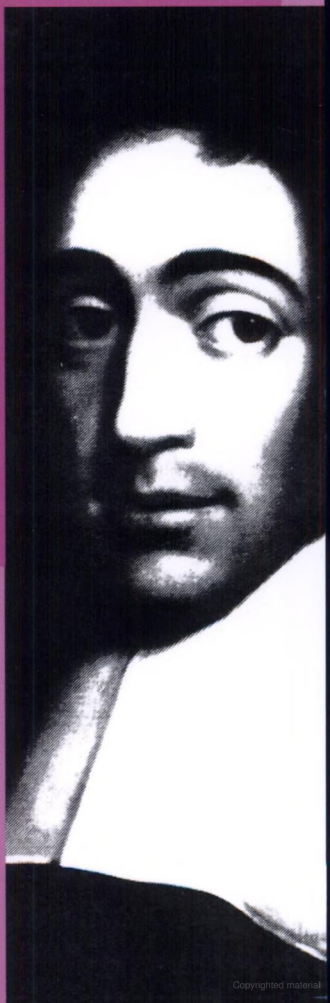
SPINOZA AND OTHER HERETICS

✿ ✿ THE ADVENTURES OF IMMANENCE



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Spinoza and Other Heretics

THE ADVENTURES OF IMMANENCE

CHAPTER I

Spinoza and Kant: Critique of Religion and Biblical Hermeneutics

Bibilical Interpretation as Preparation for Philosophy

Let us imagine that a religious fanatic had stolen Spinoza's posthumous papers before they were published, in order to save the world and posterity from a dangerous heretic. In this unfortunate case we would have lost the *Ethics*,[1] and Spinoza would have remained a marginal figure in the history of philosophy.

Still, Spinoza would even then have retained his absolutely central place in the history of another discipline—biblical criticism—for what he says on this subject in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is sufficient to ensure that place. Spinoza's contribution to biblical criticism is thus independent of his contribution to general philosophy, and could be discussed with little regard to it.

And yet, from Spinoza's own viewpoint, the two are intimately connected. His biblical hermeneutics is not only an independent science in itself; it is also—and primarily—a weapon in combating historical religion and a vehicle in constructing a purified substitute for it.

For Spinoza, the historical religions (above all, Judaism and Christianity) are the greatest obstacles to clear philosophical knowledge and the emergence of the principle of immanence. The counter-rational force that Descartes attributed to "prejudice" and tradition in general, as the veil blurring the natural light of reason, Spinoza, in a more daring and radical move, attributes specifically to the historical religions, their dogmas, images, and entrenched beliefs. Therefore, prior to any positive philosophy of immanence, a critique of these religions must be undertaken, in order to clear the mind of transcendent images and to prepare the ground for its awakening (or enlightenment) to the call of immanent reason. In other words, con-

fusion and skepticism about historical religion are necessary prerequisites for attaining true knowledge and, through it, a worthwhile life and even salvation.

Spinoza as an individual had the benefit of his Marrano background which helped him leap outside Judaism and Christianity alike and become what we called in volume I "a Marrano of reason." But this uncommon, special background cannot serve as a general paradigm—nor did Spinoza wish to remain secluded like a Marrano in his inner philosophy while the rest of the world opposed and even abhored it. Unlike former Marrano heretics described in volume I, Spinoza did not regard his rationalist philosophy as a private affair. What makes him a thinker of modernity are not his views alone, but his desire to universalize his message and to make it the basis for a new cultural and social universe, based upon reason, secularization, mechanical science, social tolerance, and political freedom, and thus opposing the medieval world in its most essential aspects. For this purpose Spinoza needed a cultural power that would purge religious *superstitio* from the minds not of an esoteric minority but of the *multitude*—a category that gains in Spinoza philosophical status in and of itself. This power Spinoza finds in the critique of religion and its attending biblical hermeneutics.

Socrates had also sought a means by which to purify the soul of prejudice; he found it in a self-defeating sophistry, leading through paradoxes and *aporias* to fertile confusion. Descartes, two millenia later, in proclaiming a new philosophical beginning, sought to achieve this purification by a single, powerful act of the will, which turns against itself and abstains from all judgment where no rational certainty (based upon evident truths) is available. Descartes hoped thereby to sweep away the whole burden of tradition in a single stroke, preparing the mind, as a kind of tabula rasa, to experience the inner revelation of the "natural light" and its rationally clear and distinct ideas.

Whether Descartes was a thorough Cartesian himself, or whether he remained compromising and conventional on religious matters, is an open question. In any case, Spinoza must reject the Cartesian "preparation for philosophy" as inadequate, since the free act of will on which Descartes relies is to Spinoza a metaphysical illusion. There is no free will; nor is there a special faculty of judgment capable of denying or affirming our ideas as a separate act, or able to abstain from passing such judgment by its own choice. For Spinoza, judgment is an integral part of the act of ideation, not a second act added to it (*Ethics*, pt. 2, prop. 495). We judge as we perceive (or conceive); more precisely, we cannot have an idea without automatically affirming the existence of its object and of the properties it represents as belonging to this object.

Negation, too, results from the affirmative power of a *new* idea that is incongruent with the first and thus replaces it. This occurs in every cognitive process: when a true idea corrects a false one; when a new superstition replaces an old one; and also when the mind vacillates back and forth in a state of doubt and confusion, which can help destroy entrenched beliefs and clear the way for philosophy. Whatever attitudes we have, whatever happens to us intellectually, does not depend on an illusory "will" but on causal chains of ideas that affect and modify our minds in a law-governed way.*

It is within this causal process that Spinoza wishes to interefere, using a proper dosage of truth and metaphor. His critique of religion is, as we shall see, a combination of philosophical knowledge and rhetoric. Based on clear and distinct ideas, it frequently couches them in metaphor, popular language, and dialectical strategems—and uses the idiom and authority of tradition as a lever to uproot this very authority. The role of the critique of religion and biblical hermeneutics is thus to perform in the multitude the same, or similar, effects that Spinoza drew from his former Marrano background and that Descartes sought in vain to produce by a one-time purifying act of the will.

