not expressed externally. This is the basic theory, but some complications arise with regard to the last point.

In *De Cive*, Hobbes employs the distinction between internal belief and external profession—but does not really thematize it—when arguing that obedience is given “even if one does not inwardly believe all that is set forth by the church,” provided that one “desires to believe it, and makes external profession whenever necessary.”⁵ Here, the distinction serves mainly to argue that, in a Christian commonwealth, external Christian profession is obligatory, regardless of internal beliefs. It does not serve to argue that internal belief is free, regardless of external Christian confession. In this context, it is not a distinction that Hobbes uses to defend freedom of religious conscience. In fact, already in the preface of *De Cive*, he expresses deep distrust of the motivations of those who defend religious freedom against his own views: “I have found my book very sharply criticized ... on the grounds that I have taken away liberty of conscience, but by Sectarians.”⁶ A sovereign must remain firmly in control of speech, for “man’s tongue is a trumpet to war and sedition.”⁷ He warns against granting “the liberty which even the lowest citizens claim for themselves on the pretext of religion”⁸ and stresses that it is entirely up to the sovereign to decide whether professed doctrines are contrary to “civil obedience” and whether he should “prevent them being taught.”⁹

In the *Leviathan*, however, we learn that “internall faith is in its own nature invisible, and consequently exempted from all humane jurisdiction; whereas the words, and actions that proceed from it, as breaches of our Civil obedience, are injustice both before God and Man.”¹⁰ This admission of *de facto* inviolability of internal faith prompts Hobbes to restrict the purview of the civil sovereign in religious matters to be only external actions, including speech:

[A Christian King] cannot oblige men to beleeeve though as a Civill Sovereign he may make Laws suitable to his Doctrine, which may oblige men to certain actions, and sometimes to such as

1 Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, p. 459.

2 Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, p. 462.

3 Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 27, and pp. 145–6. The first edition of 1660 was, it seems, largely written by Johan. Pieter constantly added material to the six reeditions of 1662. See Westeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, pp. 52–3.

4 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xvii.28, p. 233; see also *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 864: “Christian Sovereigns ... have all manner of Power over their Subjects, that can be given to man, for the government of mens externall actions, both in Policy, and Religion; for both State, and Church are the same men.”

5 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, xviii.14, p. 246.

6 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, Preface, p. 15.

7 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, v.5, p. 71.

8 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, p. 81n.

9 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vi.11, p. 81n.

10 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 822.

they would not otherwise do ... and the external actions done in obedience to them, without the inward approbation, are the actions of the Sovereign, and not of the Subject, which is in that case but as an instrument, without any motion of his own at all; because God hath commanded to obey them.¹

An external profession of faith is merely an action of citizens' bodies—their tongue, to be precise—performed on the sovereign's command. The citizens themselves are not really the authors of such action. As Hobbes writes: "What if we be commanded by our lawfull Prince, to say with our tongue, we believe not; must we obey such command? Profession with the tongue is but an external thing, and no more than any other gesture whereby we signify our obedience."² Therefore, citizens are not morally responsible for whatever act of worship they engage in on the sovereign's command. They are responsible only for obeying the governing authorities, whatever they command. Once citizens respect that formal command, they are in the clear or, more precisely, their salvation depends henceforth exclusively on the internal faith with which they honor God and whose freedom remains unimpaired.³ The Leviathan thus makes slightly more headway than *De Cive* toward a positive conception of freedom of conscience.

Hobbes's distinction between internal and external faith in the Leviathan also converges, although it does not align perfectly, with a distinction between "public" and "private" worship found in both *De Cive* and the Leviathan. The distinction is, again, relevant for attributing an act of worship to the right person. "Publique," writes Hobbes, "is the Worship that a Common-wealth performeth, as one Person. Private, is that which a Private person exhibiteth."⁴ When performed publicly, a citizen's external worship impersonates the commonwealth and must therefore conform to what is prescribed by the sovereign as the public cult. It does not imply an obligation to believe and yet cannot involve hypocrisy exactly because those actions are not attributed to the particular citizen whose body engages in the worship. Private beliefs are simply irrelevant to public worship.

In the Leviathan, however, Hobbes goes on to claim that "private worship," i.e., worship in one's own name, is free "in secret."⁵ This claim makes it impossible to simply correlate the distinction between private and public worship with that of internal faith and external movement of the tongue. For internal faith alone, since it is devoid of signs, expressions, or acts of devotion, does not qualify as worship at all, but only as honor: "Honor is properly of its own nature, secret, and internal in the heart. But the inward thoughts of men, which appear outwardly in their words and actions, are the signes of our Honoring, and these goe by the name of Worship."⁶ One consequence is that those aspects of religious worship that are free and those that are subject to sovereign command cannot be distinguished simply by separating actions of the mind from actions of the body, because private worship is free while still involving some external signs and movements of the body, even if they are performed only in secret. In the Leviathan, Hobbes thus proves slightly more liberal in his conception than he is sometimes credited for: he declares free not only internal faith, but also—it seems—the use of external signs in private worship if used only in secret. It is somewhat unclear what motivated Hobbes to allow for this slight asymmetry in his theoretical edifice, but it is not unlikely that the materialist underpinnings of his overall political philosophy played a role. The dualism involved in separating too clearly an internal domain of thought from an external domain of corporeal movement makes for an awkward fit with a philosophy proclaiming everything that exists to be corporeal.

1 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 894.

2 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 785.

3 This would be how Hobbes might anticipate one of Locke's principal arguments in favor of separation according to which the "one only narrow way which leads to heaven is not better known to the magistrate than to private persons, and therefore I cannot safely take him for my guide" (Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, pp. 50–1). Hobbes would here reply that whatever form of worship citizens have embraced externally on the sovereign's command is irrelevant for their salvation because those are not actions for which they are responsible. For Locke, see *Letter Concerning Toleration*, pp. 20–1.

4 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI, p. 564.

5 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXXI, p. 564.

6 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLV, p. 1028.

Antistius Constans's theory, by contrast, presents fewer complications. It is mostly because it is simpler. If the sphere for free outward exercise of religion is reduced to a strict minimum in Hobbes, i.e., to private worship in secret, the author of *De jure ecclesiasticorum* eradicates such freedom of outward exercise altogether, while still emphasizing the freedom of the internal individual religious conscience. He does not operate with a systematic distinction between "honor" and "worship," and any possible metaphysical complications stemming from Hobbes's materialism seem not to trouble him at all. Indeed, his mostly implicit metaphysical outlook often comes through as Cartesian rather than Hobbesian. In any case, as we shall see, he seems comfortable enough with reinforcing a dualist interpretation of Hobbes's position.

Antistius Constans is fiercely anti-clerical, perhaps even more so than Hobbes, if such a thing is possible.¹ Railing against "the impious, inappropriate and pernicious ambition of the ecclesiastics of all times,"² he argues that ecclesiastics should, at the most, be "administrators" (*procuratores*) in the service of the magistrate—the *prodeus*, as he calls him.³ To convey the point, he plays on the Latin verbs *curare* (to attend to) and *procurare* (to administer, or to attend to on someone else's behalf), arguing that someone who only attends to his own religion when teaching it to others and does not administer it on the magistrate's behalf does not deserve to be called an "ecclesiastic" but is "a bad citizen doing harm to the republic."⁴ Apart from the administrative function putting them in charge of "showing the other citizens how the body should honor God,"⁵ there is no difference between "ecclesiastical citizens" and any other private citizen.⁶ In this context, he also strongly emphasizes that, generally, natural equality among human beings is by no means canceled in the civil state.⁷

Like Hobbes, Antistius Constans distinguishes "external religion" from "internal religion," arguing that the magistrate cannot "know and recognize whether the interior religion of a man conforms to his exterior religion, even less make them conform to each other."⁸ He insists on the merely bodily aspect of external profession: "External religion is entirely separated from internal religion. ... The first is performed by the body alone, the second by the soul alone. No other can care for the latter except [the person] whose religion it is."⁹ Everything related to external religion is subjected to the magistrate, while internal religion is free: "the external religion, performed by the body alone, is, just as every other action of our body, subjected to the power of others";¹⁰ "the interior religion, and man insofar as he honors the great and good God from the sole decision of his soul, benefits from divine freedom."¹¹ Citizens have the freedom to entertain whatever religious beliefs they want, but require the authorization of the magistrate to express them, because doing so is an act of the body.¹² Moreover, developing an original argument giving an additional turn to the Erastian screw, Antistius Constans extends his strict separation of the interior, private, and mind-related from the public, exterior, and body-related into his treatment of prophetic revelation. In order for prophets to legitimately teach what has been revealed to them, it is required not only that they receive a supernatural revelation privately, but also that this revelation is accompanied by an express divine

1 Some commentators, Richard Tuck most importantly, have suggested that *De Cive* leaves an opening for Presbyterianism (see Tuck, "Introduction [to *Leviathan*]," pp. xxxiv–xlili; Tuck, "The Civil Religion," pp. 120–38; Tuck, "Introduction [to *On the Citizen*]," pp. xxx–xxxii; Tuck, "Hobbes, Conscience, and Christianity," pp. 481–90, esp. 489). The argument has been met with considerable and well-justified resistance in Nauta, "Hobbes on Religion"; Collins, *The Allegiance*, pp. 91–2; Malcolm, Introduction, pp. 40–1. For discussion, see also Sommerville, "Hobbes and Christian Belief," pp. 167–8. I shall not engage with this debate here, but I have criticized Tuck's view in Lærke, "La controverse," pp. 416–19.

2 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, Preface, [not paginated].

3 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, pp. 4–5. His use of the term *prodeus* to designate the magistrate plays on the literal meaning of someone who "stands in for God," or is a "vice-God" (*pro Deus*). For, "in every city, it is by the intermediary of the magistrates that [God] governs the citizens [per prodii ... regit]" (VI, p. 75). See also Krop, "The General Freedom," pp. 74–5.

4 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, I, p. 6.

5 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, IV, p. 58; for the expression "ecclesiastical citizens," see VI, p. 76.

6 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, IV, p. 52.

7 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, III, p. 4; X, p. 145; XII, pp. 154–5.

8 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, I, p. 2; see also II, p. 19.

9 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, IV, p. 56; see also VIII, p. 115; and Blom, "Virtue and Republicanism," p. 207.

10 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, IV, p. 57.

11 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, VIII, p. 115.

