

# Treatise on Theology and Politics

Showing that piety and civil peace are not harmed by allowing freedom of thought,  
but are destroyed by the abolition of freedom of thought.

Benedict (or 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 square brackets in normal-sized type. —Numerals like [5] embedded in the text refer to page-numbers in volume 3 of the Gebhardt edition of Spinoza's works. That's to help you connect this version with other translations. (The likes of [..27] refer to Gebhardt page-numbers in the immediately preceding passage that has been omitted.) Cross-references include the word 'page(s)', and refer to numbers at the foot of each page.

•The work's Latin title is *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* = 'A Theological/Political Treatise'. The political part of the work starts with chapter 16.

•Spinoza worked mainly with the Hebrew Bible, known as *Tanakh*; so wherever it is plausible to do so, Old Testament quotations will be from a standard English translation of that (Jewish Publication Society, 1985). Verse-numbers don't always exactly match those in non-Jewish Bibles.

•Many of Spinoza's quotations from the Bible are given first in Hebrew and then in Latin. Throughout this version, the Hebrew is ignored and the Latin translated.

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**Chapter 12:**  
**The true original text of the divine law.**  
**Why Scripture can be called 'sacred' and 'the word of God'.**  
**Scripture as containing the word of God has reached us uncorrupted**

·GOD'S ORIGINAL TEXT·

[..158] Those who think that the Bible just as it stands is a letter written to men on earth by God in heaven are sure to cry out that I have sinned against the Holy Ghost by maintaining that

- the word of God is faulty, mutilated, corrupted, and inconsistent, that
- we have only fragments of it, and that
- the original text of the contract God made with the Jews has been lost.

But I'm sure that their protests would stop immediately if they would only weigh the matter carefully. Reason itself *and* the sayings of the prophets and apostles openly proclaim that God's eternal word, his contract, and true religion, are inscribed by divine agency in the hearts of men, i.e. in the human mind, and that *this* is God's true original text that he has stamped with his seal, i.e. with the idea of himself as an image of his divinity.

To the first Jews. religion [159] was imparted in writing, as a law, because at that time they were regarded as infants. But later Moses (*Deuteronomy* 30:6) and *Jeremiah* 31:33) proclaimed that a time was coming when God would inscribe his law in their hearts. So back then it was appropriate for the Jews, especially the Sadducees, to stand up for a law written in tablets; but it's entirely *inappropriate* for those who have the law written in their minds.

So if you'll just *attend* to these things you'll find nothing

in what I have said that contradicts or could •weaken the word of God, or true religion and faith. On the contrary, you'll find that I •strengthen it. . . . If that were not so I would have decided to say nothing at all about these matters, and to escape all the difficulties by cheerfully conceding that the most profound mysteries are hidden in Scripture! It's a good thing I wasn't led to make that concession so as to keep out of trouble, because the belief in deep mysteries in Scripture has led to intolerable superstition and to other ruinously bad consequences that I spoke about at the start of Chapter 7 [page 60]. And in any case religion doesn't *need* any superstitious embellishments ·such as the pretence that it is full of mystery·. On the contrary, tricking it out with such inventions *diminishes* its splendour.

But they'll say: 'Although the divine law is inscribed in our hearts, Scripture *is* nonetheless the word of God; so you are as wrong to say that •Scripture is mutilated and distorted as it would be to say that •the word of God is mutilated etc.' Against that, I am afraid that in their excessive zeal to be holy they may turn religion into superstition, and start to worship substitutes and images—ink and paper—in place of the word of God. I do know this: I haven't said anything unworthy of Scripture or of the word of God, for I haven't maintained anything that I haven't demonstrated to be true by the most compelling arguments. So I can confidently assert that nothing I have said comes anywhere near to being impious.

No doubt some profane men to whom religion is a burden will be manage to treat my work as a license to sin. They'll infer from what I have written that Scripture is faulty and falsified everywhere, and therefore has no authority, having no *reason* for this but merely wanting to surrender to their sensual pleasure. There is no defence against such people. As the saying goes: you can't say anything so correctly that no-one can distort it through misinterpretation! Anyone who wants to wallow in sensual pleasures can easily find a reason for doing so wherever he likes. The •men long ago who had the original texts and the ark of the covenant were no better or more obedient; nor indeed were •the prophets and [160] apostles themselves. Everyone, Jew and gentile alike, has always been the same; virtue has *always* been extremely rare.