Clearing the Path of the "True Idea": The Problem of Method

Spinoza at first tried to follow in Descartes' footsteps. In his first work, the *Treatise on the Intellect*, he set out to write his own "essay on method" that was to precede his substantive philosophy. But even as he wrote it he found that the project was impossible and self-defeating. Method, Spinoza discovered, is reflective knowledge: it is "the idea of an idea." As such, it presupposes a basic, substantive idea upon which to reflect. A theory of knowledge (or of method) cannot be formed purely a priori. To know what valid knowledge is, and to frame a strategy for gaining and expanding it, we must already have in our possession some true substantive knowledge, which we then investigate for its typical features and conditions. We must, in Spinoza's words, start already with an *idea vera* (true idea) in order to know what having such an idea entails.

To fulfill its role, moreover, the first *idea vera* cannot rely on an external sign of truth, but must contain its own justification within itself. This calls to mind the self-evidence of the Cartesian "clear and distinct

* By "causal" Spinoza refers both to psychological causes and to logical reason; this pertains to his assimilation of causes and reasons generally.

ideas" (to which Spinoza also subscribes). But not any of them will do. The basic true idea of Spinoza makes sense only if its object is the ontic cause of itself, that is, the totality of the universe taken as God. We start with the recognition that God is identical with all there is, and is thus the single substance in existence—necessary, self-caused and eternal, encompassing all the aspects and dimensions of reality, including matter and mind, extension and thought, finite and infinite, and the like. From here the rest of the system, and all the specific ideas in the universe, are to follow as the *internal* explication of the comprehensive first idea.

That Spinoza's *idea vera* should be so novel and revolutionary presents a problem. If this idea is inherently self-evident, why was humanity so slow in recognizing it, and why does it continue to generate so much hostility? Spinoza, who unlike Kant or Hegel does not have a theory of the historical growth of rationality, and who unlike Freud lacks a theory of repression and resistance, again appeals to his pervasive category of religious *superstitio*. What stands in the way of the true idea—and makes it look revolutionary—is the enormous bulk of revealed religion with its false images of the deity, nurtured in the imagination by fear and ignorance of true causes, refined into theistic theology and transmitted through generations by education and language. Consequently, the inherent self-evidence of the *idea vera* cannot assert itself in actual consciousness unless a critique of religious superstition is first proffered, not only as a pure logical argument but as a social and cultural power as well.

Kant and Humanistic Immanence

In this context, the name of Kant comes to mind as a companion and counterpart to Spinoza. Despite their otherwise great differences, here they meet on common ground. Both use the critique of religion to purify the mind of false images and to eliminate the social and institutional obstacles built upon them. Moreover, both use biblical hermeneutics to divert their audience's transcendent dispositions toward an immanent religion of reason.

Kant, however, in spite of his radical critique of religion, cannot be called a philosopher of immanence without qualification. In respect to knowledge Kant takes the position of *critical* immanence, and in ethics he ends up in a transcendent position that opposes an Is/Ought dualism to Spinoza's naturalism. Yet Kant remains attached to the principle of immanence in what counts most; for in establishing the *foundations* of the natural and the moral world he allows no appeal to a power or

inherent structure, the metaphysical features of natural objects and the fundamental moral commands.

Kant views the *finitude* of human reason and its *autonomous* power as two complementary sides of the same critique of reason. It is as "transcendental Ego" that the human mind—not God—determines the metaphysical substrate of nature, that is, the system of categories and logical-synthetic laws that make its objects possible. And it is as rational will that, again, human reason (and not divine legislation) lays down the supreme laws of ethics as well as the ultimate goals of politics and of moral history. The entire domain of morality, with its absolute worth and awe-inspiring sublimity, is based not upon the will of a transcendent God whose existence cannot be known and must not be presupposed, but upon the will of man, expressed as universal practical reason whose inherent laws it explicates and obeys. Even religion—Kant's "religion of reason"—consists in viewing the inherrent commands of human reason as divine. Kant thereby secularizes the historical concept of divinity, and equally sacralizes his own humanistic morality. Throughout his book on religion, Kant reduces religious feelings, motifs, and symbols to a purely moral-secular context. Even his famous moral argument for God's existence has a purely humanistic function.[2] Not only is the concept of God derived from morality; it also tells us nothing about God, only about human powers and about a *moral teleology* underlying the universe. When the moral argument has been completed, all we are entitled to believe is that humans have the capacity to transform the existing world into the "highest good"—a moral-historical ideal projected as a duty by the rational will. But both the duty and the capacity are ours—and of God we know at the end just as much as we knew at the beginning, namely, nothing.

All this would not make of Kant the deicide Heine declared him to be (see chap. 3), but would surely place him among the religious heretics of the Enlightenment whom Spinoza foretold. Kant's attack on historical religion is, indeed, as fierce as Spinoza's in both content and style. Some of his derogatory expressions border on colloquialism (*Pfaffentum*), even vulgarity (*Afterdienst*, "bottom-worship"). His description of Judaism, Catholicism, the Byzantine Church, and the wars of religion following the Reformation are full of repudiation and moral indignation, sometimes injected with sarcastic venom. Kant's dual language and persuasive metaphors do not attenuate the feeling that, in addition to pure philosophy, the aging Kant is also getting even with the perpetrators of what he once called his "youthful slavery" in the pietist school he had attended as a child. In those early days, reading of the Romans, including Lucretius, was a consolation; and Lucretius was the great Epicurean critic of religion, setting a model for the

which to determine the proper interpretation is the moral interest. For Kant, then, biblical exegesis is *only* a means for other ends.

These broader ends concern, in both cases, the philosopher's critique of religion in its search to transform the existing reality. This critique is not a pure science of religion, but equally an instrument of change. The philosopher is not content with knowing, for himself, that miracles or personal providence are ontologically impossible, that *superstitio* is a kind of opiate for the masses, that religion is born from fear and the *imaginatio*, or that suprarational faculties (and their documented offsprings) are in fact inferior to reason. He wants to share this awareness with the multitude, thus purging their lives and institutions from the rule of irrational powers and preparing an emancipated mode of existence. Understanding religion, which is surely part of the process, is not merely academic but is ipso facto liberation from superstitious religion—in which its major purpose lies.

This democratization of reason, this ambition to extend its effects to the masses and to shape human history by it, marks a break with medieval attitudes—a clean break in Kant's case, while Spinoza maintains his reserve. Kant, more utopian, believes that the rational attitude itself can be propagated on a mass historical scale; he is committed to this belief by his view of reason as strictly universal, founded or constituted by human subjects, and by the dichotomy he draws between pure morality or none at all. Spinoza, more sober and spared the either/or Kantian alternative, wishes to propagate the products of rational enlightenment which in themselves are less than fully rational: a reformed popular religion, a more enlightened state, and the like. For Spinoza, pure rationality remains an affair for the minority and, at its height, even esoteric.