12 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, VIII, pp. 115–19.

command to render it public.¹ No one has a right to teach their private religion publicly, not even true prophets who have a true revelation, unless they are given an additional divine command to also publicize their revelation.²

Regarding public and private religion, Antistius Constans's discussion is mostly designed to prevent ecclesiastics from claiming any "foreign privilege," by which he understands any authority not emanating directly from the magistrate.³ He does acknowledge that the role of ecclesiastics is to teach (*docere*) and instruct (*erudire*). But their teaching does not come with the power of command: they only make exhortations (*suasiones*) and give advice (*concordia*).⁴ The authority (*auctoritas*) of the ecclesiastics relies entirely on the opinion or belief (*opinio*) they manage to create about their own superior knowledge and virtue.⁵ In other words, they can only have what Grotius calls "persuasive rule," a decidedly weak form of directive rule that depends exclusively on the advisor's "person."⁶ There is no trace of anything like "declarative rule"—the special kind of directive rule that obliges by the necessity of natural consequences—that Grotius attributes to wise men and that Spinoza attributes to all human beings in virtue of their humanity.⁷ In Antistius Constans, as in Hobbes but contrary to both Grotius and Spinoza, authority to teach or to advise is thus not correlated with any kind of obligation on the side of the advisee. At the end of the day, he allows for only two genuine types of authority, namely internal private authority (*auctoritas privata*), which is the authority citizens have over their own internal thoughts, and public authority (*auctoritas publica*), which is the authority the magistrate has over all citizens' external, bodily movements. In the external domain, private authority is nothing.⁸ He thus unambiguously correlates private authority with the individual person's freedom of mind, and public authority with the magistrate's control over all bodies.

A Paradox of Church and State?

In TTP XIX, Spinoza argues that the civil authorities should firmly control the religious landscape of the state: "Divine right, or the right concerning sacred matters, depends absolutely on the decree of the supreme powers, and ... they are its interpreters and defenders."⁹ Ecclesiastics are to act as state agents or "deputies" in charge of carrying out the religious command of the sovereign power,¹⁰ as "ministers of sacred affairs" (*sacrorum ministri*) with no authority of their own.¹¹ His main motivation for taking this position is, as it already was for both Grotius and Hobbes and still was for Antistius Constans, to deny the church any independent political power. Spinoza sees the model of collaterality favored by the Calvinists—setting up the church as a parallel public authority to that of the state—as a politically catastrophic construction, deploring in particular a situation where "the supreme powers have introduced some sect, in which they themselves do not hold a position of authority." For, as he continues, "then they're not thought of as the interpreters of divine right, but as the followers of a sect, i.e., as people who recognize the learned men of that sect as interpreters of divine right."¹² Given his intellectual pedigree and historical circumstances, Spinoza is, in these passages, arguing exactly what one would expect him to argue. His reasoning prolongs the Dutch tradition of *ius circa sacra* from Wtenbogaert and Grotius while giving the theory a more virulent, anti-clerical turn characteristic of the later Dutch Hobbesians.¹³

1 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, VII, pp. 110–11, 117–24.

2 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, I, p. 5.

3 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, chapters VII–XI.

4 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, I, pp. 3–4.

5 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, I, p. 3.

6 See Grotius, *De imperio*, IV, pp. 234–5; Lærke, "Grotius on Ecclesiastical Counsel."

7 See Chapter 7, sect. "Public Consultation and Political Resistance."

8 Antistius Constans, *De jure ecclesiasticorum*, I, p. 5.

9 TTP XIX, G III.236|C II.341.

10 See TTP XIX, G III.234|C II.339; TP VI.18, G III.302|C II.537.

11 See TTP XVIII, G III.222|C II.323, and G III.225|C II.327.

12 TTP XVIII, G III.225–6|C II.328.

13 Wtenbogaert and Grotius argued against counter-remonstrant and Gomarist ecclesiastics and theologians alone, favoring the remonstrant, Arminian camp themselves. Later radical Dutch Hobbesians such as Antistius Constans make no such difference, but argued against ecclesiastics and theologians altogether.

From the systematic point of view, it is equally easy to see what prompts Spinoza to adopt such a position. As we have seen in Chapter 9, any full-bodied doctrine of faith, including particular doctrines and ceremonies, includes a tendency to obstruct its own initial purpose, which is the promotion of piety, justice, and charity. Particular doctrines, albeit “in themselves indifferent,” are necessary in order for a given doctrine of faith to be practically efficacious relative to those who embrace it. They help people practice their religion with sufficient fervor, *integro animo*. But people have different mentalities and do not find the same particular doctrines and ceremonies appealing. Therefore, to ensure that everyone lives a religious life in a free republic, a variety of sects with different particular doctrines must exist. This variety of particular doctrines, however, also burdens society with an ineradicable component of sectarian exclusivism that constantly threatens to degenerate into intolerance and, ultimately, violence. For, in order for particular doctrines to fulfill their practical purpose, those who embrace them must believe them to be true. And affirming the truth of one’s own particular doctrines implies, on pain of contradiction, denying the truth of other people’s different particular doctrines. Spinoza’s defense of religious pluralism is deeply vulnerable to criticism exploiting these tensions between dogmatic theology and religious practice. TTP XIX aims to explain how these difficulties can be at least partially resolved by putting the right concerning sacred matters in the hands of the state. Then it can curb these internal tendencies to sectarian violence by means of appropriate legislation. The state thus becomes the legal guarantor of the freedom of the religious conscience of all, because it is trusted to provide citizens with security and protection from sectarian persecution by other citizens. But how, exactly, can the state achieve that goal without encroaching upon the very freedom of religious conscience it is supposed to protect?

Spinoza’s task is complicated by the fact that his theory does not make available to him the conceptual tools that Hobbes and Antistius Constans, each in their way, use to safeguard freedom of religious conscience, namely sufficiently clear-cut distinctions between the internal and the external and the private and the public. As we recall, Hobbes and Antistius Constans agree that internal faith is only subject to sovereign control to the extent that it is outwardly professed or expressed through bodily movements, acts of devotion, and so on. In itself, internal faith is free. Hobbes moreover allows private worship in secret. Antistius Constans does not allow as much. But the sanctity of the interior remains intact in both. On both theories, even the religious hypocrite is not really condemnable until his hypocrisy is expressed in “external manners.”¹

Grotius already took issue with such conceptions. Commenting on *De Cive* in a 1643 letter to his brother, he thus gives as one important point of disagreement the way that Hobbes deals with the difference between internal faith and external profession: “I cannot approve ... he thinks it is the duty of each private individual to follow the official religion of his country—if not with internal assent, then at least with outward observance.”² Grotius himself operates with a much less strict distinction between internal faith and external profession, arguing that even if “words rather than thought are controlled in sacred matters”³ and “external actions are the primary object of human authority,”⁴ internal actions are still a secondary object of such control because they “come under human authority if they are combined with external matters.”⁵ Internal actions, he argues, can be subject to state control in this secondary manner either “by design of the ruler” or “indirectly.” They are subject to state control by design “when intentions are taken into account in the judgment of offences.” They are subject to state control indirectly because, when a certain act is pronounced illegal, “it is also illegal

1 See also Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XLII, p. 804: “a true and unfeigned Christian is not liable to Excommunication; Nor he also that is a professed Christian, till his Hypocrisy appear in his Manners, that is, till his behaviour bee contrary to the law of his Sovereign, which is the rule of Manners, and which Christ and his Apostles have commanded us to be subject to. For the Church cannot judge of Manners but by external Actions.”

2 Letter of April 11, 1643, in Grotius, *Epistolae*, pp. 951–2, translated in Malcolm, *Aspects of Hobbes*, p. 473.

3 Grotius, *De imperio*, III, p. 217.

4 Grotius, *De imperio*, III, p. 207.

5 Grotius, *De imperio*, III, p. 218.

to think of undertaking such an action” since “no one can in honesty wish to do what it is dishonest to do.”¹

Spinoza does not adopt these particular distinctions. He does, however, agree with Grotius that the domains of internal faith and external profession cannot be strictly separated.² They infiltrate each other in both directions. Contrary to both Hobbes and Antistius Constans, Spinoza does not believe that internal faith is an inviolable sanctuary or de facto impervious to external control.³ He also agrees with Grotius that mere thoughts, in some respects, fall under sovereign control “because of the action such judgments involve.”⁴ Finally, and most importantly, Spinoza believes that internal faith is in fact “combined with external matters” not just sometimes, but always. In Hobbes’s vocabulary, he does not think that merely honoring God internally without external worship is even possible. For, we recall, “not even the wisest know how to keep quiet”⁵ and “experience teaches all too plainly that men have nothing less in their power than their tongue.”⁶

This is not a mere conceptual glitch that can be glossed over or patched up, for example by allowing private worship in secret as in Hobbes. The irrepressible natural urge to speak one’s mind is both a central and crucial component in Spinoza’s overall argument in the TTP. As shown in Chapter 5, it grounds the natural authority to teach and advise that is at the heart of his entire conception of collective free philosophizing.⁷ But this very same premise—that human beings are constitutively incapable of not speaking their minds unless physically prevented from doing so—also makes it impossible to maintain a strict separation of internal faith and external profession. It is not in the power of human beings to effectively separate them. Unless prevented from doing so by violence, they will necessarily profess their faith. Even separating them conceptually encourages violence, because it necessarily involves encouraging putting physical constraint upon tongues. And this is why the strategy to safeguard the freedom of religious conscience pursued by Hobbes and Antistius Constans is not attractive or even defensible from a Spinozist perspective.⁸

But must we not, then, also conclude that Spinoza’s theory of *ius circa sacra*, by subjecting all public worship to state regulation, will necessarily end up suppressing the very religious pluralism it is supposed to protect, and not just its harmful effects? ⁹ And more generally, given that, by nature, human beings will necessarily express their judgment in public, how is Spinoza’s Erastianism compatible with the freedom of philosophizing, to the extent that an important condition of the latter is the permission to “judge freely concerning religion, and hence to explain it and interpret it for [one]self”¹⁰ and “to worship God according to [one’s] mentality”?¹¹

Similar tensions show up later in the TP. Here, Spinoza also adopts a broadly Erastian position, writing in TP III that “no citizen is his own master. Each is subject to the control of the commonwealth, and bound to carry out all its commands. He has no right to decide what’s fair or unfair, pious or impious.”¹² Moreover, in TP VIII, dedicated to aristocracy, he argues in favor of the establishment of a “national religion” (*religio patriae*) that all members of the governing class of patricians should adhere to, and that the state should both promote and maintain before any other church. Certainly,

1 Grotius, *De imperio*, III, p. 207. We also find a variant of the distinction in Lipsius’s *Six Bookes of Politickes*, I, iii, p. 4. For Lipsius, no discrepancy between inward and outward religion ought to exist. For more details on Grotius’s position, see Lærke, “Grotius on Ecclesiastical Counsel,” sect. II.

2 See Moreau, Spinoza. *L’expérience et l’éternité*, p. 372.

3 TTP XX, G III.239|C III.344; trans. modified.

4 TTP XX, G III.242|C II.348; see Chapter 5, sect. “Freedom and Permission.”

5 TTP XX, G III.240|C II.345.

6 EIIp2s, G II.143|C II.496.

7 See Chapter 5, sect. “The Authority to Teach and Advise.”

8 For a similar conclusion obtained by other means, see Halper, “Spinoza on the Political Value,” p. 168.

9 Maria Rosa Antognazza has warned against “adopting Spinoza as the standard-bearer of modernity” and toleration, arguing that his position on state–church relations too easily degenerates “into an authoritarian form of secular religion” (Antognazza, “Truth and Toleration,” pp. 39–41, here 40).