•WHAT IT MEANS TO CALL SCRIPTURE 'SACRED'•

Still, to remove any lingering doubts I should show here •what it can mean to label as 'sacred' and 'divine' a silent thing such as Scripture; •what 'the word of God' really is, and that it isn't contained in a certain number of books; and lastly •that Scripture in its role as teaching the things needed for obedience and salvation *couldn't* have been corrupted. That will make it easy for everyone to see that I haven't said anything against the word of God and haven't given any opening for impiety.

We label as 'sacred' and 'divine' anything that is meant for the practice of piety and religion, and it will stop being sacred when men stop using it in a religious manner: at the moment when •they stop being •pious, •it stops being •sacred. And if they •go even further, and• dedicate the same thing to impious purposes, then something that was initially sacred become unclean and profane. [Spinoza gives an example of a 'house of God' where God was worshipped which became a 'house of iniquity' because idols were worshipped in it.]

Here's another example, which illustrates the point very clearly. Words have a definite meaning only from their use. If some words are set out in such a way that, according to their usage (•i.e. to their customary meaning•), they move the readers to devotion, then those words will be sacred; and a *book* can be sacred in that way. But if, later on, usage changes so that the words have no meaning, or if the book comes to be completely neglected (whether from malice or because men no longer need it), then the words and the book will •no longer count as 'sacred' because they are• no longer put to any holy use. Finally, if. . . meanings were to change in such a way that the formerly sacred text came to have an opposite meaning, then the words and the book would become unclean and profane.

From this it follows that nothing is *intrinsically* sacred or profane; a thing's status as sacred or profane is purely a matter of how the thing relates to the mind. Many passages in Scripture clearly confirm this. To take just one example: Jeremiah says (7:14) that the Jews of his time *wrongly* called the temple of Solomon 'the temple of God'. The name 'God' (he explains later in that chapter), [161] could be associated with that temple only so long as it was used by men who worship God and preserve justice. But if it was often used by murderers, thieves, idolaters, and other wicked men, then it was rather a den of criminals.

I have often been puzzled that Scripture never tells us what happened to the ark of the covenant. But we know this much: it perished, or was burned with the temple, even though the Hebrews had nothing more sacred, nothing they revered more highly. Well, it's the same with Scripture: it is sacred and its utterances are divine just as long as it moves men to devotion toward God. But if they come to neglect it, as the Jews once did, it is nothing but paper and ink, deprived of its religious status and liable to be corrupted. So

if it then is corrupted, or if it perishes, it's not true that the word of God is corrupted or perishes, just as it wouldn't have been true to say in the time of Jeremiah that the temple, which until then had been the temple of God, perished in flames.

Jeremiah says the same thing about the law itself. For he reproaches the impious people of his time as follows:

How can you say 'We are wise, and we possess the instruction of the Lord'? Assuredly, for naught has the pen laboured, for naught the scribes! [*Jeremiah* 8:8]

That is: you are wrong to say that you have the law of God in your hands, after you have made it null and void! Similarly, when Moses broke the first tablets [*Exodus* 32:19], what he angrily hurled from his hands and broke was not •the word of God—who could even *think* this of Moses and of the word of God?—but only •stones. These stone tablets had been sacred, because they were inscribed with the contract by which the Jews had obliged themselves to obey God; but after the Jews had rendered that contract null and void by worshipping a •golden• calf, the tablets no longer had any holiness. . . .

So it's not surprising that •Moses' first originals don't exist any longer, and that •the Books that we do still possess have undergone the things I described above, given that •the true original of the divine contract, the holiest thing of all, could totally perish. My critics should stop accusing me of impiety. I have said nothing that opposes or debases the word of God. If my critics are legitimately angry about anything, it should be about those ancient Jews whose wicked conduct took away the religious status of God's ark, temple, law, and every other [162] sacred thing, making them liable to corruption. And if the situation is as Paul said it was—

Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but with the

Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone but in the fleshy tables of the heart (2 Corinthians 3:3)

—they should stop worshipping the ink-written word and being so anxious about it.—I think that explains well enough in what way Scripture is to be considered sacred and divine.

•WHAT THE 'WORD OF GOD' IS•

Now we must see how to understand properly the phrase 'the word of God'. The relevant Hebrew noun means 'word', 'utterance', 'edict', and 'thing'. And I explained in chapter 1 what it means when a thing is said in Hebrew to be 'of God'. Putting all this together we can easily understand what Scripture means by 'God's word' (utterance, edict, thing). So I needn't repeat it all here, or repeat what I showed regarding miracles in the third segment of chapter 6. All I need to do here is to call attention to the main points, so that what I want to say about these matters here may be better understood. **(1)** When the phrase 'the word of God' is applied to something other than God, it refers to the divine law that I discussed in chapter 4, i.e. universal religion, the religion common to the whole human race. On this see *Isaiah* 1:10, where Isaiah teaches the true way of living, which consists not in ceremonies but in loving kindness and a true heart, and which he interchangeably labels as 'God's law' and 'God's word'. **(2)** The phrase 'the word of God' can also be meant metaphorically, as referring to •the order of nature itself (and of •so-called• 'fate', because that really depends on and follows from the eternal decree of the divine nature), and especially to •what the prophets had foreseen of this •natural• order (in this context the label 'word of God' label reflects the fact that the prophets didn't perceive future things through natural causes, but as decisions or decrees of God). **(3)** The phrase 'the word of God' is also used as a label for every proclamation of a prophet, if he had perceived it by his own special power or prophetic gift, and