While Spinoza and Kant not only overestimated the power of reason, they also recognized the weight of psychological and institutional obstacles. Major obstacles in the way of the critique of religion are belief in the Bible's suprarational authority, in the literal truth of its stories, and in the sacred validity of the vast dogmatic, ritual, and institutional apparatus that grew up around it. To be effective, the critic must have an affinity with the mind of his audience. As long as the public is immersed in *vana religio* no meaningful dialogue is possible, much less a change in attitude, without taking their point of departure also into account. This is where biblical exegesis becomes instrumental, serving as a fictitious common ground between the critic and his audience. Since the believer in revealed religion cannot share the philosopher's first principles, the latter, by appealing to the Bible, must *appear* to share the first principles of the believer while actually turning them against themselves.

This is not to deny that Spinoza's appeal to the Bible had other motivations as well, such as the need for prudence and personal security. Spinoza's works are a masterly example of allusion and dual language, and what Strauss has called "the art of writing within persecution."[7]

Probably to a lesser degree, Kant was also in conflict with officialdom and mindful of his steps. His open conflict with the censorship of Friedrich-Wilhelm II is only one sign of this.[8] It is clear, then, that both Kant and Spinoza used biblical exegesis for personal security: It helps the philosopher delineate the delicate path between faithfulness to his own ideas and apparent faithfulness to the ruling tradition.[9] Yet this is neither the sole nor main function of using the Bible. Even if security considerations had not existed, it is safe to assert that both philosophers would have appealed to the Bible for another reason: reaching out to the masses and subverting their established attitudes. Moreover, prudence does not require (and sometimes should rather discourage) the formation of generalized hermeneutic methods—Kant's being an overt challenge to the pious mind. Even when Spinoza and Kant intend to diminish the unnecessary risks, their preoccupation with the Bible reflects a fundamental resolution to assume the necessary ones. Its defense value is a strategic corollary, coming from the same feature that initially recommended it as an offensive weapon. In this sense biblical hermeneutics is an aggressive activity, offering the philosopher a mode of involvement in the social and cultural processes of his time.

Kant considered the Enlightenment and the free dissemination of ideas as the genuine action of the philosopher, which can affect society and politics no less than the minds of the audience; and Spinoza argued in his *Theologico-Political Treatise* that free philosophical thought is necessary for the strength and stability of the state. Yet both estimated that the process of liberating thought, with its social and political offshoots, could not be historically effective unless it passed through a critique of revealed religion and looked for support in its sacred documents. Seen from this angle, biblical interpretation is not an incidental activity among many others, but a major avenue for the social and practical involvement of the philosopher.

The Aims of the Critique of Religion

No wonder, given this backdrop, that Spinoza and Kant share the fundamental interest of "rationalizing"* the historical religion—translating it out of itself into a rational substitute. But this aim must take a

* I use this term in the sense of "rational purification" or secular reform, not of an *ex post facto* justification.

different shape in each case, mainly because, as philosophers, Spinoza and Kant hold different views of rationality, its nature and task.

To grasp Spinoza's intent we must recognize that he speaks of religion in three different senses. In the first and supreme sense religion is identical with the state of existence attained through the "third kind of knowledge" and *amor dei intellectualis* (intellectual love of God), which means that one has achieved true religion.[10] This is the semireligious dimension in Spinoza's thought, the alternative way to salvation offered to the happy few. That Spinoza insists on the word *religion* in this context has the same fundamental reason as his keeping the word *God* (with its sublime and resounding connotations) to denote the totality of the universe. Spinoza indeed suggests a new religion, a supreme metaphysical and mental liberation, a semimystical reunion with God that realizes the infinite within the realm of finitude and, charged with powerful emotion and love, transforms the person as a whole and dominates a wholly new life-course. But this sublime stage is as difficult as it is rare and not a prospect for the multitude. Most men and women cannot be expected to reach true religion at all. For them a different sort of "religion"—a merely social one—must be devised.

Spinoza goes on to discuss a second kind of religion, then, the *religio catholica* ("universal religion," not to be confused with Catholicism though trying to usurp its claim to universality). This popular religion remains within the domain of the *imaginatio*, but tries to shape its effects as an external imitation of *ratio* (reason), using for that purpose the principle of obedience to God, itself a product of the imagination. Here, indeed, the term *God* has a different meaning altogether—a metaphoric, misleading meaning that is used deliberately as such. From the viewpoint of metaphysical truth there is no personal God at all, no divine entity endowed with will and prescribing commands. But the God of the Bible did pronounce commands, or people largely believe he did, and think that they should obey his will. The aim of *religio catholica* is to put these beliefs to good social use, assisted by a proper interpretation of the Bible. The latter is to reduce the imaginary "will of God" to a number of socially beneficial rules: justice, mutual help, and obedience to the laws of the state (which become the authoritative interpreters of the "will of God").

This popular type of religion is purely social and secular; and although it is based upon the lower powers of the *imaginatio*, they no longer produce wild and arbitrary conduct, but are so regulated as to make possible conduct resembling that which is produced by reason.[11]

In the third place there is crude historical religion (*vana religio*) based upon imaginary tales, sacred histories, rituals, and a predominantly

political constitution. From ancient paganism to the contingent elements of Judaism and Christianity, all the manifestations of this third form of religion, stem from superstition and are grounded in human fears and passions. Its cognitive claims are explained by a lack of knowledge of true causes, which produce wonder and superstition in the masses and drive them to believe in miracles, final causes, and hidden forces operating in nature. The practical aspects of revealed religion have a basically political character; they are intended to exploit fear and ignorance in the service of the rulers—be they secular or theocratic. This form of religion is particularly repugnant to Spinoza who makes it the target of his severest attacks.