10 TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191.

11 TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.69.

12 TP III.5, G III.286|C II.518–19.

Spinoza stipulates in the same breath that everyone should maintain the freedom “to say what he thinks.”¹ Nonetheless, the state regulation of organized religion he goes on to defend imposes non-negligible limitations on the form and size that alternative worship can take: “Large assemblies ought to be prohibited,” and the houses of worship of alternative religions “should be small, of some definite size, and at some distance from one another.”² How can such conceptions be compatible with a genuine commitment to freedom of religion?

From a contextualist point of view, one could argue, it was only to be expected that Spinoza should put such restrictions on religious worship. Other liberal and tolerationist political theorists in his immediate context devised similar schemes for keeping religion in check, often on pragmatic grounds reminiscent of Lipsius’s reason of state arguments in the *Politica* and in his polemics with Coornhert.³ For example, if one turns to Pieter de la Court’s 1669 *Aanwysing der heilsame politieke Gronden en Maximen van de Republike van Holland en West-Vriesland*, he also affirms that there ought to be a privileged state church that all members of the state administration should adhere to and that members of other churches—Catholics in particular—should be supervised and allowed to worship only in small gatherings in secure private settings.⁴

Still, from a more systematic viewpoint, commentators have had trouble coming to terms with these notions. Already in Spinoza’s own time, toward the end of the century when the tolerationist winds began to blow more toward theories of separation, some commentators seized upon Spinoza’s notions of *ius circa sacra* to depict him, along with Hobbes, as someone who rejected freedom of conscience. For example, in his 1687 *Traité sur la liberté de conscience*, Noël Aubert de Versé attributes to Spinoza the “absurd maxim” that matters of conscience are “the concern of those to whom God has given the authority to rule over actions and speech.”⁵ Paradoxically, however, Aubert de Versé immediately goes on to declare Spinoza a bit more “moderate and indulgent” because he “would not suffer the injustice that would prevent free, frank and generous minds the freedom to speak and express their sentiments.”⁶

Present-day commentators have fared little better in resolving these tensions. As Theo Verbeek notes, “even if many people would probably agree that ‘toleration’ is one of the issues [of the TTP], little is done to match this with chap. 19, which seems to aim at subjecting all theological and pastoral activity to the sovereign.”⁷ Steven B. Smith describes it as a “startling paradox” that Spinoza affirms both in TTP VII that “each person has the supreme right to think freely about religion” and in TTP XX that “the supreme powers are the interpreters of religion and piety.”⁸ Edward Halper attempts to reconcile the apparent “contradiction” between TTP XIX and TTP XX, but never addresses the question of the TP and the notion of “national religion.”⁹ Finally, in an otherwise detailed three-chapter account of Spinoza’s place in the history of “civil religion,” these intractable difficulties have even prompted Ronald Beiner to simply omit the fact that Spinoza operates with an explicit notion of “national religion” in the TP.¹⁰ Indeed, the general incompatibility between the proto-liberalist position that Beiner ascribes to Spinoza and the position the philosopher himself champions in the TP becomes such an obstacle to

1 TP VIII.46, G III.345|C II.587.

2 TP VIII.46, G III.345|C II.587; see also Krop, “The General Freedom,” p. 84.

3 See Chapter 2, sect. “Freedom of Conscience II: The Intellectual Context.”

4 See De la Court, *Aanwysing*, I, chap. 14, pp. 59–67 (chapter dedicated to “toleration” and “religious freedom”). See also the conclusions at II, p. 282, and the politique discussion of the government’s interest in freedom of religion and of the “Tolerantie van verschillende Godsdienstige Vergaderinge en Religien” at III, chap. 1, p. 389. For commentary, see Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 639; Westeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, pp. 332–3.

5 Aubert de Versé, *Traité sur la liberté de conscience*, p. 55.

6 Aubert de Versé, *Traité sur la liberté de conscience*, p. 57.

7 Verbeek, *Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise*, p. 1.

8 Smith, *Spinoza*, p. 153. For Spinoza, see TTP VII, G III.117|C II.191 and TTP XX, G III.232|C II.336. A few pages earlier, Smith also describes it as a “striking paradox ... that Spinoza argues for the sharpest possible separation of philosophy and theology only to settle in the end on the radical subordination of theology to political control” (Smith, *Spinoza*, p. 151). It is not clear to me why one should think that a separation of theology from philosophy would preclude the subordination of theology to politics, and thus exactly what striking paradox he refers to here.

9 Halper, “Spinoza on the Political Value.”

10 Beiner, *Civil Religion*, pp. 87–146.

Beiner's interpretation that he explicitly chooses to write about Spinoza's political philosophy as if the second political treatise simply did not even exist!¹ And yet, what Spinoza says about the political management of religion in TTP XIX and TP VIII.46, respectively, was clearly conceived as two sides of the same theory. As he introduces his reflection on national religion in the TP: "In the Theological-Political Treatise we showed fully enough what we think about religion. But at that time we did omit some things which that wasn't the place to discuss."²

Some of these perceived difficulties can be overcome by stressing, as have Raia Prokhovnik, Steven Nadler, and Susan James, among others, that Spinoza could not have meant to endorse any such thing as a modern liberalism but had both feet firmly planted in the republican tradition.³ And yet, Spinoza's explicit recommendation in the TTP that everyone ought to be permitted "to worship God according to his mentality" still seems to conflict with his embrace of a theory of *ius circa sacra*. And by the same token, his defense of a "right to think freely about religion" in the TP still appears at odds with the rather severe restrictions he puts on the exercise of religions other than the national one. So how are we to reconcile Spinoza's spirited defense of the freedom of philosophizing—including freedom of religion—with his call for state control over religious worship?

National Religion

The TTP is largely silent on how to overcome these apparent contradictions. The key to solving the problem instead lies in the details of Spinoza's understanding of national religion in the TP. The notion appears in TP VIII.46 in the context of a discussion of how to best establish an aristocratic state, defined as a state where the government is composed of a council consisting of "certain men selected from the multitude."⁴ Those men are called "patricians" and once they are selected, they hold the sovereign power.⁵ The national religion, then, is the religion that must be professed and promoted by the patricians in their public function as patricians.

Even though Spinoza only explicitly discusses national religion in the context of aristocracies, there is good reason to think that the argument applies to the two other basic state forms as well, i.e., democracy and monarchy. This is relatively easy to establish when it comes to democracies: TP VIII.46 is explicitly presented as prolonging the TTP where Spinoza elaborates his position in the context of the democratic form of government he favors. It is then natural to think that the argument in the TP also applies to democracies. As for monarchies, the situation is a little more complicated, but instructively so. Consider TP VI.40, concerned with religion in a monarchy:

As for religion, no houses of worship [templa] at all are to be built at the cities' expense So, if those who are permitted to practice their religion publicly wish to build houses of worship, they may do so at their own expense. As for the king [At rex], he should have his own private place of worship [templum] in the palace, to practice the religion to which he's attached.⁶

On one reading, this passage could suggest that Spinoza does not recommend the establishment of a national religion in monarchies because he forbids the construction of houses of worship at the expense of the state. Reading it in that way does, however, saddle him with a potential inconsistency because of the very uncertain limits between monarchical and aristocratic rule. In TP VI.5, Spinoza argues that even absolute monarchies are in fact covert aristocracies because any monarch is in reality

1 Beiner, *Civil Religion*, p. 88.

2 TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587.

3 See Prokhovnik, *Spinoza and Republicanism*, p. 14; Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell*, pp. 196–7; James, *Spinoza*, pp. 3, 13, 235, 237, 254–5, 258, 286, 316–17.

4 TP VIII.1, G III.323|C II.564.

5 By such selection, we should not understand general election, since the patricians may be selected among the people but are not selected by the people but only by the already existing patricians. They retain the supreme power and "consequently have the right to select their patrician colleagues when one of them dies" (TP VIII.2, G III.324|C II.565). For this reason, aristocratic rule "never returns to the multitude ... and there is no consultation with the multitude in it" since "they're prevented both from offering advice and from voting" (TP VIII.4, G III.326|C II.567).

6 TP VI.40, G III.307|C II.543; trans. modified. Curley has "But the king" for *At rex*, which suggests an opposition not necessarily—indeed, on my reading, not at all—implied by Spinoza's text. I follow Proietti and Ramond's Latin-French edition where *At rex* is given as "Quant au roi."

obliged to delegate powers to counselors who, consequently, will end up wielding a power no different from that of the patricians in an aristocracy.¹ It is, it appears, hard to determine in practice when monarchy ends and aristocracy begins. But then, on the suggested reading of TP VI.40, it also becomes difficult to determine when Spinoza considered it beneficial for the state to establish a national religion, and when he believed it should be forbidden.

I do not think, however, that the passage in TP VI.40 should be read as a rejection of national religion in monarchies. One must distinguish between two different meanings of the term *templum* in the TP—a double meaning that in Spinoza’s original Latin remains implicit but I think operative, but that Curley renders explicit by translating the term alternately by “temple” and “house of worship.” Curley thus opts for “temples” (*templa*) whenever Spinoza refers to the buildings of the public, national religion of the state, but opts for “houses of worship” (also *templa*) whenever the buildings of other private religions permitted by the state are concerned.² Now, as Curley’s translation also suggests, both occurrences of the term *templum* in TP VI.40 on monarchies should be taken in the sense of “houses of worship.” Spinoza’s objection to state-funded houses of worship in monarchies is not concerned with the “temples” of a public, national religion. What he argues is that, in a monarchy, people should be allowed to express whatever religion they privately favor in public, including the king. But no such privately favored religion should be privileged or publicly funded, including the one favored by the king. The king is entitled to his private religion but must exercise it in his “own private place of worship in the palace.” It should not be publicly funded like a national religion. TP VI.40, then, does not reject national religion in monarchies. In fact, it doesn’t address the question of national religion at all. Spinoza only argues that everyone, including the king, should be allowed to openly profess whatever religion they privately favor in a house of worship, but that they would have to fund the building and maintenance of it themselves. Nothing in the argument excludes the existence of an additional public, national religion with state-funded temples. Spinoza only holds that, if any such state-funded national religion exists, it cannot be equated with or reduced to any private religion, not even that of the king.

This same distinction between public and private religion also applies to the patricians in an aristocratic state. This is why, in TP VIII.46, Spinoza insists that the “patricians themselves are not divided into sects, some favoring one group, while others favor others.”³ In their public function, the patricians must embrace the national religion. But Spinoza also insists that they must not pledge allegiance to any sect. The national religion, it seems, cannot count as a sect among others. Why? The distinctions developed above help make better sense of his position. In a monarchy, we saw, the private religion of the king should not be confused with the national religion of the kingdom. Similarly, in an aristocracy, no private religion must interfere with the public function of patricians. In this context, their only religious doctrine must be that of the national religion. However, as was the case for the king in a monarchy, nothing prevents the patricians from also practicing another religion or sect to which they are attached in their own private place of worship. In other words, Spinoza does not see the public national religion as being in competition with or replacing all private religions or sects. It has an institutional and theoretical status altogether different.

