Correspondence

Baruch Spinoza

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type.—Many of the letters have somewhat ornate salutations (e.g. 'Most excellent Sir, and dearest friend') and/or signings-off (e.g. 'Farewell, special friend, and remember me, who am your most devoted. . . '); these are omitted except when there's a special reason not to.—For a helpful and thoughtful presentation of the letters, see Edwin Curley (ed), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1 for letters 1–28, vol. 2 (forthcoming) for letters 29–84. **The editorial notes in the present version derive mostly from Curley's published work and the forthcoming work that he has generously made available to the preparer of the version.**

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Glossary

affect: A feeling, emotion, attitude, obsession; in Spinoza's usage always a damaging one, but not so on page 66, where the word is used by someone else.

affection: state, quality.

Collegiant: A Dutch sect of Quaker-like dissenters who were persecuted by the dominant Calvinist clergy. Spinoza attended some of their meetings.

deist: Someone who believes there is a God (opposite of 'atheist'), but whose theology is *thin* compared with Christianity—e.g. the deist doesn't think of God as intervening in the world.

eminently: This is a scholastic technical term meaning 'in a higher form'. To say that God has (say) perception 'eminenently' is to say that he has perception in some higher form that doesn't involve his straightforwardly, in the ordinary sense, *perceiving* anything. The term is used by Boxel in letter 55, and mocked by Spinoza in 56

fatal: This word is used in connection with the idea of something's being absolutely and utterly bound to happen—the idea of this as somehow laid down in advance.

magistrate: In this work, as in general in early modern times, 'a magistrate' is anyone with an official role in government; and 'the magistrate' is the ruler.

parhelia: Two bright patches flanking the sun, sometimes called 'false suns'.

philosophy: In this correspondence the word usually points more to natural science than to what we would call 'philosophy' these days.

positive: This occurs where the Latin has *positivus*, which in letters letters 50 and 54 is contrasted with 'negative'. But in fact the main sense of *positivus*—except for one that is irrelevant here—contrasts not with 'negative' but with 'comparative'. The English 'positive' also is a grammatical technical term with that meaning: good-better-best, positive-comparative-superlative. Some of the letters involve Spinoza's view that 'sin is not something positive'; this goes with his saying that what we call 'sin' is really a **privation**. In his and others' usage a privation in x is **(i)** a lack of something that **(ii)** x ought to have or is normal or natural for things like x to have. Now, the statement that a privation is not something 'positive' could mean that

- **(i)** a privation is a lack, a case of *not* having something—the concept of privation is *negative*; or that
- **(ii)** a privation in x is x's lacking something that it *ought* to have; our notion of what x ought to have comes from our comparing x with other things that we regard as being of the same kind—the concept of privation is *comparative*.

In letters 19–20, 23–24, and 36 sense **(ii)** seems at least as fitting as sense **(i)**, though it could be that both are at work. Those five letters were originally written in Dutch, and *positivus* translates one or other of two different Dutch words; but there's reason to think that in each case the writer was thinking in terms of the standard scholarly language, Latin.

principle: In just two places in the correspondence, 'principle' is used in a sense, once common but now obsolete, in which 'principle' means 'source', 'cause', 'driver', 'energizer', or the like.

salutary: Usually it means 'conducive to health', but a secondary meaning, 'conducive to salvation', is what's in play here.

Schools: A standard label for departments of philosophy (including physics) that were pretty entirely under Aristotle's influence.

vivid and clear: The Latin phrase

clarus et distinctus

are translated here by the phrase

'vivid and clear'.

The more usual translation for it and (in Descartes's French works) for the French phrase

clair et distinct

has been 'clear and distinct'; but this is demonstrably wrong for Descartes's French and Latin. He only once takes the phrase apart to explain it:

> 'I call a perception *claram* when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something *clare* when it is present to the eye's gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. I call a perception *distinctam* if, as well as being *clara*, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that every part of it is *clarum*. . . . . A perception can be *clara* without being *distincta* but not vice versa. When someone feels an intense pain, his perception of it is *clarissima*, but it isn't always *distincta* because people often get this perception muddled with ·something else·. (*Principles of Philosophy* 1:45–6)

Of course he is not saying anything as stupid as that intense pain is always *clear*! His point is that pain is vivid, up-front, not shady or obscure. And for an idea to be *distincta* is for every nook and cranny of it to be vivid; which is not a bad way of saying that it is in our sense 'clear'.—It's reasonable to think that this also holds for Spinoza's use of the phrase. The most common use of *clarus* is as meaning 'bright' or 'vivid' or the like, as in *clara lux* = 'broad daylight', though it can also mean 'clear' in our sense. But if Spinoza or anyone else used it in that sense in the phrase *clarus et distinctus*, then what is there left for 'distinctus' to mean?

letters 59–84: written in 1675–1676

59. from von Tschirnhaus, 5.i.1675:

When shall we obtain your method of rightly governing reason in acquiring knowledge of unknown truths? and your general treatment of physics? I know that you have made great progress in both. The first was already known to me, and the second can be learned from the Lemmas added to your *Ethics* Part 2, by which many difficulties in physics are easily solved.

If you have the time and the opportunity, I humbly ask you for the true definition of motion and its explanation, and for your answer to this:

> Given that extension conceived through itself is indivisible, immutable, etc., how can we deduce *a priori* •the number and variety of extended things that can can arise, and consequently •the existence of the shapes of the particles of each body, shapes that aren't the same for any two bodies?

When I was with you, you indicated to me your method for finding truths that aren't yet known. I know by experience that this method is excellent and yet—as far as I have understood it—very easy. Just by applying it, I have made great progress in mathematics. I should like, therefore, for you to give me the true definition of

•adequate idea,
•true idea,
•false idea,
•fictitious idea and
•doubtful idea.

I have tried to discover how a true idea differs from an adequate idea, but so far all I have learned is this: When in an investigation I encountered a certain concept or idea, and tried to work out whether this •true idea was also the •adequate idea of something, I asked what the cause of this idea or concept was. Once I found that, I asked again what is the cause in turn of this concept [i.e. this cause of the first concept], and so I proceeded, always seeking the causes of the causes of the ideas, until I found a cause of which I couldn't see any further cause. . . .

For example, if we are ask what is the true origin of our errors, Descartes will reply that we assent to things that we haven't yet clearly perceived. But although this is a true idea of this thing [i.e. of the cause of our errors] I can't learn all I need to know about it unless I also have an adequate idea of it. To achieve this I seek again the cause of this cause: why do we assent to things not clearly understood? And I reply that it's because of a gap in our knowledge. But I can't ask what the cause is of our *not* knowing certain things. So the series of Why?-questions stops, and I see that I have uncovered an adequate idea of our errors.

Meanwhile, I ask you this: because it is established •that many things expressed in infinite ways have an adequate idea of themselves, and •that from an adequate idea of x everything knowable about x can derived, perhaps more more easily from one idea than from another, is there a means of knowing which of two ideas must be used in preference to the other? So, for example, the adequate idea of the circle consists in

•the equality of the radii,

but it also consists in

•the infinity of equal rectangles that are made from the segments of two lines ·intersecting within the circle·.

And there are countless further expressions each of which explains the adequate nature of the circle. And though from each of these everything that is knowable about the circle can be deduced, this can be done much more easily from some than from others. For example, someone who considers the ordinates of curves will deduce many things about their measurement, but we'll do this more easily if we consider the tangents, etc.

In this way I wanted to indicate how far I have progressed in this inquiry. I long for its completion, or—if I have made a mistake somewhere—its correction, as well the definition I asked for.

60. to von Tschirnhaus, i.1675:

I don't recognise any difference between a true idea and an adequate one except that 'true' concerns only the agreement of the idea with its object, whereas 'adequate' concerns the nature of the idea in itself. There's no difference between a true idea and an adequate one beyond that extrinsic relation.

To know from which one of the ideas of a thing all its properties can be deduced, I go by this: it is the idea or definition of the thing that expresses its efficient cause. For example, when I am wondering whether all of a circle's properties can be deduced from its *consisting of infinite rectangles etc.*, I ask whether this idea involves the efficient cause of the circle. Since it does not, I seek another, namely the circle's *being a space marked out by a line of which one end is fixed and the other moving*. Since this definition expresses the efficient cause, I know that I can deduce all the properties of the circle from it.

So also when I define God as a •supremely perfect Being, since that definition does not express God's efficient cause, I won't be able to derive all of God's properties from it. (God does have an efficient cause, for a thing's efficient cause doesn't have to be external to it.) But when I define God as

> a thing that is absolutely infinite, i.e. a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, each of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence

·I can deduce all God's properties from that·. [Spinoza doesn't state this definition here; he merely refers to it as definition 6 in Part 1 of the Ethics].

As for your questions about motion and method, my material on these is not yet written out in an orderly fashion, so I reserve them for another occasion.

·In a passing remark· you say that it is easier to derive results about the measurement of curves by considering their tangents than by considering their ordinates. I think the reverse of this is the case. ·But relative ease isn't crucially important·. What matters is to look for an idea of x from which the whole truth about x can be elicited, whether easily or with difficulty. If I try to do this for a given x, the last things that I derive will inevitably be more difficult that the first.

61. from Oldenburg, 8.vi.1675:

[Of the letters that we have, this is the first in nearly ten years from Oldenburg. His tone has changed because, Curley suggests, •his busy cross-channel correspondence has led to his being imprisoned for two months in the Tower of London on suspicion of espionage, and •he has read Spinoza's *Treatise on Theology and Politics*.]

A friend's forthcoming trip to the Netherlands. . . .gives me an opportunity I didn't want to miss: to let you know in this way that some weeks ago I conveyed my gratitude to you for your *Treatise ·on Theology and Politics·*, which you had sent me. . . ., but that I doubt whether my letter ever reached you.

In my letter I indicated an opinion of the *Treatise* which I

now, after much further thought, regard as premature. At that time certain things seemed to me to tend to the detriment of religion, when I judged it by the standard provided by •the common herd of theologians and •the accepted formulas of the confessions (which seem to be too full of partisan zeal). But now, as I rethink the matter more deeply, many things come to mind that persuade me that you are so far from •trying to harm true religion or solid philosophy that on the contrary you are •working to commend and establish the authentic purpose of the Christian religion, and indeed the divine sublimity and excellence of a fruitful philosophy.