Given this triple distinction we can now define the aims of Spinoza's critique. It is clear he wished the spurious form of religion to be completely abolished. It is equally clear that Spinoza's ultimate wish, at least in theory, was to have all men attain religion in the philosophical sense. This would involve renouncing not only historical religion but also intermediary "universal religion." Yet elevating the masses from *vana religio* to philosophy was, as Spinoza realized, a remote if not hopeless task, so his major efforts were directed to a more realistic end: to neutralize the damaging effects of religion and, while leaving it in the inferior mental domain, to try and make it socially useful. The final outcome would be a religion that provides complete freedom in matters of belief and confines itself to the general (and vague) commands of social justice and mutual help.[12]

The "purification" of historical religion is to be accomplished by reshaping the effects of the imagination (the lower powers of the mind) as an external imitation of reason. There is no intention to pass from superstition to scientific knowledge; religion should rather have no cognitive role whatsoever. Nor is there an intention to pass from the passions and behavior arising from superstition to those actions and positive emotions (*actiones*) whose source is reason. Religion, even purified, remains in the realm of imagination and revelation, and all behavior which religion prompts is motivated not by reason or *scientia intuitiva* but by obedience.

Neither superstition nor philosophy, purified religion is thus a kind of universal popular morality. Historically the idea is not new, but its place in Spinoza's system is noteworthy. Judging by the epistemology of the *Ethics* there is no intermediary link between imagination and reason, or between the first and the second kinds of knowledge.[13] However, in the field of behavior Spinoza does suggest such a bridge. This topic is developed in full only in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, but its principle can be traced in the *Ethics* as well (pt. 5, prop. 10):

situations? Spinoza, who recognizes no other authority or normative power than the political, presents an unequivocal answer. The state, the political government, is to become the sole and true "interpreter" of the nuclear moral-religion, to which the message of Scripture has been reduced by biblical hermeneutics.

Kant, too, sought to rationally purify religion, to deny its cognitive import and reduce it to practical principles alone. But Kant's understanding of the nature of rationality is at variance with that of Spinoza.

First, in sharp contrast to Spinoza, Kant *is* interested in raising the purified version of religion to a genuine rational level. Like the rest of the practical sphere, religion is no longer grounded in the imagination but in pure reason, and even enjoys the primacy which Kant assigns to practical reason over the theoretical. In confining religion to the practical field Kant therefore assigns it a role that is rational par excellence. Within the sphere Kant calls "religion," all action is motivated by pure rational imperatives, mixed with no sensual or natural motive. Religion and morality are fundamentally the same, except that religion refers primarily to individuals, while religion links the individual agents into a moral totality (called the "ethical community" or "invisible church") and provides institutional aids ("the visible church") for moral education and the propagation of the ethical community.

Spinoza's use of the biblical hermeneutics as a means to create an external imitation of reason might count, in Kantian terms, as an answer to the problem of schematism (that is, of building a bridge between the rational and the empirical) in the field of action.[15] Spinoza's way also suggests another Kantian concept, "legality," signifying action that conforms externally to the moral law but originates in natural desires. The two ideas are clearly incompatible. Significantly, Kant avoided using legality to "schematize" rational action, but turned to more complicated mediators,[16] while insisting upon the uncompromising gap between morality and legality, a distinction without which his whole ethics would collapse. Thus, not only is Kant unable to find help in Spinoza's program but he must oppose it.

Unlike Kant, Spinoza neither builds his ethics as a doctrine of absolute imperatives nor makes morality depend on the subjective mode of decision. He therefore has room for an external resemblance between the sensual and rational motives and can place such semirational conduct on a higher level than mere caprice. Kant must reject this solution as "mere legality" and in order to purify religion, he must raise it to the highest—and only—level of rationality.

Legality does reign in Kant over politics and right, but these only provide an institutional framework to support and embody the truly

the Bible should serve as the exclusive source of data, but that the methodological starting point should be in the biblical text alone. The actual content of the Bible is not to be determined by an a priori idea (theological or philosophical) to which the meaning of the text is then adjusted. Rather, the basis for research is the document itself, from whence one can proceed to discover a general pattern.

Oversimplified as it is, the comparison Spinoza draws between biblical criticism and natural science may help in understanding this point. As in the investigation of nature we must start from the simplest data, and proceed through enumeration and deduction to the definitions of all phenomena, so too in the study of the Bible, the difference being that there the data are physical or biological and here the data are biblical texts and the historical and philological facts that are relevant to their understanding as "natural" phenomena.

The rejection of preestablished schemes implies the rejection of an allegorical approach to the text and the primacy of a literal interpretation. Yet this is not a rigid rule. In fact, the literal meaning itself is not manifest but usually requires a complicated deciphering. Here lies the main difference between Spinoza's approach and other doctrines of literal interpretation. Spinoza insists there is a gap between the actual literal meaning and what it appears to be. The reader and the ancient author are both affected by cultural and personal associations and by contemporary beliefs and ways of speech. In order to understand the original meaning of the text we must discount the effect of these factors upon ourselves and consider how they worked on the biblical authors; and this requires a detailed investigation, based upon a great deal of extrabiblical material. Spinoza does not give a full account of these factors, much less of the rules by which they are to be knit together and reevaluate each other; but his general criteria are clear and his ample examples add much pertinent detail. In the *Theologico-Political Treatise* he succeeds in spelling out the principles of, and part of the detailed apparatus for, treating the Bible as a purely scientific object, whose sole norms are reason and experience.[19]

Spinoza's rejection of general schemes is not unqualified. It applies only to schemes that are imposed on the Bible from without, thus creating an a priori bias. But there are hermeneutic generalizations derived from the objective study of the Bible itself, and these are not only legitimate but indispensable for correct interpretation. This is because the texts as given are not self-explanatory and because a genuine method requires some degree of deduction and application. "As in the examination of natural phenomena we try first to investigate what is most universal and common to all nature . . . and then we proceed to

what is less universal, so, too, in the history of Scripture, we seek first that which is most universal and serves for the basis and foundation of all Scripture" (*TTP*, p. 104, *Opera* 3: 102). The study of the Bible, like the study of nature, is based on two stages, which are (in Cartesian language) enumeration and deduction.[20] The first is a kind of induction, a "biblical history" (parallel to natural history, *historia naturalis*) whereby all relevant scientific material is gathered and catalogued. From these sets of data we have to extract: (1) permanent principles expressing the overall approach and spirit of the Bible; and (2) rules for interpreting specific types of problems. With these at hand, one can assess every story and verse in the Bible. If the literal meaning fits the basic principles of interpretation (even though it might conflict with religious dogma or philosophical truth), it should be accepted as such. Yet, if the literal meaning of a specific item is not compatible with the hermeneutic rules we have extracted, then even if by accident it fits the interest of reason or religion, we must reject it, and understand the story as an intended allegory and the words as metaphors (*TTP*, pp. 100, 103, *Opera* 3: 99, 102). This is the correct immanent method.