What is that status? As Spinoza explains in TP VIII.46, in the temples of the national religion “only patricians or senators [should] be permitted to officiate in their chief rituals.”⁴ In that capacity, they are first of all in charge of performing all those religious ceremonies which affect the civil status of those concerned. But they are also in charge of interpreting national religion: “only patricians should be permitted to baptize, to consecrate a marriage, lay on hands, and unconditionally be recognized as

¹ TP VI.5, G III.298|C II.533.

² The distinction is particularly clear from TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587: “those who are attached to another religion [than the national religion] must certainly be allowed to build as many houses of worship [*templa*] as they wish, but these should be small, of some definite size, and at some distance from one another. But it’s very important that the temples [*templa*] dedicated to the national religion be large and magnificent.”

³ TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587.

⁴ TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587.

priests, and as defenders and interpreters of the national religion.”¹ This last responsibility as “defenders and interpreters” must, I suggest, be understood in a particular, reflexive sense. The public defenders of national religion are not to stipulate which interpretation of religion is the correct one and they do not advocate any such interpretation in their public function. Rather, they are in charge of determining whether other religious doctrines can count as admissible interpretations of the national one. This is why national religion itself does not really count as a “sect” or “form of worship.” It is rather a public institution in charge of enforcing the standard or definition of true religion while leaving latitude for a variety of interpretations of religion under that standard or definition. Sects, by contrast, are such particular interpretations that, insofar as they fall under the definition of true religion, are permitted to build houses of worship but at their own expense. Hence, if Spinoza insists that large temples must be built for the national religion, he does not intend those temples to replace private houses of worship. Instead, they must be built as a constant reminder to citizens of what any other religion must be about and what common purpose it must serve. In short, the temples of national religion are state institutions whose aim is to ascertain that all sects are established according to the standard of true religion.

Now, Spinoza is very clear in TP VIII.46 about what that standard of true religion consists in. It is the “very simple and most universal religion” already described in the TTP and it consists in the practice of justice and piety alone.² This does not mean, however, that the right of interpretation associated with national religion is concerned with practice alone. Certainly, “the safest thing for the republic is to locate piety and the practice of religion only in works, i.e., only in the practice of charity and justice, and for the rest, to leave everyone’s judgment free.”³ But this recommendation is not quite as permissive in scope as it appears at first glance because the dissociation of practice from beliefs that it appears to introduce is relative at best. As we saw in Chapter 9, for people to practice true religion they must believe in universal doctrines of faith, i.e., speculative doctrines that serve to guide their religious imagination in the right direction. Whether the particular religious doctrine of some sect does in fact include such doctrines in some form or other is thus also something the defenders of the national religion must determine.

Only sects teaching universal doctrines of faith that encourage people to practice charity and justice will thus count as “true religion.” Still, by design, all such sects also teach secondary doctrines specifically adapted to the mentality of their members so that they can embrace their faith wholeheartedly and thereby become sufficiently motivated to live according to it. National religion in itself, it should be clear, cannot fulfill such a role. Since it incarnates only the core structures of true religion and universal faith, it involves none of the additional doctrines or ceremonies essential to the practical efficacy of actual religious worship. Again, the national religion cannot effectively replace particular sects but is not intended to either. Instead, as a public institution, its role is to make certain that putative religious sects are in fact what they claim to be, i.e., religious sects rather than seditious gatherings. Holding the right of interpretation, the ministers of state in charge of enforcing true religion must distinguish between those “sectaries” whose interpretation of religion is to be permitted and those whose interpretation ought to be “censored.”⁴ National religion thus incarnates a legislative framework established to distinguish lawful from unlawful forms of worship. This is yet another reason why adhering to the national religion is not incompatible with belonging to a particular religious sect as well. In fact, it is the contrary: adhering to the national religion is a necessary condition for belonging to a religious sect. For if the particular sect that one adheres to conflicts with national religion, it cannot legitimately count as religious but is seditious and condemnable.

Spinoza, in short, defends religious pluralism, but does not allow for just any form of worship or just any movement or congregation of people to present itself as religious. Any sect whose doctrine cannot

¹ TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587.

² TP VIII.46, G III.339|C II.587; see also Curley, “Spinoza’s Exchange with Albert Burgh,” pp. 23–4; Fraenkel, “Spinoza’s Philosophy of Religion,” pp. 379, 394.

³ TTP XVIII, G II.226|C II.328.

⁴ TTP XIV, G III.173|C II.264.

be construed as a particular interpretation of a universal faith supporting true religion disqualifies under the legislative framework of national religion and therefore cannot be permitted.

The Hebrew Republic

The most disruptive theological controversies in the Dutch Republic of the early seventeenth century were largely binary. The paradigmatic example is the disputes between Arminians and Gomarists over the question of predestination. Later, however, in Spinoza's time, these controversies did acquire a more pluralist nature. Non-confessional sects of all sorts sprung up or migrated to the Netherlands, further diversifying the Dutch religious landscape that the French army officer Jean-Baptiste Stoupe described in 1673 with such acute disapproval in *La Religion des Hollandois*, judging that accommodating all religions was equivalent to affirming none.¹ Under these circumstances, Spinoza's problem was how to politically navigate a religious landscape that, despite a dominant Calvinist church, had diversified dramatically under a republican government whose politics of toleration were real enough, as the decades of True Freedom of the 1650s and 1660s demonstrated, but also fragile, as became painfully clear with the collapse of 1672. For Spinoza, the distinct risk in such a multi-confessional and multi-religious society was that one among the confessions or religions—in his case, orthodox Calvinism—should elevate itself from private to public status and put its distinct imprint on the very definition or standard of religion. His conception of how, in a free republic, religion should be politically managed was therefore inherently pluralist: all genuine religious sects ought to have equal status under the law and in relation to the state. Still, when it came to the traditional alternative between uniformity and toleration, between imposing a single religious doctrine for all or tolerating, or even promoting, a plurality of doctrines, Spinoza's choice in favor of plurality was not unconditional. Moreover, he was not necessarily opposed to the imposition of religious uniformity when warranted by the historical circumstances. His analysis of the biblical narrative of the Hebrew Republic, and how it relates to other such analyses in his time, illustrates this final point particularly well.

Orthodox Calvinist theologians considered the Hebrew Republic as a model to emulate. They argued in particular that the privileged political status that, according to their reading of the Bible, the high priests had among the Hebrews constituted a decisive biblical argument in favor of the model of collaterality they were advocating, setting themselves up as power parallel to, or even above, a sovereign power that they considered established for the express purpose of promoting their agenda.² Thus considering the Hebrew Republic as a political model to emulate was, however, not the exclusive strategy of Calvinists. The topic was the subject of intense wars of intellectual appropriation between the liberal and orthodox camps. Hence, as shown by Eric Nelson,³ liberal thinkers would reframe the same commonplace for purposes strictly contrary to those of the Calvinists, constructing the Hebrew Republic as an Erastian political construction where religious doctrine was a part of civil law, but which also favored some form of toleration. They considered sectarianism, mutual condemnations of heresy and theological hatred to be direct symptoms of the breakdown of the Mosaic model, when after the Babylonian captivity a new priestly rule gave rise to a new age of conflict and strife among the Jews. This complex of arguments, a "troika of Hebraism, Erastianism, and toleration," as Nelson describes it,⁴ is, for example, developed at length in Grotius's *De imperio summarum postestatum circa sacra*, written around 1616–17, and in Petrus Cunaeus's *Respublica Hebraeorum*, published in 1617.⁵

In relation to these controversies, Spinoza was, unsurprisingly, entirely opposed to the orthodox reading. The orthodox appropriation of the narrative is clearly intended when he denounces those who "should be deceived by the example of the high priest of the Hebrews into thinking that the universal religion also requires a pontiff."⁶ The same applies when he complains about "opponents" trying to separate sacred right from civil right: "how wretchedly they're deceived when they try to

1 Stoupe, *La Religion des Hollandois*.

2 Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology*, pp. 71–4, 200–1, 219.

3 Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, pp. 88–136.

4 Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, p. 111.

5 See Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, pp. 100–1; James, *Spinoza*, pp. 266–9.

6 TTP VII, G III.116 | C II.190.

confirm this seditious opinion ... by appealing to the example of the high priest of the Hebrews, who previously possessed the right of administering sacred matters—as if the priests had not received that right from Moses.”¹ For Spinoza, the power of the Jewish high priests was usurped and illegitimate. They precipitated the ruin of the Hebrew Republic. However, he does not simply adopt the liberal appropriation of the narrative or argue that, before the high priests ruined everything, the Hebrew Republic was a shining model of Erastian toleration. Instead, he takes a much more historical and philological approach and objects to taking the theological-political construction of the Hebrew Republic as a model altogether: “No one can imitate it now. Nor is this even advisable.”² The narratives of the Old Testament about Moses and the Hebrew Republic provide their readers with important political lessons in the same way as, say, Quintus Curtius’s *Historiae Alexandri magni* provides readers with important lessons drawn from the career of Alexander: “[the Hebrew Republic] had many excellent features, which are at least well-worth noting, and perhaps imitating.”³ Spinoza sees no good reason to consider the Hebrew Republic, at any stage of its development, as a political construction to copy, but insists instead on the specificity of the historical circumstances and the exceptional nature of the Mosaic regime.

For Spinoza, as he is represented in the Old Testament, Moses occupied a position as what Hobbes called a “sovereign prophet,” both king and mediator for God, declaring and enforcing divine law. The primary consequence of this arrangement was that religious doctrine and political legislation entirely merged under Mosaic rule, so that obeying divine law and obeying civil law became one and the same thing: “the laws of Moses were the public legislation of their country.”⁴ Backing up his public authority with the performance of miracles, Moses made political unity and religious uniformity go hand in hand. The society he established was extremely regimented, every aspect of the citizens’ lives being subject to ceremonial rules. According to Spinoza, however, this theocratic construction was the best an unfree and ignorant people such as the ancient Jews could hope for in terms of political regime. It conferred exceptional stability upon the Hebrew Republic in spite of the wretched state of its citizens, otherwise prone to superstition and rebellion.⁵ By contrast, in an evolved, free republic like Amsterdam, the best political strategy for maintaining peace and gaining stability was, as we have seen, to allow for a plurality of sects coexisting under the auspices of a religiously generic state department for the management of sacred matters named “national religion.”

Whether the public management of religion should aim at uniform adherence to a public religion or provide some latitude for different forms of private worship was thus for Spinoza a question of social context and historical circumstance. However, what he rejected under all circumstances was the kind of construction favored by the orthodox Calvinists, perhaps best expressed by article XXXVI of the Belgic Confession (orig. 1561; revision of Dort, 1619), according to which the office of the magistrate was not only to watch over the republic, but also to “maintain the sacred ministry, to remove and ruin every idolatry and false service of God; to destroy the kingdom of the anti-Christ and to advance the kingdom of Jesus-Christ, to have the word of the Gospel preached everywhere so that God may be honored and served by all, as required by his word.”⁶ Spinoza fiercely objected to any political construction where a single religious orientation—a private sect, such as Calvinism—was not under sovereign control but nonetheless wielded public authority. The one thing to avoid absolutely in the political management of sacred matters in a free republic was thus that the public safeguarding of true religion and its definition should be conflated with the state imposition of a particular form of worship, or that some private sect should be elevated to the status of public religion.