not by the natural light that is open to everyone (·and the label 'word of God' kicks in· especially ·strongly· because the prophets usually regarded God as a lawgiver, as I showed in chapter 4).

For these three reasons, then, Scripture is called 'the word of God': **(1)** because it teaches the true religion whose eternal author is God, **(2)** because it reports predictions of future things as God's decrees, and **(3)** because those who were really its authors mostly taught not by the common natural light, but by a certain special light [163] and introduced God as saying these things. Scripture contains many other things that are merely historical, and are perceived by the natural light, but the whole thing gets called 'the word of God' on the strength of the most valuable part of its content.

So we can easily see why God should be understood to be the author of the Bible. It's because of the true religion that is taught in it, not because he had ·written· a certain number of Books for men to read!

And this also lets us know why the Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments. It is because before the coming of Christ

- the prophets usually preached religion as the law of their own country, on the strength of the contract ·between God and the Jews· entered into in the time of Moses;

but after the coming of Christ

- the apostles preached that same religion to everyone as a universal law, solely on the strength of Christ's suffering.

[The next sentence expands what Spinoza wrote, in ways that ·dots· can't easily indicate.] What makes the Books of the New Testament *new* is not •their offering new doctrine, or •their constituting a record of a new contract, or •the universal religion's being new (because it *wasn't*, except in the trivial sense of being

new to those who hadn't known it; it wasn't new in relation to the world—'He was in the world and yet the world did not know him' (*John* 1:10)).

So even if we had fewer Old and New Testament Books than we do, that wouldn't deprive us of the word of God (i.e. of true religion); just as we don't think we are *now* deprived of it by our not having the Book of the Law, which was guarded scrupulously in the temple as the original text of the contract, and the Book of the Wars, the Book of the Chronologies, and many other very important writings out of which the Old Testament was constructed by selection and re-arrangement.

There are five further arguments for this conclusion.

**(1)** The Books of each Testament were written not

- all at the same time, •for all ages, •by an explicit command ·from God·,

but rather

- at different times, •for readers in particular situations, •by historical accident.

This is clearly shown by the callings of the ·Old Testament· prophets (who were called to warn the impious people among their contemporaries), and also by the letters of the ·New Testament· apostles ·each of which is addressed to a particular audience which the writer names·.

**(2)** It is one thing to understand Scripture and the mind of the prophets, and a different thing to understand the mind of God, i.e. the truth of the matter itself. This follows from what I showed in chapter 2 about the prophets and in chapter 6, where I reapplied all that to histories and miracles, reaching conclusions about •them that one couldn't possibly apply to •the biblical passages that treat true religion and true virtue. [164]

**(3)** The Books of the Old Testament were chosen from many ·candidates·, and were eventually assembled and

approved by a council of Pharisees, as I showed in chapter 10. And the Books of the New Testament were also added to the canon—the approved list—by the decisions of certain councils, which also rejected as inauthentic a number of other books that many people considered sacred. The members of these councils—both of the Pharisees and of the Christians—were not prophets but only teachers and experts; but *of course* in making their choices they had the word of God as a standard. So they must have been acquainted with the word of God from the outset.

(4) As I said in chapter 11, the apostles wrote not as prophets but as teachers, and chose the teaching style that they judged would be easier for the pupils they wanted to teach at that time; from which it follows (as I also concluded at the end of that chapter) that their letters contain many things that we now don't *need* for religious purposes.

(5) [Curley remarks that this next paragraph contains Spinoza's most explicit discussion of the Gospels from the standpoint of biblical criticism. Why is it buried in the middle of a chapter whose title doesn't indicate that it contains any such thing? Curley suggests: because Spinoza wanted not to offend unnecessarily.] There are four evangelists in the New Testament. Who could believe that God aimed to tell Christ's story to men by having it written four times over? It's true that some things are contained in one gospel that aren't in another, so that one often helps us to understand another; but we shouldn't infer from *that* that everything reported in *any of* these four works was necessary for men to know, and that God chose the evangelists to write their works so that the story of Christ would be better understood. For each of them, in his choice of how and where and what he preached, was simply trying *to tell the story of Christ clearly—not to explain the others!* If we now sometimes understand them better by comparing them with one another, that happens by chance and only

in a few passages. Even if we knew nothing about those passages, the story would still be equally clear, and men no less blessed.