Now that I believe that in your heart you have this ·intention to •advance the cause of true Christianity·, I ask you earnestly to explain, in frequent letters to your old and honest friend who longs for the happiest outcome of such a divine plan, what you are now preparing and thinking about for •that purpose. I solemnly promise you not to divulge any of this to any mortal, if you ask me not to. I shall only try gradually to dispose the minds of good and wise men to embrace the truths that you sometimes bring into a fuller light, and to abolish their prejudices against your meditations.

If I'm not mistaken, you seem to see very deeply into the nature and powers of the human mind, and its union with our body. I *beg* you to teach me your thoughts on this theme.

62. from Oldenburg, 22.vii.1675:

Now that our communication has been so happily resumed, I don't want to fail in the duty of a friend by neglecting it. I gather from your reply of 5.vi that you intend to publish that five-part Treatise of yours [namely the *Ethics*]. I hope you'll allow me to urge you, from the sincerity of my affection for you, not to mix into it anything that might seem to weaken the practice of religious virtue, especially given that what this degenerate and dissolute age is most eager for are doctrines whose consequences seem to support the vices that are rampant.

I shan't decline to receive some copies of the Treatise in question. But I would like them to be addressed, when the time comes, to a certain Dutch merchant living in London, who will make sure that they are then passed on to me. There will be no need ·for you· to mention that books of this kind have been sent to me. Provided they come safely into my possession, I'm sure I can easily distribute them to my friends and get a just price for them.

63. from Schuller, 24.vii.1675:

[The letter opens with apologies for 'my long silence' and fulsome declarations concerning Spinoza's kindness and the importance of his work. Then:] I write now to let you know that von Tschirnhaus, who is still in England, enjoys the same good health as we do, and that three times he has asked me in letters to send you his regards and respectful greetings. He has also repeatedly asked me to set following doubts before you and to ask for your solution to them.

(1) Would you please convince us—by a direct demonstration, not by a reduction to impossibility—that thought and extension are the only attributes of God that we can know? And does it follow from this that creatures consisting of other attributes can't conceive extension, so that there would seem to be as many worlds as God has attributes?. . . .

(2) Since God's intellect differs from our intellect both in essence and in existence, it will have nothing in common with our intellect, and therefore (by Part 1, proposition 3) God's intellect cannot be the cause of our intellect.

(3) Third, in the note to proposition 10 you say that nothing in Nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute (which I see very well), and that the more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes it has. This seems to imply that there are beings that have three, four, etc. attributes; yet one could infer from what has been demonstrated that each being consists of only two attributes—some •definite attribute of God and •the idea of that attribute.

(4) I would like examples of the things produced immediately by God, and those produced by the mediation of some infinite mode. Thought and extension seem to me to be examples of the first kind; examples of the second kind seem to be (in thought) intellect, and (in extension) motion, etc.

These are the things Tschirnhausen and I would like you to clear up, if you have time for this. For the rest he reports that Boyle and Oldenburg had formed a strange conception of your person. He has. . . .given them reasons that have induced them not only to •return to thinking worthily and favourably of your person, but also to •value most highly your *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. . . .

64. to Schuller, 29.vii.1675:

I rejoice that at last you have had an opportunity to cheer me with one of your letters, which are always so welcome to me. I earnestly ask you to do this frequently. I proceed to the doubts.

(1) The human mind can achieve knowledge only of things that are involved in, or can be inferred from, the idea of an actually existing body. For the power of each thing is defined solely by its essence (by Part 3, proposition 7). But (by Part 2, proposition 13) the essence of the mind consists only in its being the idea of an actually existing body. So the mind's power of understanding extends only to things that this idea of the body contains in itself, or that follow from it. But this idea of the body doesn't involve or express any attributes of God except extension and thought. For (by Part 2, proposition 6) its object, the body, has God for a cause insofar as he is considered under the attribute of extension and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute. And so (by Part 1, axiom 6) this idea of the body involves knowledge of God only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of extension.

Next, insofar as this idea is a mode of thinking, it also (by proposition 6 again) has God for a cause insofar as he is a thinking thing, and not insofar as he is considered under another attribute. Therefore (by axiom 6 again) the idea of this idea involves knowledge of God insofar as he is considered under thought but not insofar as he is considered under another attribute. It is evident, then, that the human mind, i.e. the idea of the human body, neither involves nor expresses any attributes of God except these two; and (by Part 1, proposition 10) no other attribute of God can be inferred from these two attributes or from their affections. So I infer that the human mind cannot achieve knowledge of any attribute of God except these two. . . .

Does this imply (you ask) whether there are as many worlds as there are attributes? On this see the note to Part 2, proposition 7. This proposition could be demonstrated more easily by reducing the thing to an absurdity. Indeed, I usually prefer that kind of demonstration when the proposition is negative, because that agrees better with the nature of such things. But because you ask only for a positive demonstration, I pass to. . .

(2) . . . the question of whether one thing can be produced by another from which it differs both in its essence and in its existence. ·The question arises· because things that

differ in this way from one another seem to have nothing in common. But since all individual things, except those that are produced by their likes, differ from their causes in their essence and their existence I don't see any reason for doubt about this.

Moreover, I believe I have already explained sufficiently in what sense I understand that God is the efficient cause both of the essence and of the existence of things (in the corollary and note to Part 2, proposition 25).

(3) As I indicated at the end of the note to Part 1, proposition 10, we arrive at the axiom of that note [he means the proposition that the more reality a thing has the more attributes it has] from •our idea of an absolutely infinite being, and not from •the possibility of beings with three, four, etc. attributes.

(4) The examples ·of infinite modes· that you ask for:

- •of the first kind, ·i.e. produced immediately by God·:
  - •in thought, absolutely infinite intellect,
  - •in extension, motion and rest;
- •of the second kind, ·i.e. produced by the mediation of some mode of the first kind·:
  - •the whole universe's face ·or *make* or *Gestalt*·, which varies in infinite ways yet always remains the same. On this, see the note to lemma 7 between propositions 13 and 14 of Part 2.

I believe I have replied to the objections you and our friend have raised. If you think that some doubt still remains, please don't hesitate to convey it to me, so that I may try to remove it.

65. from von Tschirnhaus, 12.viii.1675:

I ask you for a demonstration of your thesis that the soul can't perceive more attributes of God than extension and thought. Indeed, although I see this evidently, still it seems to me that the contrary can be •deduced from the note to Part 2, proposition 7. Perhaps I haven't understood that note properly; but I'll show you how I do that •inference, begging you to come to my aid with your accustomed kindness if I have misunderstood you.

Here is how things stand. Although I gather from the note that •the world is certainly unique, still it is no less clear also from the note that •it is expressed in infinite ways, and therefore each individual thing is expressed in infinite ways. From this it seems to follow that the modification that constitutes my mind and that expresses my body—this being one and the same modification—is nevertheless expressed in infinite ways, in one way through thought, in another through extension, in a third through an attribute of God unknown to me, and so on to infinity, since there are infinitely many attributes of God and the order and connection of the modifications seems to be the same in all.

Well, then, given that the mind represents a certain modification that is expressed not only in extension but also in infinite other ways, why does it perceive that modification only as expressed through extension, i.e. the human body, and not as expressed through other attributes?

Time doesn't permit me to pursue these matters at greater length. Perhaps all these doubts will be removed by more persistent meditations.

66. to von Tschirnhaus, 18.viii.1675:

. . . .For the rest, to reply to your objection, I say that although each thing is expressed in infinite ways in the infinite intellect of God, nevertheless those infinite ideas by which it is expressed can't constitute one and the same mind of an individual thing, but infinitely many ·minds·, because each of these infinite ideas has no connection with any other, as

I have explained in the same note (to Part 2, proposition 7), and as is evident from Part 1, proposition 10. If you will attend a little to these things, you'll see that no difficulty remains. [This is clearly part of a longer letter. We don't have the rest.]

·BURGH'S ATTEMPT TO SAVE SPINOZA'S SOUL· (ending on page 98)

67. from Burgh, 11.ix.1675:

As I was leaving my country I promised to write to you if anything worth mentioning happened on the trip. Something of the greatest importance *has* happened, and I am keeping my promise by letting you know that by God's infinite mercy I have been brought back into the Catholic church, as a member. You'll be able to understand in more detail how this happened from what I have written to Professor Craenen at ·the University of Leiden·; here I shall add a few words that concern *your* welfare.

The more I have admired the subtlety and acuteness of your intelligence, the more I now lament and weep for you. Although you are a most intelligent man and have received a mind endowed by God with excellent gifts, although you love the truth and are indeed eager for it, you have let yourself be led astray and deceived by that wretched and very proud Prince of wicked spirits. What is your whole philosophy but a mere illusion and fable? Yet you commit to it your peace of mind in this life and the eternal salvation of your soul.

See what a wretched foundation all your ideas rest on! You presume that you have finally discovered the true philosophy. How do you know that your philosophy is the best of all that ever were, are, or will be taught? Leaving the future out of it, have you examined all the ancient and modern philosophies that are taught here and in India and all over the planet? And even if you have examined them all properly, how do you know that you have chosen the best?

You will say: 'My philosophy agrees with right reason, and the others are contrary to it.' But all the other philosophers—except for your disciples—disagree with you; with the same right they proclaim the same thing about themselves and their philosophy as you do about yours; and they accuse you of falsity and error as you do them. So if the truth of your philosophy is to shine forth, you must offer reasons that don't help the other philosophies and bring support only to yours—or else you must admit that your philosophy is as uncertain and trifling as all the others.

But now, confining myself to your book (to which you have given that impious title ·*Treatise on Theology and Politics*·), and mixing together your philosophy with your theology, I proceed further. (For you yourself mix them together, though with devilish cunning you pretend that one is separate from the other and that they have different principles.)

Perhaps you will say: 'The others haven't read holy Scripture as often as I have, and I prove my opinions from Scripture itself, the recognition of whose authority makes the difference between Christians and everyone else in the world.' But how? 'I explain holy Scripture by applying the clear passages to the more obscure ones, and from that interpretation I compose my doctrines, or confirm doctrines that I have previously thought up for myself.'

But think about what you are saying. How do you know that you are making this application properly? and that the application, ·even if it is· rightly made, is sufficient for the interpretation of holy Scripture? and thus that you are establishing your interpretation of holy Scripture properly? Especially when the Catholics say, rightly, that the whole word of God hasn't been given to us in writings, and thus

that holy Scripture can't be explained from holy Scripture alone—by one man or even by the Church itself, which is the only ·legitimate· interpreter of holy Scripture. We must also consult the apostolic traditions, as is •proved from holy Scripture itself and the testimony of the holy fathers, and is •equally in agreement with right reason and experience. So given that that principle of yours is quite false and leads to ruin, where does that leave your teaching, which is wholly built on and dependent on this false foundation?