¹ See also TTP XIX, G III.334|C II.339.

² TTP XVIII, G III.221|C III.322. For commentary, see James, *Spinoza*, pp. 283–4; Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, pp. 130–4.

³ TTP XVIII, G III.221|C II.323; see also Preus, *Spinoza*, p. 30.

⁴ TTP VII, G III.116|C II.190; see also James, *Spinoza*, pp. 271–3.

⁵ See TTP VII, G III.219|C II.319; and Chapter 5, sect. “Freedom and Permission.”

⁶ De Brès, *La Confession*, art. XXXVI, p. 36.

12

Conclusion

The Dutch Public Sphere

In a free republic, says Spinoza, “everyone is permitted to think what he wishes and to say what he thinks.”¹ It is important not to get this conception backwards and confuse freedom itself with the permission to exercise it, or think that a republic is free because such permission is given. Being permitted to philosophize freely is not the same as doing so. In fact, much of the philosophizing taking place in republics that do permit it is not free. Permission is not, in itself, any guarantee that the philosophizing that people engage in is not everywhere tainted by prejudice and deception. Sometimes, people will not benefit at all from the permission they are given to philosophize freely, but use it for the exact contrary purposes, as illustrated by the story of the Hebrews and their worship of the golden calf: they will only use it to confirm their own lack of freedom, flaunt their prejudices, and reinforce their submission to minds other than their own. Moreover, “they will do themselves no good, but will harm others who would philosophize more freely” without them.² Conversely, free philosophizing still takes place in republics that do not permit it. Free philosophizing cannot be entirely suppressed. Even when ordered not to, people will—as a matter of irrepressible human nature—still authorize themselves to judge and express their judgment to others and thus create room for their own free philosophizing. Violent rulers who withhold permission will necessarily encounter resistance from those citizens who are in fact free: “the more the authorities try to take away ... freedom of speech, the more stubbornly men will resist. ... Resistance will come ... from those whom a good education, integrity of character, and virtue have made more free.”³ Spinoza says little of where free philosophizing takes place under such circumstances. But presumably it will first occur in smaller, more closed circles—clandestine pockets of freethinking. One could perhaps compare with his rudimentary account those “who first taught the Christian religion” as “private men,” and who, even “against the will of those who had sovereignty,” held “meetings in private Churches” and organized themselves internally “without any concern for the sovereign.”⁴

In short, the freedom of philosophizing is not a function of extrinsic permission. It is a function of intrinsic integrity, nobility, and honorability. Whether philosophizing is free depends on whether people have taken possession of their own free judgment and on their capability and willingness to engage with each other without prejudice and deceit. And such freedom is not “granted” but achieved through civic education and mutual advising in the public sphere. This is why the emergence of free philosophizing requires not only that the state provides sufficient legal assurance against such persecution as will prevent citizens from speaking their minds out of fear, but also that the state encourages and supports—but without controlling—public educational institutions that will give citizens sufficient control over their own judgment so as not to fall prey to prejudice and deception. When, however, these conditions of free philosophizing are present and citizens have acquired some degree of sound reason, allowing and encouraging free philosophizing to flourish between them progressively gives rise to a broad, republican interface between citizens and government that cuts out the middleman, so to speak. Creating better citizens who are knowledgeable and respectful of their civic duties progressively eliminates the need for a privileged class of political counselors or advisors who only too often are tempted to promote their private interests at the expense of the *salus populi*.

The freedom of philosophizing is a collective exercise. When philosophizing freely, Spinoza argues, people make their claims by right of their natural authority to teach and advise. This authority—akin

¹ TTP XX, Chapter Title, G III.239|C II.344.

² TTP Preface, G III.14|C II.75.

³ TTP XX, G III.243–4|C II.349.

⁴ TTP XIX, G III.237|C II.342. On this passage, see also Chapter 5, sect. “Public and Private.”

to, but not identical with, Grotius's conception of declarative rule, i.e., an indirect authority of counsel tied to the declaration of natural consequences—belongs to all individual human beings as an inalienable natural right. The freedom associated with the exercise of that authority, the freedom of philosophizing, is, however, not strictly speaking something that can be attributed to individuals. It is said of the discursive relation that exists between them, that is to say, of philosophizing itself. That is why free philosophizing cannot be practiced alone but occurs only in a shared space of debate. Rather than considering Spinoza's *libertas philosophandi* as announcing modern ideals of individual liberty, we should see it against the background of humanist rhetoric. Spinoza's aim is not to give free rein to opinion-making but, as Gary Remer describes the original humanist project, "to fashion an environment conducive to rational discussion."¹ Spinoza's theory of a "style" of free philosophizing thus echoes the Erasmian theory of conversational decorum, an essential component in the humanist theories of toleration stipulating that interlocutors must engage with each other with respect, in a nonhierarchical fashion, with no one claiming certainty from the outset, and leaving all participants to judge the outcome for themselves.² For Spinoza, the Apostles' Letters provide a paradigmatic example of how to lend such decorum to philosophizing because, as he reads them, in the Letters they—and Paul in particular—engage in a collective style of thinking and speaking that carries all the characteristics of genuine "brotherly advice": a style based on reason and argument, candor and sincerity, falsifiability of claims, and equality among interlocutors.

Depending on the kind of civil society one lives in, such a shared space of debate can take different forms. At one extreme, it can take the restricted form of small circles of philosophically minded interlocutors or, as Jürgen Habermas describes a similar phenomenon in another context, a "public sphere anticipated in secret, as a public sphere still existing largely behind closed doors."³ Commentators from Leo Strauss onward, who have seized upon remarks in Spinoza suggesting strategies of secrecy and prudence—as when, in the preface to the TTP, Spinoza addresses only the "philosophical reader" while encouraging "the common people ... to neglect this book entirely"⁴—have hit upon this form that free philosophizing takes in the least free republic, namely, a republic governed by violent rulers under the sway of flattering priests who instrumentalize the mob for their devious purposes. At the other extreme, in a free republic, the space of free philosophizing can take the unrestricted form of a general public sphere of independent and well-educated "best citizens," mostly recruited from a class of "wise merchants" who, while financially independent and self-sufficient, still feel a duty to engage in public life and provide valuable political counsel to the public authorities. These are the conceptions highlighted by those commentators who have seized upon the remarks in the TTP where Spinoza appears as one of the first modern proponents of participatory democracy.⁵

The society Spinoza actually lived in was situated somewhere between these two extremes. According to Leo Strauss, Spinoza "wrote for posterity rather than for his contemporaries."⁶ On this reading, as we could paraphrase Habermas, Spinoza anticipated the freedom of philosophizing only in secret because the society he lived in was a persecuting one. This, I think exaggerated, assessment does not give sufficient credit to the historical circumstances that Spinoza found himself in or to his evaluation of them. Spinoza praises the city of Amsterdam where "all men, no matter their nation or sect, live in the greatest harmony,"⁷ a "republic in which everyone is granted complete freedom of judgment, and is permitted to worship God according to his mentality, and in which nothing is thought to be dearer

1 Remer, *Humanism*, p. 12.

2 Remer, *Humanism*, pp. 8, 13–16, 22–3.

3 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 35.

4 TTP Preface, G III.12|C II.75. For Strauss, see "How to Study," pp. 89–90.

5 For good recent examples, see Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom*, pp. 220–9; Rosenthal, "Spinoza's Political Philosophy"; Steinberg, "Benedict Spinoza: Epistemic Democrat"; and Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology*, pp. 163–4.

6 Strauss, "How to Study," pp. 81, 88.

7 TTP XX, G III.246|C II.352; trans. modified.

or sweeter than freedom.”¹ These descriptions are neither insincere nor ironic.² Admittedly, De Witt’s True Freedom was not exactly radical, and the republicanism he embraced rather less than democratic, organized as it was around the states’ regents and their privileges. As the English ambassador to Holland, Sir William Temple, observed in his 1673 *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands*, the Dutch Republic was in fact “a sort of oligarchy and very different from a popular government.”³ The republican freedom pursued by the De Witt regime was less that of the individual citizens than that of the United Provinces from the House of Orange’s Stadhoudership, perceived as quasi-monarchical.⁴ Both toleration and freedom of expression had their limitations, especially on the local level.⁵ According to Jonathan Israel, “the Republic was a society in which theologically argued and politically concerted intolerance remained a potent force”⁶ and “this ambivalent semi-tolerance ... was the real hallmark of the Dutch Republic at the end of the Golden age.”⁷ Nonetheless, the Dutch enjoyed liberties that were incomparably greater than anywhere else in Europe. As Henry Oldenburg wrote Spinoza from England in 1662, at the very height of True Freedom: “Your Republic is very free, and gives great freedom for philosophizing.”⁸

Without being insincere or ironic, Spinoza’s depiction of Amsterdam is, however, clearly idealized and designed to highlight the societal benefits of a public sphere of free philosophizing while downplaying the nuisances.⁹ Even if we allow that free philosophizing was permitted to an unprecedented degree in the Dutch Republic, many remarks by Spinoza about what the public sphere in the republic actually looked like tend to relativize his rosy depiction of the consequences of allowing it to develop. After all, this is the same public sphere that he also considered infested—and often dominated—by the “worst men” who were “possessed by a longing, not to teach the people, but to carry them away with admiration for [themselves], to censure publicly those who disagree, and to teach only those new and unfamiliar doctrines which the common people most wonder at,” leading to “great dissension, envy, and hatred, whose violence no passage of time could lessen.”¹⁰

In their *Dutch Culture in European Perspective: 1650—Hard-Won Unity*, while dissecting the “discussion culture” of the Dutch, Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies identify this culture as a “distinctly modern feature of [the Dutch] political culture,” setting it apart from other, mostly monarchical, European political regimes. In a remarkably upbeat historical evaluation, they reconstruct this Dutch discussion culture as a “horizontal model of consultation” generally oriented toward “rationally weighing opposing arguments and taking a stand of one’s own” and as a “neutral space where everyone, with only a few exceptions, was welcome, where everything was open to discussion, and no opinion could presume a priori to have won out over others.” It complemented the “vertical power structure that even the Republic could not escape” with “more horizontal processes of opinion formation in society.”¹¹ Henk van Rinsum and Willem Koops have made the obvious association of this historical analysis with Habermas’s conception of a bourgeois public sphere.¹² However, as Arthur Weststeijn has pointed out, this characterization of the seventeenth-century Dutch public debates is “overly idealistic.”¹³ Early modern Dutch debating culture was lively but not particularly polite or oriented toward rational argument. The “freedom of thought and expression unique to the United Provinces,” argues Andrew Cooper Fix, was perhaps propitious for intellectual innovation, but it also “produced a situation in which intellectual warfare among the various groups was endemic and self-

1 TTP Preface, G III.7|C II.69.

2 Contra Meinsma, Spinoza et son cercle, p. 275; see also Chapter 1 of this study.

3 Temple, *Observations*, p. 78.

4 Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp. 700–13.