Did Spinoza follow his own method? One cannot answer with an unqualified "yes." His approach to the Bible was not free of a priori principles and presuppositions,[21] the most important of which was his very claim of an immanent approach. In opting for an objective scientific method, Spinoza presupposes a fundamental principle that negates the sanctity of the Bible and denies the authority of revelation, replacing it by reason. Here we have reached the inherent structural limit of an "immanent approach." Yet once this crucial presupposition has been admitted, Spinoza's method does not presuppose anything beyond it. The demand to learn "only from the Bible" is actually the demand to learn only from the *science* of the Bible, that is, from relevant scientific investigations. This involves the absolute rejection of any religious authority and its replacement by reason and science. Biblical hermeneutics, serving the critique of revelation and tacitly presupposing it, should thus help do for the masses what Spinoza's own Marrano background did for him.

It might be remarked, following P. F. Moreau, that Spinoza performed a second revolution in biblical reading (the first revolution was prompted in the sixteenth century by the humanists and their philological science).[22] The new Renaissance philology applied in the first place to the secular, even pagan ancients; Virgil, Terence, and Cicero were studied in new and different light. Spinoza applies this philological science to the Bible—demanding to see its authors as another group of secular ancients. To be sure, humanist philology has made remarkable

progress in biblical research as well; and, rather ironically, it was the polyglot Bible of Cardinal Cisneros—a former Inquisitor General and persecutor of the Marranos, who capitalized on the scholarship of other Marranos—that gave the philological study of the Bible a significant push. This movement reached its apex with Richard Simon, the greatest biblical scholar of his age, and in many ways the "father" of modern biblical criticism together with Spinoza. Spinoza, though a great biblical scholar himself, could not rival Simon's immense knowledge; but in what concerns *method* he offered a more radical approach—the de-deification of the text.

Moreau suggests that the humanists had turned the Bible from mere story into a "text," while Spinoza's second revolution turned it into a "document." "Becoming a text" means that the reader pays attention to the material content and context, not only to the moral lesson; and "document" means that the text is made indicative of other, extratextual facts and processes (cultural, mental, intentional, etc.), in a way resembling the work of an archaeologist. But this is not the only novelty. The crucial point is that the Bible, as text and as document, had ceased to be a document of divine will—revelation—and became subject to the banal and secular authority of biblical sciences. In other words, with Spinoza the Bible has become a *secular* document.

Kant's Method of Interpretation

Kant did not elaborate his method of biblical interpretation as an explicit topic; but fragmentary remarks and, especially, dozens of instances in which Kant puts biblical verses into actual use, supply us with the required material. For example:

> What is written here must not be read as though intended for *Scriptural exegesis, which lies beyond the limits of the domain of bare reason.* It is possible to explain how a historical account is to be put to a moral use without deciding whether this is the intention of the author or merely our interpretation, provided this meaning is true in itself, apart from all historical proof, and is, moreover, the only one whereby we can derive something conducive to our betterment from a passage which otherwise would be only an unfruitful addition to our historical knowledge. (*Rel.*, p. 39 n., *Werke* 6: 41, emphasis added)

Here Kant advocates a method that is contrary to Spinoza. Renouncing a pure scientific approach to the Bible, he has little use for the authors' authentic intentions. At the same time Kant authorizes, and even rec-

ommends, attributing meanings to the text which are taken from external, a priori schemes—in this case from his own moral philosophy. And this leads him to argue that what deserves our attention is not the Bible as a whole, but only those selected passages which can, by allegory, be mobilized in the service of morality:

> We must not quarrel unnecessarily over a question or over its historical aspect when, however it is understood, it in no way helps us to be better men, and when that which can afford such help is discovered without historical proof, and indeed must be apprehended without it. (Ibid.)

Kant summarizes his rejection of the cognitive approach to the Bible by remarking,

> That historical knowledge which has no inner bearing valid for all men belongs to the class of *adiaphora*, which each man is free to hold as he finds edifying. (Ibid.)

In a passage entitled: "The Pure Religious [Philosophical] Faith is the Supreme Interpreter of the Ecclesiastical Faith,"[23] Kant later resumes the question from another angle. Moral progress on a large, historical scale requires a reciprocal relation between revealed religion and moral philosophy, to be established by biblical interpretation. The common man cannot attain a purely rational position in a single leap. He must instead go through a process in which the moral principles couched in the sensual stuff of biblical language are gradually brought to light through a proper (i.e., intentional) interpretation.[24]

Kant believes that a latent rational nucleus is couched in various shades of sensual cover in all historical faiths and hence also in the Bible. However, it cannot be present in *every* biblical verse or passage. Where this is lacking, and where the proper excuse can be found, Kant says we should engender the moral meaning even by departing from the literal sense.[25]

In an argument with the biblical scholar Johann D. Michaelis,[26] Kant asks rhetorically "whether morality should be expounded according to the Bible or whether the Bible should not rather be expounded according to morality?" (p. 101 n., *Werke* 6: 110 n.,). Evidently Kant accepts the second way. Autonomous, secular morality sets the norm, both for itself and for the Bible. And Kant's book on religion duly abounds with allegorical manipulations of biblical verses, some of them sharp and witty—and more than once he even takes the liberty of misquoting the text while using quotation marks.

In his *Contest of the Faculties*,[27] Kant continues the arguments of the

Bible is on the whole impossible, and the original intentions of the authors must lie forever beyond our reach.

Kant makes room, however, for a special kind of biblical scholarship (*Schriftgelehrsamkeit*; *Rel.*, p. 103, *Werke* 6: 112), to mediate between rational religion and the masses. Where possible, the biblical scholar mobilizes his moral insight and encyclopedic knowledge to find a moral sense in the literal text or, where this is impossible, to offer an adequate allegory. In this way the moralizing biblical savant usurps the traditional role of the priest or the theologian to become the direct authority for the masses. Kant consoles himself that such use of authority, which "does not pay proper respect to human nature," will only be a passing historical stage.