So if you believe in Christ crucified,

•recognise that wicked heresy of yours,
•recover from the perversion of your nature, and
•be reconciled with the Church.

You support your heresies in the same way that all heretics have done, do now, and will do in leaving God's Church—namely by appealing to holy Scripture alone. Don't flatter yourself that perhaps the Calvinists (the so-called 'Reformed'), the Lutherans, the Mennonites, the Socinians, etc. can't refute your doctrine. They are all just as wretched as you are, sitting with you in the shadow of death.

But if you don't believe in Christ, you are more wretched than I can say—though the remedy is easy:

•Recover from your sins, realise the fatal arrogance of your wretched and insane reasoning.

You don't believe in Christ. Why? You will say: 'Because the teaching and life of Christ don't agree with my principles, any more than the teaching of Christians about Christ agrees with my teaching.' Are you then so bold that you think you are greater than all those who have ever risen up in the State or in God's Church—greater than the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the doctors, the confessors, and the virgins, greater than innumerable saints, greater indeed (blasphemously) than the Lord Jesus Christ himself? Do you alone surpass them in teaching, in your way of living, in everything? Will you—wretched little man, base little earthworm, indeed food for worms—exult that you are better than the incarnate, infinite wisdom of the eternal Father? Do you alone reckon yourself wiser and greater than all those who have ever been in God's Church since the beginning of the world, and who have believed, or even now believe, that Christ will come or has already come? What basis is there for this rash, insane, deplorable, and accursed arrogance of yours?

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 this doesn't agree with your principles. But even if your (false, rash, absurd) principles were true and you built everything on them, you still couldn't account for everything that has happened or is happening in the world. Nor could you boldly assert that when something seemed contrary to those principles it must be really impossible or false. For there are countless things which, even if certainty is sometimes possible in natural things, you won't be able to explain at all. You won't even be able to remove the manifest contradiction between such phenomena and your explanations of other things that you take to be most certain. You will not explain completely from your principles any of the events brought about in witchcraft,. . . .of which I personally have seen examples. . . .

Even if some of your ideas do agree adequately with the essences of the things whose ideas they are, what will you be able to judge about the essences of all things? For you can never be confident about whether the ideas of all created things are possessed in the human mind naturally, or whether many if not all of them are produced in it by •external objects and also by •the suggestion of good or evil spirits and •an evident divine revelation. Consider these:

- a divining rod for detecting metals and underground water;
- the stone the alchemists seek [for turning lead into gold];
- the power of words and symbols ·in charms and incantations·;
- the apparitions of various kinds of spirits, good and evil, and their powers, knowledge and activities;
- the reappearance of plants and flowers in glass flasks after they have been burned;
- sirens;
- the gnomes that men say often appear in mines;
- the antipathies and sympathies of many things;
- the impenetrability of the human body.

How will you be able to define these things precisely and establish for certain whether they can actually exist in nature? I'm asking how you can do this *from your principles*, without consulting the testimonies of other men or empirical evidence (not to mention subjecting your judgment to God's omnipotence).

No, my philosopher, you couldn't determine anything about these things, even if your native intelligence were a thousand times more subtle and acute than it is. And if you trust your own unaided intellect in judging these and similar matters, certainly you are already thinking in the same way about things that are unknown to you, or that you haven't experienced. You regard them as impossible, though really they ought to seem to you only uncertain until you have been convinced by the testimony of a great many credible witnesses.

Julius Caesar, I imagine, would have judged the same way, if someone had said to him that a powder can be made, and will become common in later ages, whose power is so great that it makes castles, whole cities, even mountains fly up into the air. . . . He wouldn't have believed this man, and would have mocked him with hearty laughter, as wanting to persuade him of something contrary to his judgement and experience and to the sum total of military science.

But let's get back on track. . . . What rash judgements will you make about the awe-inspiring mysteries of the life and passion of Christ, which even the Catholics who teach them warn are incomprehensible? What trifling, useless raving will you babble about the countless miracles and signs which after Christ's ascension his apostles and disciples—and subsequently several thousand saints—made known in testimony to. . . .the truth of the Catholic faith, and which. . . .even in our days throughout the earth? And since you can't contradict these things, why continue to cry out against it? Give in, recover from your errors and sins, clothe yourself in humility, and be born again.

But I should like to get down to the truth of what has happened, which is the foundation of the Christian religion.

(1) Think of the power of the consensus of so many tens of thousands of men—thousands of whom have far surpassed you in learning, in refined solidity, and in perfection of life—who *unanimously* declare that

> Christ, the incarnate son of the living God, suffered, was crucified, and died for the sins of the human race; was resurrected, transfigured, and reigns in the heavens as God with the eternal Father, in unity with the holy Spirit,

and all the other things related to this—the countless miracles that have been done in God's church by the same Lord Jesus and then in his name by the apostles and the other saints,. . . .miracles that not only elude men's grasp but also contradict common sense, miracles that still occur today. How will you dare to deny. . . .all this?

[Burgh now likens Spinoza's scepticism towards the gospel narratives with the crazy view that Julius Caesar

never existed, that China was never occupied by the Tartars, or that Constantinople wasn't the capital of the Turkish Empire. Anyone who accepted any of these, in face of all the evidence, would be regarded as mad.]

(2) Consider the fact that God's church has been been spreading without interruption since the beginning of the world, and continues unchanged and solid; whereas each of the other religions, whether pagan or heretical, had a beginning after the world began, and some have also ended. The same holds for the monarchs of kingdoms and the opinions of any philosophers!

(3) Consider that through the coming of Christ in the flesh, God's church was transformed from the worship of the Old Testament to that of the New, founded by Christ. . . .and then spread by the apostles and their disciples and successors. These were by the world's standard unlearned men, yet they confounded all the philosophers [meaning: beat them in arguments], although they taught the Christian doctrine, which is contrary to common sense and exceeds and transcends all human reasoning. They were by the world's standards undistinguished low-class men who got no help from the power of kings and earthly princes, and were indeed persecuted by them with every kind of tribulation, and suffered all the other misfortunes of the world. The most powerful Roman emperors tried to. . . .crush their work, killing as many Christians as they could. . . ., yet the more they did this the more Christianity increased.

Consider that in this way Christ's church quickly spread throughout the world, until eventually the Roman emperor himself was converted to the Christian faith along with the kings and princes of Europe, after which the Church hierarchy increased its power to such an extent that today it is a thing of wonder. All this was brought about through love, gentleness, patience, trust in God, and all the other Christian virtues (not by the din of warfare, the force of large armies, and the devastation of territories, as worldly princes extend their boundaries), so that—as Christ promised—even the gates of Hell won't prevail against the Church.

Weigh also here the terrible and unspeakably severe punishment by which the Jews were forced into utter wretchedness and disaster because they were the authors of Christ's crucifixion. Read the histories of all times, and think about them thoroughly, and you won't find that anything similar has happened to any other society, not even in dreams.

(4) Notice the properties that are included in the essence of the Catholic church and ·therefore· are really inseparable from it, namely:

•*Antiquity*: having replaced the Jewish religion, which at that time was the true religion, it counts its beginning from the time of Christ, sixteen and a half centuries ago. Through that period it traces an unbroken line of pastors, through which it has divine, pure and uncorrupted sacred books as well as an equally certain and unstained tradition of God's unwritten word.

•*Immutability*, by which its doctrine and administration of the sacraments are preserved inviolate, as they were established by Christ himself and the apostles, losing none of their power.

•*Infallibility*, by which the church determines and decides everything relating to the faith with the utmost authority, security and truth, according to •the power bestowed on it by Christ for this purpose and •the direction of the Holy Spirit, whose bride the Church is.

•*Unreformability*: it can't be corrupted or deceived, and can't deceive; so obviously it never needs reform.

•*Unity*, by which all its members believe the same thing, teach the same thing regarding faith, have one and the same

altar and all the sacraments in common, and work together towards a single goal, obeying one another.

•*No soul is separable from it*, under any pretext whatever, without at once incurring eternal damnation, unless before death it is reunited with the church through repentance (from which it is evident that all heresies have departed from it, whereas it always remains the same as itself, constant, steadfast, and stable, as built on a Rock);

•Its *tremendous extent*, as it visibly spreads itself throughout the whole world. The same is not true of any other society—schismatic, heretic, pagan—or of any other political regime or philosophical doctrine, because none of those do or can have the cited properties of the Catholic church.

•*Perpetuity to the end of the world*, concerning which the Way, the Truth and the Life himself [i.e. Jesus Christ] has made the church confident, and which is also manifestly demonstrated by the experience of all the properties mentioned, promised and given to it likewise by Christ himself, through the Holy Spirit.

(5) Consider that the admirable order by which the church, such an immense body, is directed and governed indicates plainly that it depends very particularly on God's providence and that its administration is arranged, protected and directed amazingly by the Holy Spirit (just as the harmony seen in all the things in this universe indicates the omnipotence, wisdom and infinite providence that has created and still preserves everything). In no other society is such an excellent and strict order preserved without interruption.

(6) Reflect on the following. Countless Catholics of each sex, many of whom are still alive today (I have known some of them), have lived wonderful and most holy lives, and have. . . .performed many miracles in the name of Jesus Christ; every day many people undergo a sudden conversion from a bad life to a better, truly Christian and holy life; the holier and more perfect Catholics are, the humbler they are, the more they consider themselves unworthy. . . .; even the greatest sinners retain a proper respect for sacred things, confess their own wickedness, accuse their own vices and imperfections, and wish to be freed from them. . . . So it can be said that the most perfect heretic or philosopher who ever lived hardly deserves to be considered among the most imperfect Catholics. This clearly shows that Catholic teaching is the wisest, and wonderful in its profundity—in a word, that it surpasses all the other teachings in the world because it makes men better than those of any other society, teaches them the secure path to peace of mind in this life, and delivers the eternal salvation of the soul to be achieved after this.

(7) Reflect on the public confession of many heretics hardened in obstinacy, and of the most serious philosophers, that after receiving the Catholic faith they at last realised that they had been wretched, blind, ignorant—indeed foolish and mad—when in their pride and arrogance they falsely persuaded themselves that they were elevated above everyone else in teaching, learning, and perfection of life. Some of these went on to lead a holy life, leaving behind the memory of countless miracles. Some faced up to martyrdom cheerfully and with the greatest rejoicing. Some also (among them St. Augustine) became the subtlest, deepest, wisest and therefore most useful doctors of the church. . . .