5 On censorship in the Dutch Republic, see Van Bunge, “Censorship of Philosophy”; Frijhoff and Spies, *1650—Hard-Won Unity*, pp. 263–7. On the limits of toleration, see Bergsma, “Church, State and People”; Mout, “Limits and Debates.”

6 Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 638.

7 Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 676.

8 Oldenburg to Spinoza, July 1662, Letter 7, G IV.38|C I.189.

9 For a similar assessment, see Steinberg, *Spinoza’s Political Psychology*, p. 131.

10 TTP Preface, G III.8|C II.70.

11 For all three quotes, see Frijhoff and Spies, *1650—Hard-Won Unity*, pp. 223–5.

12 Van Rinsum and Koops, *University of Utrecht*, pp. 15–16.

13 Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, p. 39; see also Pollmann and Spicer, “Introduction.”

defense on the intellectual plane essential.”¹ Helmer J. Helmers has arrived at a similar evaluation, tersely noting about Frijhoff and Spies’s study that “the term ‘discussion’, which connotes polite exchange and negotiation, seems rather too friendly for the harsh realities of Dutch public debate.” In fact, he continues, “repression, slander, and satire could easily trump argumentation, but they also shaped discussions and were just as much a consequence of the plurality of interests that made up the Dutch state as deliberation and tolerance.”² Moreover, “public debate was structured to a considerable extent by power and patronage, and a fear of violence, rather than a heartfelt desire to exchange opinions.”³

Freia Sierhuis’s study of pamphleteering, libel, and satire during the Arminian controversies in the early century is very instructive in this regard.⁴ The same can be said about Helmers’s own study of the Anglo-Dutch relations and Royalist pamphleteering in the Dutch public sphere in the middle of the century.⁵ Even though the doctrinal fault lines shifted throughout the century, the major politico-theological confrontation in Spinoza’s time no longer being between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants but rather between secular-minded Erastians and Further Reformation theologians,⁶ the controversies were no less virulent for that. Intellectual disagreements continued to get tangled up in political, institutional, or even financial disputes. Jetze Touber’s recent accounts of the theological and political polemics between Lambert van Velthuysen, a Cartesian and Hobbesian but also the politically powerful Utrecht regent, and the local Utrecht consistory during the 1660s provide a good example. Their seemingly innocuous philological disagreements about the organization of the first Christian communities—were they copied on the model of the Jewish Synagogue or not?—were directly related to the justification of certain political and financial privileges that the Calvinist church had—privileges that Van Velthuysen was keen to abolish and his adversaries, a certain Jodocus van Lodenstein the first among them, of course equally keen to maintain.⁷ Hence, what Joad Raymond concludes regarding the “rhetorical-manipulative” English public sphere in the mid-seventeenth century also applies to the Dutch theological-political debates in the same period, namely that they were largely “characterized by religious and political faction and conflict.”⁸ Hardly dedicated to the provision of sincere brotherly advice alone, just like the English one, the emerging Dutch public sphere was riddled with satire, slander, propaganda, libel, flattery, threats, vulgarity, insincerity, dissimulation, deception, misappropriation, and misattribution. Numerous strategies aiming at shaping public opinion were deployed that could hardly count as civic education, open debate, or, indeed, free philosophizing.

It remains the case, nonetheless, that some new kind of public sphere, even if it was rather less than rational and not exactly free, did emerge in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century. Citizens did discuss political and theological issues with each other on a greater scale than anywhere else; citizens did turn to the public authorities to vent private grievances and solve disputes; structures of public counsel, consultation, and petition did appear.⁹ Indeed, as Helmers notes, “relative to its population size, more people were involved in political decision-making in the new Dutch Republic than in most other polities in Europe, and even more than in modern democracies.”¹⁰ Missing, however, were clear

1 Fix, *Prophecy and Reason*, p. 52.

2 Helmers, “Popular Participation,” p. 126.

3 Helmers, “Popular Participation,” p. 145.

4 See Sierhuis, *The Literature of the Arminian Controversy*, pp. 53–97. For other resources on public debate in the Dutch Republic focusing on pamphleteering, see the volume *Pamphlets and Politics in the Dutch Republic* edited by Deen, Onnekin, and Reinders, in particular the contributions by Deen, Onnekin, and Reinders, “Introduction”; De Bruin, “Political Pamphleteering”; Stern, “Poison in Print.” See finally Bergin, “Defending the True Faith.”

5 Helmers, *The Royalist Republic*.

6 See Fukuoka, *The Sovereign and the Prophets*, pp. 154–5, 166.

7 See Touber, *Spinoza and Biblical Philology*, pp. 191–203.

8 Raymond, “Describing Popularity,” p. 127; Raymond, “The Newspaper,” pp. 27–35; Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering*. See also Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers*, esp. pp. 303–32; Lake and Pincus, “Rethinking the Public Sphere”; Andersen Nexø, “Between Lies and Real Books.”

9 Van Nierop, “Private Interests,” pp. 33–9; Van Nierop, “Popular Participation”; Helmers, “Popular Participation,” p. 131; Bergin, “Defending the True Faith,” pp. 220–1; Van Rinsum and Koops, “University of Utrecht,” pp. 15–17.

10 Helmers, “Popular Participation,” p. 130.

guidelines for how and when to address questions of public import and how to distinguish them from questions of merely private interest. “The private and the public spheres were not rigidly separated,” as Van Nierop observes, but constantly spilled into one another.¹ Normative theories of how to better frame public discourse then emerged in response to these new political circumstances. Spinoza’s conception of the apostolic epistolary style, his critique of deception and flattery, the stress he puts on public consultation and civic education, his descriptions of the conduct of the “best citizen” vis-à-vis the sovereign power, indeed his entire conception of the freedom of philosophizing, is just such a normative theory. It is an attempt to conceptualize how to better harness the unwieldy powers of free public discourse for the common good and the benefit of the state while at the same time shielding it from the pursuit of merely private advantage by violent or deceitful sovereigns and citizens.

Spinoza’s major contribution to the theoretization of this emerging Dutch public sphere has, however, been somewhat neglected by both historians of philosophy and political theorists who have engaged with his political thought. They have mostly focused on his (alleged) contributions to the liberalist political tradition, various aspects of his republicanism, or the metaphysical underpinnings of his defense of democracy. The reason for this neglect, I suspect, relates not only to the philosophical orientation of contemporary Spinoza studies, but also to the way the historical study of the modern European public sphere and how it emerged has been conducted in contemporary political and social theory. It has to do with the fact that the historical circumstances of the Dutch Republic, and the intellectual context of its political development, are entirely absent from the one magisterial work which, in the study of modernity, has most pervasively shaped the academic discussion of the role of the public sphere in the emergence of European democracies, namely Habermas’s classic 1962 study, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas draws his primary material for his historical sociology exclusively from England, Germany, and France, and focuses mostly on the political circumstances of the eighteenth century. The intellectual history of the theoretization of the public sphere that accompanies his sociological study is dominated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century figures, most prominently Kant, Hegel, and Marx. His analyses of the German giants are prefaced by some brief discussion of several earlier thinkers from the English and French seventeenth-century contexts, including Hobbes, Locke, and Bayle. But Spinoza, being both Dutch and seventeenth century, is entirely left out: the index nominum indicates not a single reference to him. This focus has to some extent oriented the scholarly reception of Habermas’s thesis.² However, as recent intellectual history has shown—Jonathan Israel’s work on the radical Enlightenment being a prominent and in many ways outstanding example, but certainly not the only one—a focus on the Dutch context will reveal how some of the constitutive features of the Enlightenment and of conceptions habitually associated with modernity emerged in European intellectual culture somewhat earlier than is usually asserted, in the second half of the seventeenth century rather than in the eighteenth century. Spinoza’s conception of the freedom of philosophizing and the historical circumstances and intellectual context that this conception arose from is, as I have tried to argue in this study, a case in point. In short, one could suspect that, had Habermas included the Dutch context, he would necessarily have come upon Spinoza as an early central contributor to the intellectual history of the modern public sphere.³

As we have seen, the deeper political aim of Spinoza’s defense of the freedom of philosophizing is the creation of a public sphere adjacent to the state and interacting with it in different ways, ranging from peaceful public consultation between well-educated citizens and a noble sovereign to non-rebellious resistance to a violent ruler. Spinoza’s conception of the freedom of philosophizing, and especially his description of how the best citizens resist violent rule by speaking their minds but without engaging in sedition, bears striking resemblances to Kant’s later conception of the public use of reason in his

1 Van Nierop, “Private Interests,” p. 34.

2 For example, none of the historical contributions to the influential reassessment of Habermas’s work edited by Craig Calhoun include reflections on the Dutch context. See Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.

3 Michael Hofmann has come to a similar conclusion, arguing in his *Habermas’s Public Sphere* that “the inclusion of the Dutch Republic during its ‘Golden Age’ would have allowed Habermas to reconstruct the philosophical discourse of modernity from its very beginning,” and complaining about “Habermas’s exclusion of philosophers like Francis Bacon, René Descartes, James Harrington, and Baruch Spinoza” (*Habermas’s Public Sphere*, p. xi; see also pp. 5, 155–70).

famous 1784 essay *Was ist Aufklärung?*, with its injunction to “argue as much as you please, but obey!” Moreover, Spinoza’s free philosophizing includes an essential aspect of parrhesia—encapsulated in the Paulinian declaration to have “written more boldly” to the Romans (15:15)¹—that resonates across the centuries with Kant’s Enlightenment motto: *Sapere aude!*² It is, I think, no coincidence that Kant’s immediate predecessors in adopting that particular *Wahlspruch*—namely, the scientific society called the *Alethophilen* founded by Count Ernst Christoph Manteuffel in 1736 to promote Leibnizio-Wolffianism—had done so on the suggestion of a prominent Spinozist, namely Johann Georg Wachter, whom the society had put in charge of devising their logo and motto.³ Spinoza shares with Kant a great confidence in the ability of collective reason to structure the public sphere by the force of its own devices if provided with the proper institutional framework to do so. Despite all his invectives against flattery and deception with evil intent, Spinoza’s vision of the freedom of philosophizing is a strikingly optimistic one, and a strikingly rationalistic one too, deeply committed to the idea that rationality and freedom are inextricably intertwined within the intersubjective structures of public debate. Both of them will necessarily come to expression, mutually pulling each other forward, if the institutional and political conditions for this are fulfilled. Of course, the “if” in the previous sentence is a big one: large swaths of the TTP are dedicated to the myriad ways that these processes of rationalization can be disrupted, delayed, distorted, and destroyed by violence and deception, and how far not only common men but everyone to some degree has yet to go before they can take possession of their own free judgment. Still, what Spinoza calls “the natural light common to all” is everywhere present among us— if not actually, then at least as a potential for self-liberation that we share in virtue of our common humanity. He would entirely agree with Kant’s assessment that “it is difficult for any single individual to extricate himself from the minority that has become almost nature to him But that a public should enlighten itself is more possible; indeed this is almost inevitable, if only it is left its freedom.”⁴ Their shared confidence in the potential of rationalization inherent in the public use of reason constitutes a deep and significant commonality between Spinoza and Kant that, anachronism be damned, it would not be inappropriate to describe as a shared project of modern enlightenment.