How would Spinoza have answered Kant? We can guess the answer from Spinoza's critique of Maimonides, who also advocated a method of philosophical allegory. Violating the text in the name of reason, says Spinoza, makes reason contradict itself. Moreover, such biased interpretation would only establish "a new sort of priests or pontiffs, more likely to excite men's ridicule than their veneration" (*TTP*, p. 116, *Opera* 3: 114).

The opposition between the methods of Kant and Spinoza reflects to some extent a difference in philosophical temperament—especially if we juxtapose Kant's demanding moralism with Spinoza's objective comprehension of necessity. But even more important are their divergent interests in the critique of religion, and several specific views each of them held. To be faithful to his system of rational naturalism, Spinoza must make the Bible an object for scientific research, since this applies to every particular thing in the world without exception. Moreover, he actually believed that the Bible is a product of *imaginatio*, and thus could have expected that a disinterested study of the Bible, apart from its contribution to knowledge, would also yield the practical result of exposing the Bible's flaws and subverting its authority. Spinoza must be aware that scientific research cannot destroy the authority of the Bible unless this authority has already been rejected at the outset by accepting science as the supreme judge. So instead of starting with a person's arguments he uses interpretation as a rhetorical means to perplex and convert the nonphilosophers. Kant, on his part, believed that the human mind actually has the propensity to rational religion, and, therefore could expect his allegorical method to gradually develop and bring to light the moral potential of the human race.

This is related to Kant's view of history (to which I devoted a different book).[29] For Kant history is the process whereby reason brings its latent potential to light, gradually liberating itself from sensual

presupposes that culture, language, custom, and mentalities change and evolve, while leaving their decipherable marks; and they flow into the present, where they provide us with a tradition within which a new revolution can take place. Spinoza, furthermore, tries to extract from the Bible a nucleus of semirational morality, the basis for the universal religion he destines for the masses. This implies the reinterpretation of tradition as a means for historical advancement. Past and present are separated by a revolution but are also bridged by a hermeneutical enterprise. The Bible is even said to contain *in fact* the nucleus of popular morality, if we take this contention at face value (which perhaps we should not); and since Spinoza's method is supposed to unveil the original intention of the authors, it will follow that Spinoza, perhaps unwittingly, postulates a common moral insight that underlies centuries of biblical authorship and provides, under its various forms of the imagination, an element of continuity between past and present, between superstition and reason.

The same, on a broader scale, can be observed in Spinoza's pure philosophy. When Spinoza chooses to retain such words as *God, freedom, beatitude,* or *right,* or when he uses expressions like "God's intellect," "God's power," the "love of God," and the like, he is not merely practicing subtle camouflage. He employs the terms by which tradition correctly located and designated certain crucial problems and perennial philosophical tasks, though it was led astray in trying to identify the true objects of these terms; and Spinoza feels that, for the first time, his philosophy succeeds in doing so. Spinoza's *champs de chasse* contains the inadequate ideas of the past (along with their names, the words by which they are designated), as a necessary substrate within which his own conceptual and semantic revolution takes place. Behind the mantle of Spinoza's "geometrical order," a full-scale hermeneutial endeavor is pursued, not dissimilar to the one which his biblical interpretation implies (though addressed to a philosophical, not a popular audience), and likewise implying a nascent historical consciousness.

Spinoza, moreover, could have gained this consciousness by looking closely at himself. His life from early childhood was interwoven with a momentous historical adventure: the return of the Marranos from Catholicism to Judaism and their intensive effort to create an old-new culture. This was also a hermeneutic enterprise to a large extent. The Amsterdam Jews were working to reinterpret the past as a means for creating a new present and future; they struggled constantly to suppress former symbols and traditions and to reinterpret others, in order to overcome their former identity and create a new culture. Spinoza, in breaking from them, maintained a similar effort but went in the

opposite direction; for they strove to resuscitate an even older religious tradition, while Spinoza tried to transcend the religious universe altogether. But this only highlights Spinoza's position as a Marrano of reason. Here, again, Spinoza stands one step ahead of the actual former Marranos, retaining a similar *pattern* of experience yet turning its *content* diametrically against them.

History was certainly stirring around Spinoza. The rise of the Dutch republic, the wars of religion, the revolution in England, the new sun in Versailles—and Descartes, Huygens, the Royal Society—might still pass, despite their weight, as historical routine, Not so the messianic fervor that circulated among Jews and Gentiles alike in Spinoza's neighborhood. Here was something absolute, the evidence of divine guidance. Already the return of the Marranos was perceived as a messianic redemption in minuscule, a fact that, as Gershom Scholem points out, added its peculiar Amsterdam flavor to the messianic uproar around Sabbetai Zevi, the most galvanizing false messiah in Jewish history, which erupted a few years after Spinoza's ban.[31] Spinoza was asked about it by Oldenburg, himself of chiliastic leanings, in a letter from London. Though no letter exists with Spinoza's response, we know his answer very well—it is given at the end of chapter 3 in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Spinoza holds that *historia sacra* is a myth and messianism a delusion. There is only nature with its uniform natural causes; history does not exist as a special domain and everything in it is the result of natural causes—even though these causes can bring about the most astonishing phenomena: for example, the persisting of the Jewish people, the liberation of the Marranos, possibly even the return of the Jews to political independence in their ancient land. By reflecting on his personal background and the fate of his former people, and especially on phenomena that usually call for providential explanations, Spinoza thus gained a sense of history which was utterly secular and naturalistic.

And this corresponds exactly to the approach he advocates in biblical interpretation.

Finally, a word about the inner limitations of the methods of Spinoza and Kant in biblical criticism. Spinoza's major problem is that his acceptance of the believers' principles is fictitious, and in fact he subordinates his opponents to his own rational criteria from the outset. His claim of ethical compatibility of reason and the Bible is misleading, for Spinoza does not mean to say that reason is compatible with the Bible as given, but only with the criticized Bible, namely, after it has been reduced and interpreted by this very same reason. The alleged

autonomy of reason and revelation in Spinoza is rhetorical, a lip service paid and a bait extended to the religious and the faithful.[32]

Kant's major difficulty lies in the possible clash between two rational interests, truth and moral education. An exegetical method that is consciously ready to overlook historical truth is incompatible with Kant's own spirit of the Enlightenment and the autonomy of objective knowledge. To little avail is his doctrine of the moral postulates, since the principle is flawed in itself.[33]

In conclusion, the inner limitations of the methods of both Spinoza and Kant stem from their attempt to maintain a fictitious parallelism between the practical and the scholarly interest in biblical exegesis. Kant subordinated the one to the other, and Spinoza assumed (or pretended he did) a preestablished harmony between them. If there is a philosophical lesson to be drawn from these attempts, it is the need for a radical separation between the two interests. Turning one of them into a means for the other may produce theoretical contradictions and practical distortions, of which self-deception, censorship, and brainwashing are a few extreme examples. The lesson we are trying to draw is, in other words, a more rigorous Spinozism. If separation is declared, let there be separation.[34]

CHAPTER 2

Spinoza and Hegel: The Immanent God—Substance or Spirit?