(8) Finally, reflect on the wretched and restless life of the atheists. Although sometimes they manifest great cheerfulness and want to seem to be leading a pleasant life with great internal peace of mind, look at their unfortunate and horrible deaths. I myself have seen some examples of this, and I know of countless examples, from the accounts of

others and from history. Learn from the example of these men to be wise while there is time.

I hope you see from this how rashly you are committing yourself to the opinions of your brain. For if Christ is the true God and is at the same time man, as is most certain, see what you are reduced to! For if you persevere in your abominable errors and most grievous sins, what else can you expect but eternal damnation? Reflect on how horrible that is. How little reason you have to mock the whole world (except for your wretched disciples)! How foolishly proud you are, puffed up with the thought of the excellence of your intelligence and with wonder at your vain, false and impious teaching! How shamefully you make yourself more wretched than the beasts by denying yourself freedom of the will! If you don't actually experience this freedom, how can you deceive yourself by thinking that you are worthy of the greatest praise, and indeed, of the most exact imitation?. . . .

Come to your senses, philosophic man. Recognise that what you deem foolishness is wise and what you deem wisdom is mad. Go from pride to humility and you will be healed. Worship Christ in the most holy Trinity, so that he may have mercy on your wretchedness, and receive you. Read the holy fathers and the doctors of the Church, and let them instruct you about what you need to do. . . .to have eternal life. Consult Catholic men who have been thoroughly instructed in their faith and are living a good life; they will tell you many things you never knew, things that will astound you.

I am writing this letter with a truly Christian intention: first, that you may know the love I have for you, although you are a pagan; and second, that I might call upon you not to persist in corrupting others too.

So I conclude with this: God wants to snatch your soul from eternal damnation, provided you are willing. Do not hesitate to obey the Lord, who has called you so often through others, and now calls you again, perhaps for the last time, through me. Having attained this grace by the inexpressible mercy of God himself, I pray that you will attain it also. Do not refuse. If you don't listen to God now when he is calling you, his wrath will be inflamed against you and you'll risk being left behind by his •infinite mercy and becoming a wretched victim of •divine justice, which consumes all things in its wrath. . . .

67a. from Steno, 1675:

I take it that you *are* the author of ·*Treatise on Theology and Politics*·; some say that you are, and I have reasons for thinking they are right. I notice that in that book you bring everything back to the public security, or rather to *your* security, which you say is the goal of public security; yet you have embraced means contrary to the security you desire, and have completely neglected the part of you whose security ought to be your sole concern.

That your means contradict your goal is evident from the fact that

- •while seeking public peace, you throw everything into confusion, and that
- •while striving to deliver yourself from all dangers, you needlessly expose yourself to the greatest danger.

That you have neglected completely the part of yourself to which you ought to be uniquely attached is established by the fact that you permit everyone to think and say what they like about God, provided it doesn't destroy the obedience which you say ought to be given not so much to God as to man. This amounts to equating all human goods with the goods of a civil order, thus restricting them to the goods of the body. You say that you reserve the care of the soul for philosophy, but

that doesn't help you because your philosophy's treatment of the soul is based on ·mere· *suppositions*, and because you leave those unsuited to your philosophy in a condition of life like that of automata, devoid of a soul and born only for the body.

I see a man turning this way and that in this darkness, a man who was once a close friend of mine and who even now, I hope, is not an enemy (for I'm sure the memory of our former intimacy preserves even now a mutual love). And I remember that I too was once stuck in serious errors, even if not exactly the same ones. So the more clearly I see God's mercy to me in the size of the danger from which I have been liberated, the more I am moved by compassion to pray that you receive the same heavenly grace that Christ's kindness has brought to me. To add deeds to my prayers, I offer myself to you as most ready to examine with you all the arguments it may seem suitable to examine, to discover and maintain the true way to true security. Your writings show you to be very far from the truth, but the love of peace and of the truth that I have seen in you in the past, and that isn't yet quenched in this darkness, makes me hope that you'll lend a receptive ear to our church, provided you are given an adequate account of what it promises everyone, and what it offers those who are willing to approach.

The church promises everyone true security, eternal security, or the enduring peace which accompanies infallible truth; and it offers the necessary means for attaining such a great good, namely:

- a certain pardon for evil actions;
- a quite perfect standard for acting rightly;
- the true, effective perfection of all activities according to this standard.

It offers these things, not only to the learned, or to those endowed with a refined intelligence and plenty of free time, but indiscriminately to all people, of whatever age, sex or condition.

[This, Steno says, requires that that those who approach the church don't merely 'not resist, but cooperate'; but he goes on to say that they don't have to do this 'by their own forces'—all that's needed is 'not to deny assent and cooperation'. He continues:] If you haven't yet understood this, I am not surprised, and I won't try to make you understand. It is not in my power to do that.

[He says that he'll 'outline briefly the form of a Christian government', first describing the four stages in 'the life of each man infected with sins'. **(i)** The man always acts as though 'his thoughts were not subject to any judge'. He may say true things about God and the soul, but he treats them 'as if they were distant or external objects', so that what he says about them is 'always doubtful and often contradictory'. He is guilty of many vices (in thought if not in outer action) because his soul 'like a corpse, lacks a spirit to give life to its actions, and is moved by every puff of desire'. **(ii)** The man starts to take in that God is calling him, recognises 'by the beam of this supernatural light that many things are false in his opinions and defective in his actions, and commits himself totally to God'. **(iii)** His soul's continuous exercise of the virtues becomes ready to understand properly the mysteries hidden in sacred scripture, and understanding that it will have only when **(iv)** it 'begins to see God and achieves the wisdom of the perfect'.—And 'the whole program of Christianity' is aimed at bringing each sinner from stage **(i)** to stage **(iv)**.

[Steno exclaims about the success of the Catholic church in 'producing perfect examples of the virtues in every century'. He could give examples involving bishops, priests, severely disciplined monks, but he chooses to emphasize the moral splendours of •people converted from the worst life to the

most holy, and of •uneducated men and women 'who by the exercise of divine virtues were raised to understanding wonderful things about God and the soul', with the result that. among other things, they could perform miracles.]

I know what objections you can make to miracles. We aren't impressed by a miracle just because it is a miracle; but where we see a miracle bring about the perfect conversion of someone's soul from vices to virtues, we rightfully ascribe it to the author of all virtues. . . .

The church has always stood by its promises and still does, every day. You will see this if you study its past and present

- •not in the books of our opponents, or by listening to those among us who haven't yet advanced beyond stage **(i)**,
- •but from those who are considered true Catholics according to the profession of our own people,

this being the normal standard for inquiries into such subjects. . . . I beg you to examine our doctrines in our writings; your own teaching about the strength of prejudices will easily persuade you to do that.

[He won't cite Scripture in support of the Pope's authority, Steno says, because of the underlying conflict between Spinoza and the church regarding how Scripture should be interpreted. He goes on to say that the church's having a single head is intended so that 'matters of divine law or things that are necessary should always remain unchanged', whereas inessentials may change.]

Surely, therefore, if you are led by love of virtue and if you delight in the perfection of actions, you must inquire diligently into all the societies in the world. Nowhere else will you find the cultivation of perfection undertaken with such fervour, and brought to a conclusion with such happiness, as happens among us. . . .

. . . .Penetrate deeply into yourself and search your soul; if you examine everything properly you'll find it to be dead. You live among matter in motion, as if there weren't anything causing the movement. What you are introducing is a religion of bodies, not of souls. In the love of one's neighbour you •provide for the actions needed to preserve the individual and propagate the species, but •have little if any concern for the actions by which we acquire knowledge and love of our author. But you believe that everyone is dead with you, you who deny the light of grace to everyone because *you* haven't experienced it. Ignorant of the certainty of faith, which surpasses all demonstrations, you think the only certainty is demonstrative. Well, that certainty of yours that is confined within such narrow limits, is it demonstrative? I beg you to examine all your demonstrations and bring me even *one* concerning the way thinking and being-extended are united so that the cause of movement is united with the body that is moved.

But why do I ask you for *demonstrations* about these matters? You can't even explain to me how thought and extension are *probably* united. So without suppositions you can't explain. . . .pleasure or pain, or. . . .love or hate. The whole philosophy of Descartes, however diligently you have examined and reformed it, can't explain to me even this one single phenomenon: how the impulse of matter on matter is perceived by the soul united to the matter.

[In this paragraph, the Latin requires that 'you' be understood as plural; presumably Steno is addressing Spinoza and Descartes.] But what other notion of matter itself do you give us, I ask, beyond what you derive from a mathematical examination of quantity relating to shapes that no particle has been proved, except hypothetically, even to *have*? Nothing can be more contrary to reason than

- to deny the divine words of him whose divine works lie open to the senses, denying them because they're contrary to human demonstrations made by hypotheses; or
- to make a judgment about the state of the body which, having been glorified by the change from corruptible to incorruptible, is to be re-united with the soul,

given that you don't even understand the state of the body by whose mediation the mind perceives corporeal objects.

I'm convinced discovering' new principles for explaining the nature of God, of the soul, and of body, is the same as inventing fictitious principles. Reason itself teaches that it's contrary to divine providence that the true principles concerning those things should have been concealed from the holiest men for so many thousands of years, to be uncovered first in this century by men who haven't even achieved perfection in the moral virtues. . . .

Examine thoroughly the principles and doctrines of this philosophy, not among its enemies, not among those of its hangers-on whom either wickedness has united with the dead, or ignorance with children, but among its teachers who are perfect in all wisdom, and precious to God, and probably already participants in eternal life. Then you will recognise that the perfect Christian is the perfect philosopher, even if that person is only a little old woman, or a serving girl busy with menial chores, or someone scratching out a living by washing rags, a layman in the eyes of the world. . . .

If you wish, I will gladly take upon myself the task of showing you how the points in which your teachings depart from ours are partly inconsistent, and partly uncertain, although I might wish that as soon as you have recognised one or two errors in your doctrines, compared with the evident credibility in ours, you would make yourself a pupil of the teachers I have mentioned and that among the first fruits of your repentance you would offer God a refutation of your errors which you yourself have recognised by the illumination of the divine light, so that if your first writings have turned a thousand souls from knowledge of the true God, your recantation of them, confirmed by your own example, will bring a thousand thousands back to him with you. . . . With all my heart I pray for this grace for you.