·SCRIPTURE QUA WORD OF GOD COULD NOT HAVE BEEN CORRUPTED·

Through these arguments I have shown that Scripture is properly called 'the word of God' only in relation to religion, i.e. in relation to the universal divine law. I have one more thing to show, namely that Scripture in its role as the word of God (properly so-called) is not faulty, distorted, or mutilated. When I call something 'faulty', 'distorted' and 'mutilated' I mean that it is written and constructed so badly that its meaning can't be *worked out from linguistic usage or gathered solely from Scripture.* [165] I'm not saying that the parts of Scripture that express the divine law have *been free from merely linguistic mishaps*, always using the same accents, the same letters and the same words. The question of whether that is true. . . can be left to those who superstitiously worship the ink on paper. My claim is just this: the only thing in any *biblical* statement that we have any reason to call 'divine' has reached us without corruption, even if the words that first expressed it have been changed. Such verbal changes don't take anything at all away from the Scripture's divinity. Scripture would be equally divine if it were written in other words or another language.

So no-one can doubt that we have received the divine law pure and uncorrupted. Scripture itself has made clear to us what its *top teaching* [Latin *summa*] is, and there's nothing difficult or ambiguous about it. It is

**•TT: To love God above all else, and to love your neighbour as yourself.**

This can't be an interpolation *in a document that shouldn't have contained it*, or something written by a hasty or erring pen. For if Scripture didn't teach *this* it would have to teach

everything else differently, because TT is the foundation of the whole religion; remove it, and the structure immediately collapses; which means that a Scripture without TT wouldn't be the book we are speaking about. So this is a secure result: Scripture has always taught TT, and if anything had happened to corrupt its meaning this would have been immediately noticed by everyone. If someone did that maliciously, his wicked conduct would be evident. [The doctrine in question is here called 'TT' for convenience. Spinoza has no name for it.]

Since the foundational teaching TT is uncorrupted, the same must be true for the other teachings that uncontroversially follow from it, and are also foundational, such as that

- God exists;
- God provides for all;
- God is omnipotent;
- By God's decree things go well with those who observe their religious duties and badly with the unprincipled; and
- Our salvation depends only on God's grace.

Scripture clearly teaches all these things everywhere, and must always have taught them, because otherwise all its other teachings would be hollow and baseless. The remaining moral commands—

- Defend justice,
- Aid the poor,
- Kill no-one,
- Covet nothing belonging to someone else,

and so on—must be regarded as equally uncorrupted, because they follow quite evidently from the universal foundation TT. None of these things could be corrupted by malicious interference with texts, or destroyed by age; for if any of these teachings were to be destroyed, its universal

foundation TT would immediately have taught it again! [166] This especially holds for the teaching of loving kindness, which is commended all through both Testaments in the strongest terms. As for the possibility of someone's having *deliberately* corrupted this teaching: There's no limit to the badness of the crimes that have been committed, and yet no-one ever tries to •destroy the laws to excuse his own crimes, or to •parade something impious as an eternal and salutary teaching. That's because man's nature is so constituted that anyone—prince or pauper—who does something shameful is eager to decorate his action with details that will get people to think he hasn't done anything contrary to justice or propriety. So I conclude that the whole universal divine law that Scripture teaches—the *whole* of it, without exception—has come to us uncorrupted.

There are other things that we also can't doubt were handed down to us in good faith, namely the gist of the historical narratives in Scripture, because they were very well known to everyone. The ordinary people among the Jews were long ago accustomed to sing the past history of their nation in psalms. Also, the gist of the deeds of Christ and his suffering were immediately spread throughout the whole Roman Empire. It's not remotely credible that later generations altered important parts of these narratives before handing them on to their posterity—not unless this deception was known and accepted by almost everyone, and that is incredible too.

So if anything has been interpolated in Scripture, or is faulty in it, that must concern matters other than TT and the doctrines that follow from it. For example, •some detail in of a narrative or a prophecy, •inserted or modified• so as to move the people to greater devotion; •some miracle, •interpolated• so as to torment the philosophers, or—after schismatics had introduced theological theories into religion—•some

bit of theory, ·inserted· by someone who was willing to misuse divine authority to prop up one of his own inventions. But it doesn't matter much for our salvation whether such

distortions have occurred. I shall show this in detail in the next chapter, though I think it is already established by things I have already said, especially in chapter 2.