In the previous chapter we saw the prephilosophical work which the critique of religion is to perform in clearing the mind of transcendent images and religious superstition. Only after such obstacles have been removed, or at least seriously undermined, can the clear and distinct ideas of reason emerge and assert their self-evidence in the philosopher's mind.

The first and most important idea to emerge is the recognition of the absolute immanence of God and his identity with the whole of reality. This is Spinoza's supreme rational intuition, the very first and most comprehensive true idea (*idea vera*) from which his philosophy takes its departure (whatever its formal order in the *Ethics*, Spinoza's chief work). The rest of the system serves to explicate this idea and specify it in detail.

It is also a most daring and heterodox idea—not only for the theologians, Spinoza's usual opponents, but in the history of rational philosophy itself. Among the major philosophers, only Hegel, a century and a half later, adhered to a viewpoint similar to Spinoza's, while trying to transform it in a more coherent and, in Hegel's view, a more spiritual perspective. Hegel is also the only heterodox thinker we shall discuss who not only denies the idea of transcendence, but sees the realm of immanence as divine—a move which the others refused to make and which Nietzsche denounced as an illusion and aberration.

This provides Spinoza and Hegel with a common ground and a deep philosophical affinity, but it also serves as their major point of contention. For, once the immanence of God, as absolute totality, has been established, the question arises: What is the nature of this totality? Is it to be construed as substance, or as spirit? Should we understand it as an absolute beginning or as a result? And is the divine present and

When this occurs, a supratemporal perspective for refuting former philosophers becomes available. Within the final system we can now discern the whole history of philosophy sketched as in a shadow. Every great philosopher of the past now figures as a "moment" (or a logical ingredient) within the overall synthesis. His personal marks abolished, his historical particularity eliminated altogether, and his claim to express the total truth negated, he has been crystallized into a conceptual component within the totality of the final system.

In his critique of Spinoza, Hegel uses the same principle in an almost paradigmatic precision:

> The only refutation of Spinozism can therefore consist, first, in recognizing its standpoint to be essential and necessary, and then, however, in letting this standpoint elevate itself *of itself* into a higher one. The relation of substance [Spinoza's main category], when considered merely in and for itself, leads itself over to its opposite, the Concept [Hegel's main category]. Therefore, the exposition of substance as offered in the last book [of Hegel's Logic], which leads over into the Concept, is the sole and true refutation of Spinozism.[2]

Among the many forerunners Hegel wished to assimilate as "moments" into his new system, Spinoza occupies a privileged position, comparable only to that of Aristotle and Kant. Spinoza's absolute monism, reviving the early Greek philosophers, provides Hegel with the necessary substrate and beginning of *all* philosophy. More importantly, Spinoza marks for Hegel the culmination of traditional, object-oriented metaphysics, with its view that the object, the universe in itself, is inherently structured and governed by reason (*logos*). Hegel called this standpoint "Objective Logic,"★ his own, somewhat odd renaming of what Kant had termed "dogmatic metaphysics."

Whereas Kant saw his German predecessor, Christian Wolff, as "the greatest among all dogmatic philosophers,"[3] Hegel reserves this title for Spinoza. "When beginning to philosophize, one must first be a Spinozist," he says in one characteristic statement.[4] In Hegel's *Science of Logic*, it is Spinoza's system, duly modified, which brings to a climax the whole march of traditional philosophy, crystallized into "Ob-

★ By "Logic," as the term appears in the title of his metaphysical work, *Science of Logic*, Hegel does not understand formal logic but the study of *logos* as it structures being, or reality itself. Hence "Objective Logic" signifies the one-sided recognition of *logos* as only embodied in external reality; "Subjective Logic" involves the recognition (of idealism in general) that the rational subject participates in determining the rationality and actuality of the object.

emerge, connected, from all relevant sources.[6] Then, following the text of Hegel's *History of Philosophy* and *Logic*, I shall complement these points and spell them out in further detail.

From this logical and ontological analysis, I shall then develop its less abstract implications for religion and the philosophy of history. Then, in the last part of this chapter, I shall delve beneath the hard core of the Spinoza-Hegel controversy for a possible clash between a heterodox Lutheran philosopher and a former ex-Marrano Jewish heretic. Finally, commenting on Hegel's critique, I shall argue that Spinoza came closer to Hegel than the latter admitted, and yet the remaining differences are irreconcilable. Showing why Spinoza must refuse the dialectical (and teleological) *Aufhebung* by Hegel, I shall indicate how this leaves two other grand alternatives for carrying on a *non*teleological philosophy of immanence—that of Marx and Nietzsche.

Overview of Hegel's Criticism

Generally speaking, Hegel views his critique of Spinoza as an attempt to specify the coherence conditions for maintaining Spinoza's principles, above all his idea of God as immanent totality. It is because Hegel accepts and wishes to maintain Spinoza's principle of absolute totality that he wants to remove other aspects of Spinoza's thought that make the coherent explication of his main idea impossible.

Analytic Summary of Hegel's Critique

Hegel, in particular, criticizes Spinoza for his one-sided view of negation; his non dialectical (and, therefore, incoherent) construal of the concept of totality; and—as a consequence—his view of the totality as an inert thing, a substance, rather than an organic and conscious subject. Most of Hegel's detailed criticisms are such that even non-Hegelians might (and often did) voice them. But Hegel tries to *systematize* the various difficulties found in Spinoza, by attributing them to a common root—Spinoza's one-sided view of negation, leading to his non-dialectical concept of totality. Hegel identifies the following major flaws in Spinoza's thought:

1. Substance qua substance is only pure being and simple identity, excluding all negation.
2. In that, the absolute must exclude all inner differences and particularization.
3. For this reason, Spinoza cannot show the necessity of there

being particular things at all; the finite aspect of the universe remains inexplicable and at best contingent.