68. to Oldenburg, reply to 62:

At the time when I received your letter of 22.vii I went to Amsterdam to see to the publishing of the book I wrote to you about. While I was dealing with this, a rumour spread around that a book of mine about God was in the press, and that in it I tried to show that there is no God. Many people believed this. As a result certain theologians, perhaps the authors of the rumour, complained about me to the Prince and the magistrates. And the stupid Cartesians, to clear themselves of the suspicion of favouring me, as they are believed to do, wouldn't stop denouncing my opinions and writings everywhere. They haven't stopped yet.

Since I learned these things from trustworthy men who also told me that the theologians were setting traps for me everywhere, I decided to put off the publication I was planning, until I saw how the matter would turn out; and I resolved to tell you how I would then proceed. But every day the matter seems to get worse, and I'm not sure what to do.

But I don't want to delay longer my reply to you. First, thank you very much for your friendly warning. But I'd like a fuller explanation of it, telling me *which* of my doctrines you believe might seem to undermine the practice of religious virtue. For I believe that the doctrines that seem to me to agree with reason are also most conducive to virtue. Next, if it's not too much trouble, I'd like you to let me know the

passages in the *Treatise on Theology and Politics* that have caused learned men to have misgivings. For I want to make that Treatise clearer with certain notes, and to remove the prejudices against it if I can.

69. to van Velthuysen, no date:

I am surprised that our friend Nieuwstad said that •I am considering a refutation of the writings that have for some time been coming out against my treatise, and that among other things •I am planning to refute your manuscript. I never thought of rebutting any of my opponents, so unworthy did they seem to me. And I don't remember that I said anything to Nieuwstad except that I planned to •clarify some more obscure passages in that treatise with notes, and to •attach your manuscript to them together with my reply, if this could be done with your permission, which I asked him to get from you. I added that if you withheld permission because I said certain things too harshly in my reply, you would have complete discretion to correct or delete them.

In the meantime, I am not at all angry at Nieuwstadt. Still, I did want to let you know how the matter stands, so that if I couldn't get your permission I would at least show that I didn't want to publish your manuscript against your will. I believe it can be done without any danger to your reputation, provided that your name isn't assigned to it; but I shall do nothing unless you grant me the right to publish it.

But to confess the truth, you would please me much more if you would write down the arguments by which you believe you can attack my treatise, and add them to your manuscript. I ask you most earnestly to do this. There is no-one whose arguments I would be more pleased to weigh carefully. I know that you are possessed only by a zeal for the truth, and I know the singular integrity of your heart, by which I urgently beg you not to hesitate to undertake this task. . . .

70. from Schuller, no date:

I hope that my last letter, together with the process ·for transmuting metals· of the anonymous author, has been properly delivered to you, and at the same time that you are still well, as I myself am.

For three months I had no letter from Tschirnhaus, which led me to think that some calamity had happened to him on his trip from England to France. But now I rejoice to say that I have received a letter from him, which he asks me to share with you.

I am to convey to you, together with his most solicitous greetings, that he has arrived safely in Paris and met Huygens there, as we had advised him to. . . . He has accommodated himself to Huygens's temperament in every way, so that Huygens thinks very highly of him. He mentioned that you had commended Huygens's acquaintance to him, and that you valued his person highly. This pleased Huygens greatly; he replied that he values your person highly, and that recently he received the *Treatise on Theology and Politics* from you, which many people there think well of. They ask eagerly whether other writings by the same author have been published, to which Tschirnhaus has replied that he knew of none except the demonstration of Parts 1 and 2 of Descartes's *Principles*. He reported nothing else concerning you. He hopes that this ·report· will not be unwelcome to you. I am to convey to you, together with his most solicitous greetings, that he has arrived safely in Paris and met Huygens there, as we had advised him to. . . . He has accommodated himself to Huygens's temperament in every way, so that Huygens thinks very highly of him. He mentioned that you had

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Recently Huygens sent for Tschirnhaus and told him that Colbert [Chancellor of the Exchequer under Louis XIV] wanted someone to instruct his son in mathematics, and that if a position of this kind would please him Huygens would arrange it. Tschirnhaus replied by seeking some delay, but eventually he said he was available. Huygens reported that this pleases Colbert greatly, especially since Tschirnhaus, not knowing French, will have to speak to his son in Latin.

Regarding the objection Tschirnhaus made most recently [in letter 65], he replies that those few words I had written at your request [relaying the contents of letter 66] have revealed your meaning to him more deeply, and that he had already entertained the same thoughts (since ·your words in the *Ethics*· chiefly admit of explanation in these two ways). But two reasons have led him to pursue the train of thought contained in the objection recently made.

First, that otherwise propositions 5 and 7 of book II seem to him to conflict with one another. In 5 it is maintained that objects are the efficient cause of ideas, which seems to be overturned by the demonstration of 7 because of its citation of axiom 4 of Part 1.

·Tschirnhaus writes·: 'Or (as I am inclined to think) I am not applying this axiom rightly, according to the intention of the author, which I would be glad to learn from him if he has time.

'The second reason that prevented me from following the explanation given was that in this way the attribute of thought is held to spread much more widely than the other attributes. But I don't see what stops •that from contradicting •the thesis that each attribute constitutes the essence of God.

'In any case, let me add this: if I can judge other understandings from my own, propositions 7 and 8 of part 2 will be very difficult to understand, because the author has chosen to provide them with such short demonstrations and not to explain them at greater length, no doubt because they seemed so evident to him.'

Tschirnhaus reports that in Paris he met a remarkably learned man named Leibniz, who is very capable in the various sciences and also free of the common prejudices of theology. They have become close friends, because Leibniz like Tschirnhaus works continually on the perfection of the intellect and indeed values nothing more highly than this. . . . In morals, Tschirnhaus says, he is most well-versed and speaks without any influence of the affects, simply from the dictate of reason. In physics, and especially in metaphysical studies concerning God and the soul, he continues, he is most expert.

He concludes that Leibniz is most worthy of having your writings communicated to him, if you give your permission. He believes that 'great advantage will come to the author from this', as he promises to show fully if it pleases you. But if not, be assured that he will honourably keep your writings secret, as he has promised. So far he hasn't as much as mentioned them.

This same Leibniz thinks very well of the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*, on the subject of which you may

remember receiving a letter from him [a letter that we don't have]. Unless there is some weighty reason against it, please don't be reluctant to permit this in keeping with your generous kindness. . . .

71. from Oldenburg, 15.xi.1675:

As far as I can see from your last letter, the publication of the book you intended for the press remains in danger. I approve your programme for the book, in which you indicate that you want to clarify and soften things that readers found troubling in the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. These, I should think, are especially the passages that seem to speak ambiguously about **(a)** God and Nature, two things that many people think you run together. Also, to many you seem to deny **(b)** the authority and value of miracles, which most Christians are convinced are the only possible support for the certainty of divine revelation. And they say that you conceal your opinion regarding **(c)** Jesus Christ, the redeemer of the world and only mediator for men, and regarding his incarnation and atonement ·for mankind's sins·. They ask that you reveal clearly your thinking on these three points. If you do this, in a way that pleases intelligent Christians who value reason, then I think your affairs will be safe. . . .

72. to Schuller, 18.xi.1675:

I was pleased to learn from your letter, which I received today, that you are well and that our Tschirnhaus has successfully completed his trip to France. In his conversations about me with Huyghens, he conducted himself very wisely, in my judgment at least. I am delighted that he has found such a favourable opportunity for the goal he had set himself.

But I don't see why he thinks that axiom 4 of part 1 contradicts proposition 5 of part 2. The proposition says that the essence of each idea has God for a cause insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing; while the axiom says that the knowledge or idea of an effect depends on the knowledge or idea of its cause.

To confess the truth, I don't follow what you write about this; I think there has been a slip of the pen either in your letter or in Tschirnhaus's copy ·of the *Ethics*·. You write that proposition 5 says that *ideata* [= 'the things that ideas are ideas *of*'] are the efficient cause of ideas; in fact proposition 5 explicitly denies this. . . . It would be pointless for me to write more fully about this now; I should wait until you explain his mind more clearly to me and I know whether he has an adequately corrected copy of the work.

I believe that I know from letters the Leibniz of whom he writes, but why this counsellor in Frankfurt has gone to France I do not know. Judging from his letters he seems to have a liberal understanding and to be knowledgeable in every science. But I don't think it would be wise to entrust my writings to him so quickly. I should like to know first what he is doing in France, and to hear Tschirnhaus's judgment on him after he has associated with him longer and knows his character better. . . .

I haven't yet tried to test the process of your author, and I don't think I'll be able to focus my mind on it. The more I think about the thing itself [i.e. about what the process is supposed to *do*], the more convinced I am that you haven't made gold but only separated out a little that was hidden in the antinomy. But more of this on another occasion. . . .

73. to Oldenburg, no date:

Last Saturday I received your very short letter of 15.xi, in which you point out things in the *Treatise on Theology and*

Politics that have troubled readers. However, I had hoped also to learn from your letter *what* the opinions are that—as you had warned me previously—seem to undermine the practice of religious virtue. But to explain my intention regarding the three points you mention, I say:

(a) My opinion concerning God and Nature is far different from the one modern Christians usually defend. I maintain that God is the indwelling cause of all things, not the cause from outside. In saying that all things are in God and move in God I am agreeing with Paul [*Acts* 17:22–31] and perhaps also with all the ancient philosophers, though in another way; and, I would venture to say, also with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as it's legitimate to conjecture from traditions that have been corrupted in many ways. But some people think the *Treatise on Theology and Politics* rests on the assumption that God is one and the same as 'Nature' understood as a mass of corporeal matter. This is a complete mistake.

(b) Regarding miracles, I on the contrary am convinced that the certainty of divine revelation rests only on the wisdom of the doctrine, not on miracles, i.e. on ignorance ['on the contrary' because Oldenburg had said that most Christians are convinced of the opposite view]. I have shown this at sufficient length in chapter 6, on miracles. Here I add only that in my view the chief difference between religion and superstition is that one had wisdom as its foundation and the other has ignorance. This, I think, is why Christians are distinguished from others not by faith, not by loving-kindness, not by the other fruits of the Holy Spirit, but only by opinion: because like everyone else they defend themselves only by miracles, i.e. by ignorance, which is the source of all wickedness. And thus they turn faith into superstition, even if it is true. But I doubt very much whether kings will ever permit the use of a remedy for this evil.