**Chapter 13:**  
**Scripture teaches only the simplest matters.**  
**It aims only at obedience, and teaches nothing about God's nature**  
**except what men can imitate by how they live**

I showed in chapter 2 that the prophets had only a special power to •imagine things and not a special power to •understand them, that God revealed to them only the simplest things and not any secrets of philosophy, adjusting his revelations to their preconceived opinions. And I showed in chapter 5 that Scripture hands things down and teaches them as each person can most easily take them in: rather than

deducing things from axioms and definitions, and connecting them with one another in that way,  
 what it does is

to speak simply, and (aiming to induce trust) to back up what it says by experience, i.e. by miracles and historical narratives, relating these matters in a style and vocabulary that are most apt to move people's hearts.

On this see chapter 6, regarding the things demonstrated under heading 3 [pages 56–57]. Finally, in chapter 7 I showed that the difficulty of understanding Scripture lies only in its language, and not in the loftiness of its theme. To these

points we can add one more: the prophets preached not to the learned few but to *all Jews*, and they usually taught the doctrine of the Gospel in the churches—the places where everyone met.

From all this it follows that what Scripture has to teach doesn't involve philosophical topics or high-level theorizing; it offers only the simplest material that can be taken in by anyone, however slow. And yet some people (I spoke about them earlier) •see Scripture as containing mysteries so profound that no human language can explain them, and •have introduced into religion so many issues in theoretical philosophy that they make the Church look like a university, and make religion look like a learned society—or a debate within one. What sort of minds can these people have? But really I suppose it's not surprising that men who boast of having a supernatural light don't defer to the knowledge possessed by philosophers, who have nothing but the natural light! What *would* be surprising is their having any *new* items of theory to offer. ·I stress 'new' because they *do* present plenty of *old* stuff·, things that had been commonplaces among the [168]

pagan philosophers (although the theologians I am criticising here say that the pagan philosophers were blind!). Look at the writings of these theologians to see what mysteries they have found hidden in Scripture, and you'll find *nothing* but the inventions of Aristotle or Plato or their like—things that could be dreamed up by a layman as easily as they could be found by a theologian in Scripture.

I don't of course maintain that absolutely nothing in the way of ·theological· theory is linked to the teaching of Scripture: I cited in chapter 12 some things of this kind as fundamentals of Scripture. All I'm saying is that there aren't many such things, and what ones there are are very simple. I'm now going to show which ones these are, and how they are determined. [Having 'cited some', Spinoza now aims to 'show which ones these are'. This looks odd at first, but isn't really. He gave some *samples* in chapter 12—'God exists' and 'God is omnipotent' and so on (page 106)—and now he's going to characterize *in general terms* the class of theoretical items that have an important role in Scripture.] This will be easy to do now that it's established that the purpose of Scripture is not to teach any matters of high-level intellectual theory ·but rather to present what I have called its *summa* or 'top teaching', namely the injunction to love God above all else and to love one's neighbour as oneself. Given that this is its purpose, we can easily judge that all Scripture requires from men is *obedience*, and that what it condemns is not ignorance but *stubborn resistance*.

Now, obedience to God consists only in •love towards one's neighbour. *Only* that? Yes—Paul says in *Romans* 13:8 that if as a matter of obedience to God you love your neighbour, then you have fulfilled the law. It follows from this that the only *knowledge* that Scripture endorses [Latin *commendari*] is whatever men need if they are to obey God according to •this prescription, and without which men would fall short in the discipline of obedience. It also

follows that Scripture doesn't touch on other theoretical matters—whether in theology or natural science—that don't directly *tend* toward this end; so all such items are to be separated from revealed religion.

I repeat: everyone can easily see these things. Still, because the settlement of the whole of religion depends on this, I want to go through it all in greater detail and to explain it more clearly. For this purpose I need to show first that

(1) although the faithful all have obedience, they *don't* all have a detailed knowledge of God as a topic of theological theory.

I must show also that

(2) what God (through the prophets) has required *everyone* to know—what *everyone* is obliged to know—is nothing but the knowledge of his divine justice and loving kindness.

Both of these things are easily demonstrated from Scripture itself.