4. Even as contingent, Spinoza cannot attribute reality to the finite modes. Although declared to be real, they must be considered the fruit of an "external reflection" or the *imaginatio*.

5. Similarly, the so-called attributes cannot count as self-specifications of the substance, but only as external and subjective projections of our minds.

6. The absolute is there as a beginning, not as a result; the modes depend upon the substance unilaterally, and do not condition, in turn, the possibility of the substance itself. The substance is *causa sui* in itself, prior to and independently of its being the cause of the particular modes. (This, to Hegel, is the single most important expression of a nondialectical, nonreciprocal system.)

7. The former points add up to a fundamental break between both aspects of the universe—the infinite and the finite, *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. Spinoza's intended monism splits into an actual dualism—an adverse outcome from Spinoza's viewpoint and, again, the result of his lack of dialectical logic and its movement of dual negation.

8. Because the totality as such has no inner negativity, it also lacks development and life. There is movement *among* the particular modes (mechanical movement), but no movement as the inner development of their principle of unity; the totality qua this unity remains inert and static.

9. Finally (and partly as a result of the former), the absolute is perceived as a mere thing (*res*), an unconscious object, devoid of subjectivity, personality, and spirit.

Points 1 through 7 sum up the *lack of dialectical logic in Spinoza*. Point 9 indicates the *lack of subjectivity*, and point 8 serves as a link between them. Accordingly, Hegel would demand (and performs in the *Logic*) two dialectical corrections in order to overcome Spinoza's shortcomings.

First, the totality must be constituted and governed by the negation of negation (or dialectical reciprocity); in other words, the absolute must not be conceived as a ready-made beginning, but as a result.

Second, the totality must also be conceived as subject. The first dialectical correction takes place on the level of substance (or "Objective Logic"); the second correction completes the passage of substance into subject.

Atheism, Acosmism, and Pantheism Spinoza was charged with atheism. Hegel reverses this charge, claiming that, on the contrary, the trouble with Spinoza is that "with him there is too much God."[7] In other words, it is not God, the infinite, but the finite and particular modes that are denied actual reality. This makes Spinoza's system a form not of atheism but—in Hegel's polemical phrase—of "acosmism" (denial of the reality of the world of finite things).

Hegel's critique is based upon the systematic implications of Spinoza's doctrine, not on his explicit position. Having started with absolute unity and identity—and lacking a dialectical logic—Spinoza, Hegel claims, is unable to maintain the actuality of particular and finite things. His totality becomes an overpowering principle in which all differences are obliterated. This boundless totality allows of no real distinctions in the universe—only of modal variations of the same. Whatever does appear to us as distinct and specific is such only because of the imagination—or, in Hegel's language, of an "external reflection"—and not by virtue of its objective ontological status. Only the substance existing *in se* (in itself) and conceivable *per se* (through itself) is an actual individual, whereas the finite modes are but passing and fluctuating "affections," or states, of this single substance. Spinoza's inability to do justice to the realm of the finite is what Hegel means by having "too much God."

At the same time Hegel praises Spinoza's achievement in grasping the structure of reality in terms of a single totality, in which the dualism of God and world, the Creator and the created, the transcendent and the immanent, is overcome. This pantheism will serve as the foundation of Hegel's own system; but in Hegel it will be given a processual and spiritual dimension. The absolute totality does not exist beforehand and eternally, as in Spinoza, but produces itself as absolute in the process of history; and, rather than being conceived as an inert and thinglike substance, the totality of God and world is viewed as a free subject.

Hegel's modified version of Spinoza's pantheism is not less but more "heretical" in terms of conventional theology. With all his daring ideas, Spinoza still maintained that God was eternal and not subject to becoming or change. In Hegel, God is not only deprived of his absolute transcendence, but is even made the product of a process in time (namely, of the self-actualization of spirit through human history). Rather than being absolute and eternal from the outset, God, the absolute unity of the immanent and the transcendent, emerges in Hegel as the outcome of a dialectical process of self-constitution and self-mediation. This view of the "becoming God" should have earned He-

gel—from the viewpoint of traditional theology—an even greater crown of thorns than the one placed on Spinoza's head. Yet Hegel already wrote in a different *Zeitgeist*—and that makes a difference.

Deduction and Method Hegel's second criticism concerns Spinoza's use of the geometrical—that is, formal-deductive—method. Hegel argues that this method should be banned from philosophy because philosophy must reflect the "inner movement" of its own subject matter. Already Kant distinguished the "mathematical" from the "philosophical" method. In philosophy (thus Kant), reason has only itself to build upon, working its way from the less clear and articulate to the more clear and articulate. Clarity and distinctness can be expected in philosophy only at the end and not, as in a deductive system, at the beginning. Accordingly, Kant concludes, the method of philosophy is the *gradual self-explication of reason*. In the "mathematical" method, on the contrary, full clarity and conclusive certainty are attained at any stage of the deduction; we do not move, as in philosophy, from lesser to greater clarity of whole contexts but proceed on the level of absolute clarity from one particular item to the next.[8]

Hegel accepts the thrust of this Kantian argument but adds to it specific reasons of his own. First, verification in philosophy depends on the complete systematic context and cannot be obtained prior to its full unfolding ("the true is the whole"). Second, the logical genesis of an idea in philosophy is an integral part of its meaning and truth; it cannot be communicated as a single "conclusion" and yet retain its meaning or truth value. In the same way, the "proof" is not an external ladder that can be disposed of once the ensuing "proposition" is reached. In the formal-deductive method, however, the process of demonstration is extraneous to the ensuing conclusion which has a truth value and meaning in itself, independently of its genesis. The logical equipment of "proofs," "propositions," and the like, indicates an external relation between process and consequent, and is therefore suitable only to the formal and the empirical sciences (mathematics, formal logic, physics, etc.), as well as in daily argumentation and ratiocination (including practical arguments and strategies), but not in philosophy. Third, philosophy is based on *Vernunft* (concrete reason), not on *Verstand* (formal understanding); its subject matter is actual reality, which can be expressed only in a logical form that has the characteristics of its object—namely, of organic totality, rather than a series of single propositions. Fourth, and more broadly speaking: in philosophy one cannot separate form from content, method from subject matter; the philosopher is supposed to follow the immanent move-

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