(c) For salvation there's absolutely no need to know Christ according to the flesh. We must think quite differently about that eternal 'son of God', i.e. God's eternal wisdom, which has manifested itself in all things but most in the human mind and most of all in Christ Jesus. No-one can attain blessedness without the wisdom that teaches—as nothing else does—what is true and false, good and evil; this wisdom was manifested most through Jesus Christ, so his disciples also preached it as it had been revealed to them, showing that they could pride themselves beyond other people in that spirit of Christ. As for what certain churches *add* to this—that God assumed a human nature—. . . .they seem to me to speak no less absurdly than if someone said that a circle has assumed the nature of a square.

I think these words will be enough to explain what I think about those three points. You'll know better than I whether it will please your Christians acquaintances.

74. from Oldenburg, no date:

Since you seem to reproach me for excessive brevity, I shall remove that fault this time by excessive prolixity! You had expected an account of the opinions in your writings that seem to your readers to destroy the practice of religious virtue. I shall say what distresses them most. You seem to build on a fatal necessity of all things and actions; but once that has been granted, they say, the sinews of all laws, of all virtue and religion, are cut, and all rewards and punishments are useless. They think that whatever compels or implies necessity *excuses*, so that ·on your view· no-one will be inexcusable in the sight of God. If we act by the fates, and everything. . . .proceeds along an inevitable path, they don't see what room there is for guilt or punishments. It's quite hard to say what means there are to untie this knot. I want

to know what help you can offer in this matter.

Regarding your opinion about the three points I raised, which you think fit to reveal to me, the following things need to be asked ·about two of them·.

(b) In what sense do you take miracles and ignorance to be equivalent, as you seem to do in your most recent letter? The raising of Lazarus from the dead, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death, seem to surpass the whole power of created Nature and to belong only to the divine power. Of course this exceeds the limits of a finite intelligence, but that doesn't mean that it involves culpable ignorance. It is fitting—don't you agree?—for a created mind to recognise in an uncreated mind and supreme Divinity

- knowledge that enables it to penetrate into things whose reason we puny humans can't explain; and
- power that enables it to do things whose means we puny humans can't provide.

We are men, and it seems that nothing human should be considered alien to us.

(c) Since you admit that you cannot grasp the doctrine that God really assumed a human nature, it is proper to ask you how you understand the passage [*John* 1:14] in our Gospel which affirms that 'the word became flesh,' and in the letter to the Hebrews the affirmation that 'the son of God assumed not ·the nature of· the angels, but ·that of· the seed of Abraham'. [The added phrases follow previous translators' view about what Oldenburg meant to say.] I should think that the whole tenor of the Gospel is this: that the only begotten son of God, the Word, who both was God and was with God, showed himself in human nature and by his passion and death paid the ransom for us sinners, the price of our redemption. I would be very glad to learn what should be said about passages like these, to support the truth of the Gospel and of the Christian religion, which I think you support.

I had intended to write more, but I've been interrupted by visiting friends, to whom I think it wrong to deny the duties of politeness. But the things I've thrown together in this letter may have been enough. . . .

75. to Oldenburg, no date:

At last I see what you were asking me not to make public. But because this is the principal foundation of everything in the treatise I had decided to publish, I want to explain to you briefly how I maintain the fatal necessity of all things and actions. I don't subject God to fate, but I conceive that all things follow with inevitable necessity from the nature of God. Everyone thinks that it follows necessarily from God's nature that God understands himself, but no-one thinks that God is compelled by some fate. Rather they think he understands himself completely freely, even if necessarily.

This inevitable necessity of all things doesn't destroy either divine or human legislation. The moral teachings themselves, whether or not they take the form of law or legislation from God himself, are divine and salutary [see Glossary]. The good that follows from virtue and the love of God will be just as desirable whether we get it •from God as a judge or •as something emanating from the necessity of the divine nature. The bad things that follow from evil actions and affects won't be any less frightful because they follow from them necessarily. And whether we do the things we do necessarily or contingently, we are still led by hope and fear.

Next, the only reason men are inexcusable before God is that they're in his power as clay is in the power of the potter, who out of one batch of clay makes some vessels for honour and others for dishonour [echoing *Romans* 9:20–21]. If you would attend a little to these few things, I'm sure you could easily reply to all the arguments that can be raised

against this opinion, as many have already experienced with me.

I have equated miracles with ignorance because those who try to base the existence of God and religion on miracles want to show something obscure by something else more obscure that they are completely ignorant of. . . . For the rest, I think I have explained my position on miracles sufficiently in the *Treatise on Theology and Politics*. Here I add only this one thing, ·about Christ's reported resurrection·:

If you attend to the following things—

- ·the risen· Christ didn't appear to the Senate, Pilate, or any of the unfaithful, but only to the saints;
- God has neither a right hand nor a left, and is not in any place but is everywhere according to his essence;
- matter is everywhere the same;
- God doesn't manifest himself outside the world in that imaginary 'space' they have invented; and finally
- the structure of the human body is kept within its proper limits only by the weight of the air

—you will easily see that this appearance of Christ was not unlike God's appearance to Abraham when he saw three men whom he invited to eat with him [*Genesis* 18:1–8]. You will say: 'But all the apostles believed completely that Christ was resurrected from the dead and really ascended into heaven.' I don't deny this. For Abraham also believed •that God had dined with him; and all the Israelites believed •that God descended from heaven to Mt. Sinai, surrounded by fire, and spoke directly to them [*Exodus* 19:18–24], although these and many other things of this kind were apparitions—revelations adjusted to fit the grasp and opinions of the men God wanted to reveal his mind to.

I conclude, therefore, that Christ's resurrection was really spiritual, and was revealed only to the faithful according to their power of understanding; that is, I take it that •Christ was endowed with eternity, •that he rose from 'the dead' (in the sense *he* gave that phrase when he said 'let the dead bury their dead' [*Matthew* 8:22]), and •that his life and death provided an example of singular holiness which his disciples could follow and in that way be 'raised from the dead'.

It wouldn't be hard to explain the whole teaching of the Gospel according to this hypothesis. Indeed it's only on this hypothesis that Paul's arguments in 1 *Corinthians* 15 can be explained; interpreted according to the common hypothesis, they seem weak and can easily be refuted—not to mention the fact that the Christians have interpreted spiritually all the things the Jews interpreted in terms of the flesh.

Like you, I recognise human weakness. But do you think that we puny men have so much knowledge of Nature that we can determine how far its force and power extend themselves, and what surpasses its force? To claim to have this knowledge is *arrogant*, so it isn't wrong or boastful to explain miracles through natural causes as far as possible. As for things that we can't explain but can't show to be absurd, it will be best to suspend judgment about them, and to base religion only on the wisdom of ·its· teaching.

You think that the passages in the Gospel of John and the letter to the Hebrews are incompatible with what I have said, but that's because you understand the phrases of eastern languages in terms of European ways of speaking. It's true that John wrote his Gospel in Greek, but he still hebraizes. Anyway, when Scripture says that God manifested himself in a cloud, or that he dwelt in the tabernacle, and in the temple, do you believe that God himself took on the nature of a cloud, and a tabernacle, and a temple? ·Of course you don't·! Well, that is the most that Christ said of himself: that he was the temple of God, because. . . .God manifested himself most in Christ. To express this more powerfully, John said that 'the word became flesh'. But enough of these things.

76. to Burgh, reply to 67:

I could hardly believe it when others told me, but now I have it from your letter: you have not only joined the Roman church but have become a vehement defender of it, and have already learned to revile your opponents and rage against them impudently and aggressively.

I hadn't intended to reply to your letter. I was certain that to restore you to yourself and your family you needed the passage of time more than you needed argument, not to mention other reasons that you approved in our conversation about Steno, whose footsteps you are now following. But friends who had had great hopes for you because of your natural ability pressed me •not to fail in the duty of a friend, •to think of what you recently were rather than of what you are now, and so on. So I have finally been persuaded to write you these few lines, asking you earnestly to be so kind as to read and weigh them fairly.

Opponents of the Roman church usually relate the vices of the priests and popes, but I shan't try in that way to turn you away from them. Those stories are often brought up maliciously, more to irritate than to instruct. I concede that the Roman church contains more men of great erudition and personal virtue than any other Christian church. (That's because it has more members than any other Christian church, and therefore more men of every kind.) But if you haven't lost your memory along with your reason, you can't deny that in every church there are many honourable men who worship God with justice and loving-kindness. We know many men of this kind among the Lutherans, the Reformed, the Mennonites, and the Enthusiasts; and among others there are your own ·Protestant· ancestors, who in the time of the Duke of Alva suffered all kinds of torture for the sake of religion, with equal constancy and freedom of mind.

So you ought to concede that holiness of life is not exclusive to the Roman church, but is common to all. And because we know by this—as I say with the apostle John (4:13)—that we remain in God, and God remains in us, it follows that whatever distinguishes the Roman church from the others is completely superfluous and thus has been established only by superstition. For as I have said, with John, the unique and most certain sign of the true universal faith is *justice and loving kindness*. They are the true fruits of the Holy Spirit; wherever they are present, Christ is really present; wherever they are absent, Christ is absent; for only by the spirit of Christ can we be led to the love of justice and loving kindness. If you had been willing to weigh these things rightly, you wouldn't have lost yourself, and you wouldn't have driven your parents, who are now lamenting your misfortune, into bitter grief.

However, I return to your letter, in which first you lament that I let myself be led astray by the Prince of wicked spirits. Cheer up! and return to yourself. When you were in possession of your faculties, unless I'm mistaken, you worshipped an infinite God by whose power absolutely all things happen and are preserved. But now you are dreaming that •there's a Prince, an enemy of God, who against God's will leads astray and deceives most men (good ones are rare), and that •for that reason God hands these men over to this master of wicked acts to be tortured to eternity. So divine justice allows the Devil to deceive men with impunity, but the men the Devil has wretchedly deceived and led astray don't go unpunished.

Would these absurdities still have to be tolerated if you worshipped an infinite and eternal God, instead of *that* one. . . .? And you weep that I am wretched? And you call my philosophy, which you have never seen, a fable? Young man bereft of understanding, who has bewitched you into

believing that ·in the Eucharist· you are eating that highest and eternal being and have him in your intestines?

Yet you seem to want to use *reason*, and you ask me: 'How do you know that your philosophy is the best of all that ever were, are, or will be taught?' I can ask you the same thing, with far better right. For I don't presume that I have discovered the best philosophy, but I know that I understand the true one. How do I know this? In the same way that you know the three angles of a triangle to be equal to two right angles. No-one will deny that this is enough—as long as his brain is healthy and he isn't dreaming of foul spirits who fill us with false ideas that are like true ones. For the true is the indicator both of itself and of the false.