(1) The first point follows most evidently from *Exodus* 6:3, where God indicates the special grace he has given to Moses by saying to him: 'I appeared [169] to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as "El Shaddai", but I did not make myself known to them by my name "Jehova".' [Spinoza starts his explanation of this passage with a point about the Hebrew language. The phrase translated here as 'God almighty' means something like 'God who is •sufficient'; so it is a general noun phrase, which refers to God through just one of his attributes, namely his giving to each person what is •sufficient for that person. Similarly with other Hebrew nouns and adjectives applying to God; the only exception—the only one that the Hebrews understood as expressing God's intrinsic nature rather than his relation to created things—is the represented here by 'Jehovah'. [In the English translation of the Hebrew Bible it is left

untranslated, and a footnote says that it is traditionally not spoken aloud, being replaced in speech by *Adonai* = ‘the Lord’.] The explanation continues:]

God tells Moses that he (God) wasn’t known to Moses’ forefathers by the name ‘Jehovah’, from which it follows that they didn’t know any attribute of God that reveals his intrinsic nature, but only attributes that express his power as is manifested through visible things—his effects and his promises. In telling Moses this, God is *not* accusing those patriarchs of lacking faith; on the contrary, he is praising their trustfulness and faith, which led them to believe God’s promises to be valid and lasting even when they didn’t have the special knowledge of God that Moses had. . . . So there we have it:

The patriarchs didn’t know the special name of God, and God tells Moses this fact to praise their simplicity of heart and faith, and at the same time to put on record the special grace he was granting to Moses.

This very obviously implies my first conclusion, namely that •men are not obliged by a •divine• command [170] to know God’s attributes, and that •this knowledge is a special gift granted only to certain of the faithful.

There’s no point in piling up biblical evidence for this. *Anyone* can see that knowledge of God wasn’t evenly distributed throughout the faithful. And *anyone* can see that no-one can •be knowledgeable on command, any more than he •can live on command. It’s possible for all people—men, women and children—to be equally obedient, but not for all people to be equally knowledgeable.

Possible objection: ‘Indeed it isn’t necessary to •understand God’s attributes, but it’s necessary to •believe in them, this being a simple belief not backed up by any demonstration.’ Rubbish! Invisible things are the objects only of the mind, •not of the senses•; so the only ‘eyes’ they

can be seen by are, precisely, demonstrations. So someone who doesn’t have demonstrations doesn’t see anything at all in these matters. If they repeat something they have heard about such things, that doesn’t come from their minds or reveal anything about their minds, any more than do the words of a parrot or an automaton, which speaks without any mind or meaning.

Before I go on, I have to explain why it is often said in *Genesis* that the Patriarchs called God by the name ‘Jehovah’, which looks like a flat contradiction of what I have just said •in the indented passage three paragraphs back•. Well, if we attend to the things I showed in chapter 8, we’ll find it easy to reconcile these statements. In that chapter I showed that the writer of the Pentateuch refers to things and places by the names they were well known to have •at the time of writing, not the names they had had •at the earlier times he is writing *about*. When *Genesis* reports the Patriarchs as referring to God as ‘Jehovah’, that’s not because that was *their* name for him, but because this name was accorded the greatest reverence by the Jews. We’re forced to this conclusion by the fact that our passage from *Exodus* says explicitly that God wasn’t known to the Patriarchs by this name, and also because in *Exodus* 3:13 Moses asks what God’s name is. If anyone else had previously known it, then Moses too would have known it. So we are forced to the conclusions that I have argued for: •the faithful Patriarchs did not know this name of God, and •the knowledge of God is something God *gives* us, not something he commands us to have.

It is time now to pass to **(2)** [introduced a page back], namely the thesis that the only knowledge that God through the prophets asks men to have of him is the knowledge of his divine justice and loving kindness, i.e. attributes of God that men can imitate by how they live their lives. [171] Jeremiah

teaches this most explicitly. For in *Jeremiah 22:15*...he speaks of someone as having done justice and judged the right of the poor and the needy, and adds that Jehovah says: *Doing these things is knowing me*. Another equally clear passage is this: 'Only in this should one glory: in his earnest devotion to me. For I Jehovah act with kindness, justice and equity in the world, for in these I delight—says Jehovah' (*Jeremiah 9:23*). I draw the same conclusion from *Exodus 34:6–7*, where Moses wants to see God and to come to know him, and God reveals only those of his attributes that display divine justice and loving kindness. And there is a passage that I'll discuss later [page 113], but want also to highlight here, in which John, because no-one has seen God, explains God only through loving kindness, and concludes that whoever has loving kindness really *has* God and comes to *know* God (·1 *John 4:7–8, 12–16*·).

So we see that Jeremiah, Moses and John sum up the knowledge of God each person is obliged to have by locating it only in this: that God is supremely just and supremely merciful, i.e. that he is the unique model of the true life. Which is just what I have been maintaining. And then there's the fact that Scripture doesn't •explicitly define God, •tell us to accept any attributes of God except the two I have just mentioned, or •explicitly commend any other attributes as it does those. From all this I conclude that

faith and revealed religion have nothing to do with intellectual knowledge of God, knowledge of his nature as it is in itself—a nature that men can't imitate by living in a certain way and can't take as a model in working out how to live.