By the same token, Spinoza’s project entertains a particular relation to the contemporary theory of the modern public sphere most clearly modeled upon Kant’s conception of the public use of reason, namely that formulated by Habermas.⁵ Both Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere and Spinoza’s free philosophizing represent “a sphere of private people come together as a public”;⁶ they both establish “a certain parity of the educated,”⁷ in Spinoza’s case by making nobility a function of good education.⁸ Moreover, moving on to Habermas’s later Theory of Communicative Action of 1981, the ideal of free philosophizing that Spinoza sees for reframing public debates and civic discourse bears striking resemblance to the idealized space of the “universal auditorium” which in Habermas’s own sociology and political theory forms the normative counterpart to his historical account of the public sphere’s development.⁹ Habermas envisages this universal auditorium to be structured by the “illocutionary force of the better argument” alone, excluding all strategic or perlocutionary acts that might interfere with the symmetry and transparency of the discursive relation between interlocutors. Similarly, Spinoza sees his free philosophizing as a specific “style” of discursive interaction where each

1 Rom 15:15 as quoted in TTP XI, G III.153 | C II.243.

2 On this particular point, I agree with Smith, Spinoza, p. 29. For another way of making the same rapprochement, see Miqueu, Spinoza, Locke, et l’idée de citoyenneté, p. 448.

3 The motto originally stems from a letter from Horace to Lollius. On the history of the motto, see Venturi, “Was ist Aufklärung?”; Firpo, “Ancora a proposito di ‘Sapere Aude’.” On the *Alethophilen* and Wachter, see Döring, “Beiträge”; Mulsow, “Erkühne dich, vernünftig zu sein”; Lærke, “Leibniz et Diderot,” pp. 75–6, 56–8. On Wachter’s Spinozism, see Scholem, “Die Wachtersche Kontroverse”; Schröder, Spinoza; Lærke, “Three Texts”; Lærke, “Mendelssohn, Wachter et les origines du Spinoza idéaliste.”

4 Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” in *Practical Philosophy*, p. 17.

5 See Norris, Spinoza, p. 185; see also Preus, Spinoza, p. 4 n. 7.

6 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 27.

7 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 32.

8 TTP VII, G III.116–17 | C II.191; see also TTP XX, G III.244 | C II.349.

9 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I–II.

interlocutor “submits [his judgments] to the discretionary judgment of anyone,” as governed by reasoning and argumentation and based on candor, equality, and the falsifiability of judgments.¹

These intriguing similarities should not, of course, prompt us to ignore basic differences in status among their texts. It is, after all, comparing apples and pears to juxtapose a twentieth-century historical study such as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* or an exercise in contemporary sociology and political theory such as *The Theory of Communicative Action* with the theological-political doctrine of a seventeenth-century thinker. In any case, Spinoza should not be cast as anticipating Habermas, analogously to the way that Straussian readers have cast Spinoza as a liberalist *avant la lettre*. Doing so would burden Spinoza with a precursor status that is misguided at best and Habermas with a heritage he does not claim. It would do injustice not only to the differences in historical circumstance of their writings, but also to the theoretical specificity of each doctrine. Nonetheless, the freedom of philosophizing described by Spinoza resembles in sufficiently striking proportions the bourgeois public sphere studied by Habermas to warrant the comparison in a more abstract mode. And, despite the obvious anachronism, once this general resemblance is noted, the precise differences between their respective conceptions are instructive for understanding the theoretical, conceptual, and philosophical specificity of Spinoza’s political program. These differences essentially reduce to two.

The first difference concerns the relation that, respectively, Spinoza’s circles of free philosophizing and Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere entertain with the state and the governing authorities. On Habermas’s conception, the emergence of a public sphere—a sphere of public exchange among private citizens²—corresponds to the appearance of a new authority of the bourgeois class, a public authority of private citizens that he sees as dialectically related or opposed to the public authority of the state. The “public sphere of civil society” was constituted as the “abstract counterpart of public authority” with “awareness of itself as the latter’s opponent”³ and it came about when private people “claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves.”⁴ This conception of an opposition between the public sphere and the public authority does not necessarily mean that the public sphere is in conflict with the state, with revolution as the extreme consequence. But it does mean that the defining role of the public sphere, understood as private men acting in public, is to establish and uphold certain limits to the authority of the state, keeping it in check, so to speak. On the Habermasian model, the public sphere is thus intrinsically linked to a firm conception of democratic accountability of the state to its citizens.⁵

Spinoza, by contrast, inherited the early modern notion of indivisible sovereignty. This is why the relation between the freedom of philosophizing and sovereign power never acquires a truly dialectical character. As Hobbes shows, taking political absolutism to its limits, a coherent political theory of indivisible sovereignty cannot produce a viable notion of legitimate political rebellion. Indeed, for Hobbes, whatever meager resistance to the sovereign is legitimate—in sum, the inalienable right to preserve one’s own life even against sovereign command⁶—does not really qualify as “political,” but tends to fall outside that domain altogether. For example, on the Hobbesian model, a condemned criminal opposing his own execution is acting legitimately to preserve his own life but is not, by doing

¹ TTP XI, G III.152|C II.241–2; and Chapter 4, sect. “The Epistolary Style.”

² See Habermas, *The Emergence of the Public Sphere*, p. 26: “The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public.”

³ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 23; my italics.

⁴ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 27; my italics.

⁵ I should note that, as a model of accurate historical analysis of the emergence of public opinion as a singular phenomenon in modern European history, commentators today—including Habermas himself—generally agree that the dichotomy between state and public sphere governing his definition of the bourgeois public sphere in *The Structural Transformation* is too rigid (Habermas, “Further Reflections”; Deen, Onnekink, Reinders, “Introduction,” pp. 7, 14–15). These reservations of the historians are valid but not of my concern here: I am mostly interested in the conceptual construction of Habermas’s original philosophical model, how it translates into the normative theory of the universal auditorium and his conception of procedural rationality in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and how these conceptual models of the public sphere compare to Spinoza’s conceptual model of free philosophizing.

⁶ See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXVII, p. 468: “If a man by the terrour of present death, be compelled to doe a fact against the Law, he is totally Excused; because no Law can oblige a man to abandon his own preservation.”

so, taking political action within civil society. He is removing himself from society altogether, returning to the state of nature where only natural law reigns.¹ Correlatively, a people opposing its sovereign resists not only that sovereign but sovereignty as such. Hobbes's unwillingness to distinguish other than nominally between a monarch and a tyrant is the most striking consequence of taking that position.²

Despite his insistence on the indivisibility of sovereignty, Spinoza was keen on not being assimilated too strongly to this Hobbesian position, especially when it came to the political requirements of religious uniformity. He wanted to give freedom of conscience its due while avoiding falling into the monarchomachic positions of the Calvinist political theorists of the Dutch Revolt such as Philippe Duplessis-Mornay.³ The way he envisages that the best citizens would exercise their freedom—how they would advise, and sometimes resist, the sovereign power—is his way of steering that difficult political course. In advocating freedom of philosophizing, he does not set the enlightened public dialectically up against the state apparatus, but places it next to it as a source of public counsel, in a relation of contiguity rather than opposition. On Spinoza's conception, good citizens are not to interfere with the legal functioning of the state. If the privy counselor in a monarchy whispers in the king's ear, the best citizen in Spinoza's democracy speaks openly, publicly, and directly to the government, but they essentially fulfill the same advisory function. Most importantly, their advice comes with the same kind of authority. As Grotius would put it, they exercise a directive or declarative rule and not a constitutive one, a soft power to guide and not a hard power to enact laws or command. On this point, Spinoza's distinctions are very clear. Rebels attempt to force the state to change the laws and thus impose "the authority of [their] own decision."⁴ The best citizens, on the contrary, obey the laws they disagree with but still challenge the public authority only with the means that naturally remain at their disposal, namely their right to speak their mind in public and their authority to teach and advise. The best citizens, whenever disgruntled, will not seek to impose their demands by force but seek to sway the actions of the sovereign powers by arguing in public. They will expose the benefit or harm that this or that course of action will cause the republic, thus declaring the natural consequences of sovereign decrees.

In Spinoza's free republic, citizens adopt two attitudes toward the sovereign power, neither of which is directly confrontational: they stand below the state, obeying the laws, but also beside the state, consulting and advising about the laws. But they never stand against it, or rebel against the laws. Revolution is not legitimate.⁵ It will not prove efficient, for "it happens that the people can often change the tyrant, but it can never destroy him, or change a monarchic state into another, of a different form."⁶ On the Habermasian conception of the bourgeois public sphere, a historical event like the French Revolution remains on the horizon of what that conception can accommodate; it is

1 See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIV, p. 214: "A Covenant not to defend my selfe from force, by force, is alwayes voyd. For (as I have shewed before) no man can transferre, or lay down his Right to save himselfe from Death, Wounds, and Imprisonment, (the avoyding whereof is the only End of laying down any Right,) and therefore the promise of not resisting force, in no Covenant transferreth any right; nor is obliging. ... And this is granted to be true by all men, in that they lead Criminals to Execution, and Prison, with armed men, notwithstanding that such Criminals have consented to the Law, by which they are condemned."

2 Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, vii.2, p. 92; *Leviathan*, XIX, p. 284, and XXIX, p. 508.

3 See the work attributed to Mornay, the famous *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* of 1679 (I have consulted the English version of 1689). On resistance theory in Calvinist theology, see Giesey, "The Monarchomach *Triumvirs*"; Skinner, *The Foundations*, II, pp. 189–359, and, specifically for the Dutch context, Van Gelderen, *The Dutch Revolt*, pp. 269–76.

4 TTP XX, G III.241 | C II.347.

5 For two opposing views on Spinoza's attitude toward revolution, see Sharp, "Violentia," and Rosenthal, "The Siren Song." Both correctly caution that any view on the matter involves a level of anachronism as the term "revolution" was not employed in this political sense in the seventeenth century. Sharp argues that Spinoza's political philosophy did allow for some positive notion of "revolutionary change," based on a conception borrowed from Marx and Engels of "revolutionary change as the incorporation of increasingly many diverse interests into the common interest." Rosenthal defends the contrary view that Spinoza was opposed to anything like revolution in the modern political sense, i.e., violent and sudden upheaval against the governing authorities, but rather recommended "improvement" and "reform." The dispute is about words, and on their respective interpretations of the term "revolution," I would tend to agree with both. As I see it, Spinoza does have a notion of how to actively produce political change, i.e., through resistance, but such resistance excludes civil upheaval and disobedience, which he associates with rebellion.