But you, who presume that you have at last discovered the best religion—or rather the best men, to whom you have abandoned your credulity—how do you know that they *are* the best among all those who ever did, do, or ever will teach other religions? Have you examined all those religions, both ancient and modern, that are taught here and in India and everywhere throughout the globe? Even if you had examined them properly, ·I would still ask· how do you know you have chosen the best? since you cannot give any reason for your faith.

You will say that you're 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 others will make the same boast about *their* teachings.

As for what you add about the common agreement of many thousands of men, and about the uninterrupted succession of the Church, etc.—that's the same old song of the Pharisees [referring to the adherents of the rigidly ritualistic Judaism of his own time.] With no less confidence than the adherents of the Roman church, they display many thousands of witnesses who report •things they have heard as •things they have experienced, with as much stubbornness as the Roman witnesses. They trace their lineage all the way back to Adam, and they boast with equal arrogance that their church has spread to this day, and remains unchanged and genuine, in spite of the hostility of the pagans and the hatred of the Christians.

They defend themselves most of all by their antiquity. They claim, unanimously, that their traditions were received from God himself, and that they alone preserve his written and unwritten word. No-one can deny that all heresies have left them, but that they have remained constant for thousands of years without any state compulsion, solely by the effectiveness of ·what I call· their superstition. The miracles they tell of are enough to weary a thousand babblers.

What they are most proud of is that they count far more martyrs than any other nation, and that the number of those who have suffered for the faith they profess increases daily. This is not a fable. I myself know among others a certain Juda, known as 'Juda the Faithful' [a Spanish nobleman who converted to Judaism] who in the midst of the flames, when he was already thought to be dead, began to sing the hymn 'To thee, Lord, I offer my soul. . . ', and in the middle of it he breathed his last.

I grant that the organisation of the Roman church, which you praise so highly, is well-designed politically and profitable for many. I don't believe there's any order more suitable for deceiving the people and repressing men's minds—except for the Mahommedan church, which surpasses it by far because it has had no schism ever since it began. [Spinoza is clearly unaware of the division in Islam between the Sunnis and the Shiites, which began immediately after the death of Mohammed.—note by Curley]

So if you make the calculation correctly, you'll see that only your point **(3)** [on page 96] is in favour of the Christians:

namely, that unlearned and base men were able to convert almost the whole world to the faith of Christ. This, though, supports not the Roman church but everyone who professes the name of Christ.

Anyway, suppose that the reasons you cite *do* all favour only the Roman church, do you think you can use them to demonstrate mathematically the authority of that church? Of course you can't; so why do you want me to believe that my demonstrations come from the Prince of wicked spirits while yours are inspired by God? Especially given that in becoming a slave of this Church you have (as your letter clearly shows) been guided less by the love of God than by the the sole cause of superstition, namely the fear of hell. Putting no trust in yourself, and relying solely on others whom many people condemn—is this your humility? Using reason, and trusting in this true word of God that is in the mind and can never be distorted or corrupted—is this my arrogance and pride?

Away with this pernicious superstition! Recognise the reason God has given you, and cultivate it, unless you want to be considered one of the brute animals. Stop calling absurd errors 'mysteries', and don't shamefully confuse •things that are unknown to us. . . .with •things that are demonstrated to be absurd, as are the terrifying secrets of this church. The more contrary these are to right reason, the more you believe they are simply out of our intellectual reach.

The *Treatise on Theology and Politics* is based on the thesis that Scripture must be explained only through Scripture. You fiercely announce that there are no reasons supporting this, and that it is false; but it's not something that I merely *supposed*—I conclusively demonstrated it to be true or solidly grounded, especially in chapter 7 where rival views are also refuted. And see also what I demonstrated at the end of chapter 15. If you're willing to attend to these things, and also to examine the histories of the church (of which I see that you are most ignorant) so as to see how falsely the Popes transmit many things, and by. . . .what tricks the Bishop of Rome had himself made Prince of the Church 600 years after the birth of Christ, I don't doubt that you will at length recover. I heartily desire this for you.

77. from Oldenburg, 14.i.1676:

You were exactly right when you saw why I didn't want that *fatal necessity of all things* to be spread around, namely so that the practice of virtue wouldn't be hindered by it, and rewards and punishments made would worthless. What your latest letter suggests about this doesn't seem to lessen this difficulty or calm the human mind. If we men in all our actions, moral as well as natural, are in God's power as clay is in the potter's hand how can any of us properly be called to account for having acted thus and so when it was completely impossible for him to act otherwise? Won't we *all* be able to say this to God?

> 'Your inflexible decree and irresistible power have driven us to act in this way; we couldn't act otherwise. So where's the justice in handing us over to the direst punishments that we couldn't possibly avoid because you were doing and directing everything. . . .according to your will and good pleasure.'

When you say that •men are inexcusable before God simply because they are in God's power, I would turn that around and say (with greater reason, I think) that •men are completely *excusable* because they are in God's power. For everyone can easily object: 'Your power is inescapable, O God; so it seems that I should be excused for acting as I did.'

You still take miracles to be equivalent to ignorance. By that you seem to confine the power of God within the same limits as the knowledge of men—at least of the most acute men—as if God can't do or produce anything that men can't explain if they exert all the powers of their intelligence. And that narrative of Christ's passion, death, burial and resurrection seems to have been painted with such lively and genuine colours that I venture to challenge you to think about it: if you are persuaded of the truth of the narrative, do you believe that it is to be taken allegorically rather than literally? The details the evangelists have recorded so clearly about this matter seem to weigh heavily in favour of taking the narrative literally.

These are the things I wanted to note regarding this subject. I beseech you to pardon them, and in accordance with your sincerity, to reply in a friendly fashion. Boyle greets you courteously. At another time I'll report on what the Royal Society is doing now.

78. to Oldenburg, 7.ii.1676:

When I said in my previous letter that we are inexcusable because we are in God's power like clay in the hand of the potter, I meant this:

> No-one can reproach God because he has given him a weak nature, or a mind lacking in power. Just as it would be absurd for a circle to complain that God didn't give it the properties of a sphere, or a child who is tormented by a stone that he didn't give it a sound body, so also a weak-minded man can't complain that he can't restrain or moderate his desires because God has denied him strength of character and a true knowledge and love of God himself.

Nothing belongs to a thing's nature except what follows necessarily from its given cause. It doesn't belong to the nature of each man that he should be strong-minded. And experience and reason both tell us that it is no more in our power to have a sound body than it is to have a sound mind. [We'll see that Oldenburg in his reply writes as though Spinoza had written 'it is no more in our power to have a sound mind than it is to have a sound body', and that is surely what he meant to say: 'You know that we don't choose our bodies; well, we don't choose our minds either.'] You insist that if men sin from a necessity of nature then they are excusable. But you don't explain what you want to infer from that. Is it that God can't become angry with them? Or that they are worthy of blessedness, i.e. of the knowledge and love of God? If the former, then I entirely agree that God doesn't become angry, but that all things happen according to his decree. I deny, though, that therefore all men ought to be blessed. Men can be excusable and yet lack blessedness and be tormented in many ways. A a horse is excusable for being a horse and not a man, but it must still be a horse and not a man. He who is crazy because of a ·rabid· dog's bite is indeed to be excused; nevertheless, he is rightly suffocated. And one who cannot govern his desires and restrain them by fear of the laws, although he too is to be excused because of his weakness, still can't enjoy peace of mind and the knowledge and love of God. He necessarily perishes.

. . . .When Scripture says that God becomes angry with sinners, and that he is a judge who finds out about men's actions, makes decisions about them, and passes sentence, it is adapting itself to the accepted opinions of the common people; it isn't trying to teach philosophy or make men learned, but to make them obedient.

I don't see why I seem to confine the power of God and human knowledge within the same limits, just because I have taken miracles and ignorance to be equivalent.

I accept Christ's passion, death, and burial literally, as you do, but I understand his resurrection allegorically. I agree that the evangelists relate the resurrection in such detail that we can't deny that they believed

> •that the body of Christ was resurrected and ascended into heaven so that he sits on the right hand of God; and •that this could also have been seen by non-believers if they had been present at the times and in the places where Christ appeared to the disciples.

Nevertheless, they could have been deceived about this, without that detracting from the Gospel's teaching, as also happened to other prophets. I've given examples of this previously. But Paul, to whom Christ also appeared afterwards, gloried that he knew Christ not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

79. from Oldenburg, 11.ii.1676:

Your letter of 7.ii contains some things that seem to merit critical examination. You say that a man can't complain that God has denied him true knowledge of God and sufficient powers for avoiding sins, because nothing belongs to a thing's nature except what follows necessarily from its cause. But I say that since God, the creator of men, formed them according to his own image—which seems to imply wisdom, goodness, and power in its concept—it seems to follow completely that it *is* more in man's power to have a sound mind than to have a sound body, because the soundness of the body depends on mechanical principles whereas the soundness of the mind depends on choice and prudence.

You add that men can be excusable and yet tormented in many ways. At first glance this seems hard and what you go on to offer as a proof—that a dog gone mad from a bite is indeed to be excused but nevertheless is rightly killed—doesn't seem to settle the matter, since killing a dog of this kind would be cruel if it weren't necessary to preserve other dogs or other animals or men themselves from a bite of this kind, which would make them mad.

But if God implanted a sound mind in men, which he could, no contagion of vices would need to be feared. It seems very cruel for God to destine men to eternal torments (or at least for a time to severe torments) because of sins that they had no way of avoiding. Furthermore, the tenor of the whole of sacred Scripture seems to imply that men *can* abstain from sins. Indeed, it teems with curses and promises, announcements of rewards and of punishments, which all seem to •count against a necessity of sinning and •imply the possibility of avoiding punishments. To deny this is to imply that the human mind act just as *mechanically* as the human body does.

Your continuing to take miracles and ignorance as equivalent seems to be based on the view that a creature must have a clear insight into the infinite power and wisdom of the creator. I'm still completely convinced that this is false.

As for your claim that Christ's passion, death and burial are to be taken literally, but his resurrection allegorically, you don't support this with any argument that is clear to me. In the gospels Christ's resurrection seems to be related as literally as the other events. And the whole Christian religion—its *truth*—rests on this article of the resurrection. Take this away and the mission of Christ Jesus collapses, as does his heavenly teaching. You must have noticed how much trouble Christ took, after rising from the grave, to convince his disciples of the truth of the resurrection, properly so called. Wanting to turn all those things into allegories is the same as wanting to undermine the truth of the whole Gospel narrative.