So men can be completely mistaken about this without being wicked.

So it's not in the least surprising that God adjusted his revelations to fit the prophets' imaginations and preconceived

opinions, and that the faithful have favoured different opinions about God, as I showed in chapter 2 that they do, with many examples. Nor is it surprising that the Sacred Books everywhere speak so improperly about God,

attributing to him hands, feet, eyes, [172] ears, a mind, and movement, as well as emotions such as jealousy, compassion, and so on; depicting him as a judge, and as sitting in the heavens on a royal throne with Christ at his right hand.

The biblical Books speak according to the level of understanding of the general mass of people, whom Scripture is trying to make obedient, not to make learned.

Nevertheless, the general run of theologians have contended that if they could see by the natural light that any of •these things—e.g. God's having hands, feeling compassion, being a judge—are inconsistent with the divine nature, •they would have to be interpreted metaphorically, whereas what escaped their grasp must be accepted literally. [That last clause seems odd and implausible; but it might arise from the theologian's saying that any biblical passage is to be interpreted metaphorically if, *and only if*, the natural light shows that it is inconsistent with God's nature.] But if everything like that in Scripture *had to* be understood metaphorically, that would mean that Scripture was written not for the uneducated multitude of common people, but only for the most learned, and especially for philosophers. Indeed, if it were impious to believe about God the things I have just mentioned, believing them piously and with simplicity of heart, then surely the prophets would have been especially careful *not* to use such expressions, if only out of consideration for the ·intellectual· weakness of the general mass of people. They would have put a premium on clearly and explicitly teaching the indispensable truths about God's attributes. And they haven't in fact done this anywhere.

[This paragraph amplifies what Spinoza wrote, in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't easily indicate. His version of the paragraph is not notably difficult; but it contains an elegant bit of analysis just under its surface, and the present version brings it to the surface.] So when we have the thought that there is something pious (or impious) about a particular person's faith, we shouldn't have it in the form:

•x believes that P, and P is pious (or impious).

It should rather have the form:

•x piously (or impiously) believes that P,

where there's no question of P's containing piety or impiety, and the piety or impiety of x's belief that P consists in *the use*

*he makes of* P. If this belief of his moves him to obedience it is a pious belief; if he gets from it a license to sin or rebel, it is an impious belief. Either way, what counts is the behaviour, not the content of P. It is perfectly possible for someone to believe piously something that is false. For I have shown that the true knowledge of God is not something we are commanded to have; for those who have it, it is a divine *gift*; and the only knowledge of God that God asks men to have is knowledge of his divine justice and loving kindness. And what this knowledge is needed for is not •theory-building endeavours but only •obedience.

## Chapter 14:

### What is faith? Who are the faithful?

#### Settling the foundations of faith, and separating it from philosophy

You don't have to look very hard to be aware that a proper knowledge of faith must involve knowing that

Scripture is adjusted to fit the grasp not only of the prophets but also of the fluctuating and inconstant multitude of the Jews.

Anyone who indiscriminately accepts everything contained in Scripture as universal and unconditional teaching about God, and doesn't understand in detail what comes from adjustment to the grasp of the multitude, will be bound to •confuse the multitude's opinions with divine doctrine, to •peddle human inventions and beliefs as divine teachings, and to •abuse the authority of Scripture.

It's just *obvious* that this—the failure to grasp that not everything in Scripture is meant universally—is the main reason why the followers of the sects teach as doctrines of the faith so many and such contrary opinions, and confirm them by many examples from Scripture—so that it has long been a proverb among the Dutch, *geen ketter sonder letter*, ·meaning 'no heretic without a text'·. The sacred Books were written not by one person only, nor for the people of one age, but by many people of different mentalities, and for men of different ages, over a period of at least two thousand years.

When the followers of the sects make the words of Scripture fit their own opinions, they aren't behaving impiously.

Just as Scripture was once adjusted to fit the grasp of the general mass of people, so also everyone is permitted to adjust it to fit his own opinions, if he sees that this will help him to obey God more wholeheartedly in matters of justice and loving kindness. But I *do* accuse them of impiety when they refuse to allow this same freedom to others, and persecute as God's enemies everyone who does not think as they do, however honest and obediently virtuous they may be. And the impiety of such people goes even further: They love as God's elect those who share their opinions, however poorly those people behave. You can't imagine anything more wicked than that—or more fatal to the State.