6 TTP XVII, G III.227 | C II.329.

conceived as the creation of a public sphere “overnight.”¹ For Spinoza, by contrast, who learns his lesson from the catastrophe of the English Civil War, any such revolutionary action falls entirely outside the scope of what can be permitted. Still, it remains both the right and the responsibility—indeed, the civic duty—of citizens to inform a violent sovereign that he is precipitating his own demise and to advise him to adopt another course, thus saving him from himself, just like a medical doctor is obliged to inform his patient about the detrimental consequences of not heeding sound medical advice. Spinoza thus resolves—felicitously or not, I shall leave it to the reader to decide—the paradox of political resistance by showing that the kind of authority by which political resistance acquires legitimacy is placed on a different level, and is of a different quality, than the public authority associated with sovereignty. The public authority that belongs to the sovereign power gives exclusive right to command and to force. The private authority that belongs to citizens gives an inalienable right to give counsel, to teach and advise, to present arguments and reasons, and to expose and declare the consequences of sovereign actions.

This brings me to the second difference between Spinoza’s sphere of free philosophizing and Habermas’s historical account of both the bourgeois public sphere and the normative notion of a universal auditorium he later develops on the basis of it in his Theory of Communicative Action. It concerns the status of consensus in public discourse. Already in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, consensus constitutes a basic regulative principle of discursive interaction in the public sphere: its aim is described as a “ratio that in the public competition of private arguments came into being as the consensus about what was practically necessary in the interest of all.”² In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas prolongs this conception of consensus-regulated public discourse in a normative theory of argumentation inspired by speech act theory and Wittgenstein. This theory plays a central role in his explanation of the constitution and reproduction of the social world. The sociological and political theory he develops in the work as a whole aims at demonstrating how what he calls “communicative action,” or everyday linguistic exchange, constantly reproduces the shared significations at the basis of our phenomenologically shared lifeworld. Society is thus maintained through a kind of circuit: ordinary communicative action reproduces the shared lifeworld, while the lifeworld in turn serves as the shared background for all communicative action. When this circuit is broken, and a given signification becomes problematic, in order to restore the circuit, one must enter the sphere of what Habermas calls “argumentation” or “discourse” where, in front of a “universal audience,” one engages in a form of exchange where the best argument alone must serve to achieve a rationally motivated agreement.³ Such argumentation or discourse is, for all intents and purposes, comparable with Kant’s public use of reason and, by extension, also with Spinoza’s free philosophizing.

For Habermas, however, the regulative idea of possible consensus is a necessary condition for interlocutors to engage in such discourse. The idea of consensus thus constantly operates in the background of all rational argumentation as a necessary horizon for its exercise, or as an “idealizing proviso”: interlocutors only engage in argumentation if motivated by the presupposition that, ideally, an agreement can be reached. As he writes in a much-discussed passage:

I shall speak of “discourse” only when the meaning of the problematic validity claim conceptually forces participants to suppose that rationally motivated agreement could in principle be achieved, whereby the phrase “in principle” expresses the idealizing proviso: if only the argument could be conducted openly enough and continued long enough.⁴

1 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, pp. 69–70. For Habermas, paragraph 11 of the 1791 Constitution enshrines the principle of a free public sphere legally by proclaiming “the free communication of ideas and opinions [as] one of the most precious rights of man.” For a detailed assessment of Habermas’s reading of the French Revolution, see Hofmann, *Habermas’s Public Sphere*, pp. 27–94.

2 See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, p. 83.

3 See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I, pp. 8–42.

4 See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I, p. 42.

What drives argumentation forward on Habermas's conception is this teleology of agreement. Many critics, perhaps most prominently Gerard Hauser and Chantal Mouffe, have pointed out both empirical problems and, more seriously, conceptual inconsistencies in the consensus model summarized by this passage.¹ In later work, Habermas himself acknowledges not only factual problems, but problems with the very principle of presupposing possible consensus.² These are not discussions we shall need to address in any detail in this context. We only need to highlight how Spinoza, for his part, operates with no such ideal horizon or presupposition of consensus in his conception of free philosophizing. What animates Spinoza's free philosophizing is not the prospect of agreement, but the affect of self-contentment (*acquiescentia in se ipso*) when associated with reasoning.³ Rational self-contentment is the joy we experience in contemplating our own intellect at work, including when it engages in free and unprejudiced exchange of lessons and advice. Free philosophizing is thus driven by a joy associated with the process of collective reasoning, not with its desired end, or with any presumed prospect of consensus. In fact, as we have already discussed, as Spinoza sees it, free philosophizing is not consensus-seeking at all.⁴ In the theological context, in particular, his conception of how free philosophizing functions is as far removed from any irenic ideal of doctrinal conciliation as it can be. Free philosophizing is essentially, and ideally, an exercise in disagreement, a model for managing disagreement politically within a free public sphere without operating with a presupposition of ever really overcoming it; it is an attempt to conceive of a structuration of the public sphere that seeks to both affirm and manage an irreducible diversity of opinions in the best possible way, allowing us to draw the best from such diversity while also curbing the worst effects of it.

This also explains why, contrary to approaches that detect a principle of "free speech" in it, Spinoza's conception of *libertas philosophandi* is not a theory about how to deregulate and abandon the public sphere to its own devices. It is, on the contrary, a theory about how to regulate the public sphere so as to ensure that it operates as it should; that is to say, without violence, deception with evil intent, or flattery. As we have seen, if left to its own devices, a public sphere of free philosophizing is vulnerable to—not to say defenseless against—strategies of deception and flattery that instrumentalize the discursive tools of free philosophizing for purposes that are, in fact, averse to freedom itself. Such strategies will be deployed by those "worst men" who, ignorant of their own rational self-interest, will pursue their base desires for pleasure, honor, and riches by giving ignoble advice—i.e., advice that aims at their own advantage and not that of the advisee—and by teaching doctrines that aim not at the *salus populi*, but only at "introduc[ing] something into the republic on the authority of [their] own decision."⁵ For this reason, establishing and maintaining a public sphere of free philosophizing requires public instruction and civic education. It is necessary to ensure that citizens learn from an early age to abide by the rules of free philosophizing, to speak their minds sincerely, and to engage in public consultation with the common good in view, i.e., to speak up with integrity and nobility rather than peddling prejudices or engaging in deception. Citizens who are less than fully rational will frequently not realize their rational self-interest in always adhering to these basic principles of good citizenship. They must instead be taught to do so out of obedience and a sense of civic duty. And the way Spinoza envisages teaching them such a sense of civic duty is by means of what he calls "doctrines."

The need for such doctrines applies to all. No one—Jesus Christ, perhaps Solomon, are the only named exceptions⁶—will always and at all times act in their own rational self-interest out of adequate

1 For Hauser, see *Vernacular Voices*, pp. 37–56; and "Vernacular Dialogue." In *The Royalist Republic*, Helmer J. Helmers subscribes to Gerard Hauser's criticism of Habermas, applying Hauser's more rhetorical and less rationalist approach to the public sphere in his analysis of the seventeenth-century Anglo-Dutch public sphere (Helmers, *The Royalist Republic*, pp. 22–4). For a brief summary of Mouffe's critique of Habermas and her own alternative "agonistic" model of deliberative democracy, see Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy*.

2 For a good discussion of these issues, see Thomassen, *Deconstructing Habermas*, pp. 15–42.

3 See Chapter 6, sect. "Integrity and Rational Self-Contentment."

4 See Chapter 9, sect. "The Freedom to Disagree."

5 TTP XX, G III.241|C II.347.

6 On Christ, see in particular TTP IV, G III.64–5|C II.133: "Christ ... perceived the things revealed truly and adequately. If he ever prescribed them as laws, he did this because of the people's ignorance and stubbornness." See also TTP I, G III.21|C II.84; TTP I, G III.22|C II.85; Spinoza to Oldenburg, c. December 1, 1675, Letter 73, G IV.308|C II.468. On Solomon, see in particular TTP II, G III.41|C II.107: "Solomon ... surpassed everyone in his age in the natural light. That's why he also thought himself above the law—for it was imparted only to those who lack reason

knowledge. If that is what is required for a republic to be free, Spinoza certainly set the bar too high for the notion to be of any practical value other than as a regulative ideal. But that is clearly not what he had in mind. A free republic is not a community of truly free people alone, because such a community will not be a republic at all, but a natural society. A free republic is a community of people who act freely, no matter whether they do so out of rational self-interest or out of obedience to divine and civil law. It is a community of people who are sometimes wise and sometimes not, but also a republic where they are compelled to act in accordance with wisdom even when they lack it. And in order to ensure that they do, citizens in such a republic must not only be held to obey the civil laws, but also be taught doctrines that may not be true as such, i.e., true according to the intellect, but that nonetheless incite them to act in accordance with their true interest even when they do not recognize what that is. These doctrines are to be taught mostly through civic education, instilling in all citizens a sense of obligation toward others and toward society as a whole, prompting them to act with integrity, nobility, and honorability, even when this appears contrary to their immediate interests and desires.

Fundamentally, in a free republic, two such doctrines are necessary: a theological one and a political one. The first is a theological doctrine of universal faith, an example of which Spinoza develops in TTP XIV on the basis of his reading of the Bible; the second is a political doctrine of a social contract, developed in TTP XVI by reframing Hobbes's original theory. Both these doctrines are foundational narratives that serve to structure the collective imagination of the citizens in a free republic, helping them to act according to the dictates of reason even when they have not achieved the requisite level of rationality to always realize their self-interest in doing so. More precisely, these doctrines express the minimal requirements for any such social narrative—theological or political—in a free republic that will effectively live up to its purpose, namely protecting and structuring a peaceful and harmonious civil society while also allowing for a public sphere of free philosophizing to emerge and flourish. The first kind of minimal narrative, the doctrines of universal faith, establishes what one must believe in order to obey God—most importantly that piety consists in the practice of charity and justice. The second narrative, the doctrine of the social contract, establishes what one must believe in order to obey the sovereign power—most importantly that the use of command and coercion is the exclusive prerogative of the public authority. In both cases, the doctrines require citizens to act with integrity and nobility, charitably, and without persecuting others. In the absence of adequate knowledge of our rational self-interest, these basic doctrines thus form the minimal speculative support structure that must be in place for peaceful communal life in a free society to be possible. They form the speculative foundations (*fundamenta*) of society. In either case, however, it is irrelevant to the function of these narratives whether they are true. What counts is their practical outcome or how they induce people to behave according to a given standard (*norma*). The way that foundations and standards are conceptually folded into each other is the formal model that Spinoza devises to account for how the theological and political imagination of citizens in a free republic must be structured so that, absent complete rationality, they will still conduct themselves in view of the two basic aims of society: security and freedom.

and the teachings of the natural intellect." See also TTP I, G III.23|C II.87; TTP II, G III.29|C II.93; TTP III, G III.45|C II.112; TTP IV, G III.66|C II.135.

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