I wanted to convey these few remarks to you again, in accordance with my freedom of philosophising, which I earnestly beseech you to take in good part.

Very soon I shall write to you about the studies and activities of the Royal Society, if God grants me life and health.

80. from von Tschirnhaus, 2.v.1676:

First, I have great difficulty conceiving how the existence of bodies with motions and shapes is to be demonstrated *a priori*. For in extension considered absolutely—·i.e. considered in itself, *just* as extension·—there are no shapes or motions.

Secondly, I would like to learn from you how these words in your letter on the infinite [page 17] are to be understood: 'But they don't infer that such things exceed every number because of how many parts they have.' It seems to me that mathematicians *do* always demonstrate concerning such infinites that the number of the parts is so great that it exceeds every assignable number. And in the example of the two circles that you use there, you seem not to show what you said you would show. You do show that they don't infer infinity from •the excessive size of the intervening space, or from •our not knowing its maximum and minimum; but you don't demonstrate, as you wanted to, that they don't infer it from •the multiplicity of the parts.

Leibniz tells me that the tutor of the Dauphin of France, a man of outstanding learning named Huet, is going to write about the truth of human religion, and will refute your *Treatise on Theology and Politics*.

81. to von Tschirnhaus, 5.v.1676:

What I said in my letter concerning the infinite, that they don't infer the infinity of the parts from their multiplicity, is evident from the fact that if it were inferred from their multiplicity, this would be a multiplicity than which we could not conceive a greater; and it isn't. In the whole space between two circles with different centres we conceive twice as great a multiplicity of parts as in half of the same space. Yet the number of parts, both in the half and in the whole space, is greater than every assignable number.

Next, from extension as Descartes conceives it—i.e. as a mass at rest—it is not only 'difficult' but completely impossible to demonstrate the existence of bodies. Matter at rest, left to itself, will continue to be at rest; it won't move unless a more powerful external cause moves it. That's why I didn't hesitate to affirm that Descartes's principles of natural things are useless, not to say absurd.

82. from von Tschirnhaus, 23.vi.1676:

I would like you to do me the favour of indicating how, according to your meditations, the variety of things can be derived *a priori* from the concept of extension. You'll remember Descartes's opinion about this: he holds that he can't deduce it from extension except by supposing that it was brought about in extension by a motion aroused by God. So I don't think he deduces the existence of bodies from matter that is at rest; saying that he *does* involves disregarding his supposition of God as a mover. For you haven't shown how ·the existence of a variety of bodies· must follows *a priori* from God's essence, something that Descartes thought surpassed man's grasp.

So I ask you this because I know that your views are different. I don't think you would have written so obscurely about this if you didn't have weighty reasons for not coming into the open about it; but be assured that whether you indicate something to me openly or whether you conceal it, my feeling towards you will always remain unchanged.

My reason for particularly wanting an explanation of this is as follows. I have always observed in mathematics that from anything considered in itself, i.e. anything's definition, we can deduce just one property, no more; to deduce more properties we have to relate the thing in question to other things, and then from the conjunction of the definitions of these things new properties do result.

Consider for example the circumference of a circle: from that alone I can't infer anything except that it exists everywhere like itself, or is uniform, a property that does indeed mark it off from all other curves. . . . But if I relate it to other things, such as the radii drawn from the centre, or two lines intersecting ·within the circle·, etc., I shall certainly be able to deduce more properties from this.

Actually, this seems to be somehow contrary to proposition 16 of Part 1, which is nearly the most important proposition in that part of your treatise. In this proposition it is taken for granted that many properties can be deduced from a thing's given definition. This seems to me impossible unless we relate the thing in question to other things. And it has the further result that I can't see how the infinite variety of bodies can arise from any attribute considered by itself, e.g. from extension. Perhaps you think that this can't be inferred from one ·attribute· considered by itself, but can be inferred from all ·the attributes· taken together; if so, I would like you to explain how this would be conceived.

83. to von Tschirnhaus, 15.vii.1676:

You ask whether the variety of things can be demonstrated *a priori* from the concept of extension alone. I believe I have already shown clearly enough that this is impossible, and that therefore Descartes defines *matter* badly by •extension, and that it must be defined by •an attribute that expresses eternal and infinite essence. I may some day discuss these matters more clearly with you, if I live long enough; up to now I haven't been able to set out anything concerning them in an orderly way.

You add that from a thing's definition, considered in itself, we can deduce only one property; this may be true of very simple things, i.e. beings of reason (under which I include shapes also), but not for real beings. From my defining *God* as ·a being to whose essence existence pertains· I infer many of his properties—that he exists necessarily, that he is unique, immutable, infinite, etc. I could give many other examples, but this one will do for now.

Finally, please inquire whether Huet's treatise—the one against the *Treatise on Theology and Politics* that you wrote me about earlier—has been published already, and whether you'll be able to send me a copy. Also, do you know yet what has recently been discovered concerning refraction? [This may refer to either or both of two then-recent discoveries: Newton's, that a prism resolves a beam of light into coloured beams with different indices of refraction; Bartholinus's, that light entering a crystal of Iceland spar emerges as two refracted rays.—note based on A. Wolf's edition of the correspondence.]

84. to a friend, date unknown:

Yesterday I received your welcome letter. I thank you heartily for your scrupulous concern for me. I would not let this

opportunity go by, if I weren't busy with a certain matter that I think to be more useful and that I believe will be more pleasing to you—namely, putting together the Political Treatise that I began some time ago, at your suggestion.

Six chapters of this Treatise are already complete. The first contains a kind of introduction to the work as a whole; the second treats of natural right; the third, of the right of the supreme powers; the fourth, what political affairs depend on the governance of the supreme powers; fifth, what is the ultimate or highest thing society can consider; and sixth, how a monarchic State ought to be set up so as not to fall into Tyranny.

I am now writing the seventh chapter, in which I demonstrate methodically all the main points of the sixth chapter concerning the order of a well-ordered monarchy. Then I shall move on to the aristocratic State and the popular State, and finally to the laws and other particular questions concerning politics.

Notes on the other correspondents

Pieter Balling (c. 1664–1669): A Mennonite and and enemy of dogmatism. He was the agent in Amsterdam of various Spanish merchants, knew Spanish well, and may have come to know Spinoza through that. He was the translator into Dutch of Spinoza's *Descartes' 'Principles'* and *Metaphysical Thoughts*, and perhaps of other works as well.

Willem van Blijenbergh (1632–1696): A grain broker by profession, but also an ardent would-be theologian and metaphysician. Spinoza's initial warm welcome to him would have been more cautious if he had known that van Blijenbergh had already published a work entitled

> Theology and Religion defended against the views of Atheists, wherein it is shown by natural and clear arguments that God has implanted and revealed a Religion, that God wants to be worshipped in accordance with it. . . etc.

In 1674 he wrote another such book, including 'a refutation of' Spinoza's *Treatise on Theology and Politics*—'that blasphemous book'. Spinoza's final letter to him (27) is notably gentle and temperate.

Johannes Bouwmeester (1630–1680): A close friend of Meyer and of Spinoza. Trained in medicine and philosophy at the University of Leiden, he was a fellow member with Meyer of the society Nil volentibus arduum [Latin: Nothing is difficult for the willing] and codirector of the Amsterdam theater in 1677.

Hugo Boxel: High-level bureaucrat and then governor of his native city Gorkhum.

Robert Boyle (1627–1691): Son of an Earl, and the leading British scientist of the period between Bacon and Newton. He belonged to a group of Baconians that was later incorporated as the Royal Society. His reputation as a scientist is most securely based on work that led him to the law relating the pressure and volume of gases. He held that science was not only compatible with Christianity but encouraged an appreciation of God's works, and he wrote extensively agaionst atheism.

Albert Burgh: Son of an influential member of the governing classes. When he converted to Roman Catholicism, his parents asked their friend Spinoza to intervene, which he did, though unsuccessfully.

J. Ludovicus Fabritius (1632–1697): Professor of philosophy and theology at the University of Heidelberg. The Elector Palatine, on whose behalf he wrote letter 47, was Karl Ludwig, brother of Queen Christina of Sweden, Descartes's patroness.

Johan George Graevius (1632–?): Professor of rhetoric in the university of Utrecht.

Johannes Hudde 1628–1704: A student at the University of Leyden in the 1650s; joined a research group that translated Descartes's *Geometry* into Latin and published it with three appendices, one by Hudde. Did significant work in mathematics, optics, and probability theory. Mayor of Amsterdam (1672–1702).

Jarig Jelles (?–1683): A spice merchant in Amsterdam, he entrusted his business to a manager and devoted himself to the pursuit of knowledge. He was one of those who persuaded Spinoza to publish his *Descartes's 'Principles'*, and he paid the cost of publication.

Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716): The most distinguished European philosopher of the generation after Spinoza's.

Lodewijk Meyer (1629–1681): Studied philosophy and medicine at the University of Leiden, where he became an ardent Cartesian. After receiving doctorates in both subjects he practised medicine in Amsterdam and figured in the literary world—wrote poems and plays, assisted with an important dictionary, directed the Amsterdam theater.

Henry Oldenburg (c. 1618–1677: Born in Bremen, where he studied theology. Most of his adult life was spent in England, where he was occupied partly in diplomatic work, partly in teaching (one of his pupils being a nephew of Boyle), but mainly with the secretaryship of the Royal Society, a position he held from 1662 until his death.

Jacob Ostens (1625–1678): A Collegiant [see Glossary] and surgeon.

G. H. Schuller (1631–79): A medical practitioner in Amsterdam. Spinoza consulted him medically sometimes, including during his final illness; and Schuller was with Spinoza when he died.

Nicholas Steno (1638–1687): Physician and research biologist; converted to Roman Catholicism in 1667.

Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus (1631–1708): A German Count who studied in Holland and served as a volunteer in the Dutch army. He had many scientific activities and interests, and is also credited with being the first European to find out how to make porcelain.

Lambert de Velthuysen (1622–1685): Studied philosophy, theology and medicine at the University of Utrecht, and practised medicine there. His liberal views in religion brought him into conflict with the dominant church, but he couldn't see his way to agreeing with Spinoza.

Simon de Vries (c. 1633–1667): An Amsterdam merchant and Collegiant [see Glossary]. When his death was approaching, de Vries wanted to make Spinoza his sole heir; Spinoza declined, because the money ought to go to de Vries's brother, though he did eventually accept a small annuity—half the amount offered—from the brother.