We need to get a good grasp of two things concerning faith-related matters:

- How far is each person free [174] to think what he likes?
- Whom should we regard as faithful, even if they think different things?

To answer these questions, we have to get clear about what faith and its fundamentals *are*. That's what I plan to do in this chapter, along with separating faith from philosophy, which is the main purpose of this whole work.

To show these things in an orderly way, let's start by reviewing the chief purpose of the whole of Scripture, because *that* is what will show us the true standard for determining what faith is. As I said in chapter 13, the only purpose of Scripture is to teach obedience. Really, no-one can deny this, for it is *obvious* that neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament is anything but an education in obedience, and that each Testament has only one axiom, namely that men should obey in all sincerity. I showed this in chapter 13, to which I now add another point: Moses didn't try to convince the Israelites by reason; all he wanted was to bind them by a contract, oaths and benefits: he tried to get them to obey

by threatening them with punishment if they didn't obey the laws and promising them rewards if they did. This is all about obedience, not knowledge. And **(1)** what the Gospel teaches is nothing but simple faith—i.e. to believe in God and to revere him—which is just to say: to obey him. In support of something as obvious as this, there's no need for me to heap up Scriptural texts commending obedience—there are plenty of them in each Testament.

**(2)** Next, Scripture itself also lays down—clearly and often—what each person must do if he is to obey God: namely, to love his neighbour, this being the whole law. So there's no denying that someone who loves his neighbour as himself, according to God's command, is really obedient. . . .whereas one who hates his neighbour or fails to help him when he is in need is a stiff-necked rebel.

**(3)** Finally, everyone agrees that Scripture was written and published not only for •learned people but for •all people of every age and kind.

From these •three• considerations alone it clearly follows that the only beliefs that Scriptural command obliges us to have are whatever beliefs are absolutely needed for us to carry out this command •to love our neighbour•. So *this command itself* is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we to settle what the articles of that faith are—to settle what the beliefs are that everyone is obliged to have.

[175] Since this is very obvious, and since everything •that is needed for the faith• can be soundly inferred from this foundation alone, by reason alone, you be the judge of •how so many disagreements could have arisen in the Church, and of •whether they could have had causes other than those I mentioned at the start of chapter 7 [page 60]. Just because these disagreements occur, I have to show here how to determine what the required articles of faith

are, working from the basis that I have discovered. If I don't do this, determining the matter by definite rules, people will rightly think I haven't done much to advance the discussion, and the door will left open to everyone to produce his own favourite candidates for 'necessary as a means to obedience'—especially ones concerning the attributes of God.

To show all of this in an orderly way, I'll start by defining *faith*. According to the foundation that I have laid down, the definition must be this:

*faith* is thinking things about God such that •if you don't believe them your obedience to God is destroyed, and—saying essentially the same thing in a different way—•if you are obedient you do believe them.

This definition is so clear, and follows so plainly from the things I have just demonstrated, that it doesn't need explanation. I'll show ·five· things that follow from it.

**(1)** Faith doesn't bring salvation •all by itself but only •through its bearing on obedience; in other words. 'Faith if it hath not works is dead' (*James* 2:17). On this, see the whole of *James* 2.

**(2)** It follows that anyone who is truly obedient must have a true and saving faith. James says this too: '... I will show you my faith *by* my works' (*James* 2:18). And John says that whoever loves—i.e. loves his neighbour—is born of God and knows God; and that he who doesn't love doesn't know God, for God is loving kindness. (1 *John* 4:7–8)

**(3)** It also follows that we can judge people faithful or unfaithful only on the basis of their works. If the works are good, the people are faithful, however much they may disagree with other faithful people in their beliefs; and if the works are bad, they are unfaithful, however much they may agree in words with other faithful people. Because where there is obedience there must also be faith, and 'faith without works is dead'. [Spinoza adds a somewhat

convoluted account of 1 *John* 4:13, which he says 'explicitly' teaches the doctrine that Spinoza is offering here; **[176]** and also of 1 *John* 2:3–4, which ends with:] 'He who saith, "I know him", and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.'

**(4)** The next thing we can infer from all this is that people who persecute honest men who love justice, on the grounds that they don't share their views about the articles of the faith, are really *Antichrists*. If someone loves justice and loving kindness, that settles it: he is faithful; and anyone who persecutes the faithful is an Antichrist.

**(5)** Finally, it follows that faith doesn't require articles that are •true as much as it does articles that are •pious, i.e. ones that move the heart to obedience. It doesn't matter if many of them are utterly false, so long as the person who accepts them doesn't know they are false. If he does, then he must be a rebel. Why? Because he worships as divine something he knows to be foreign to the divine nature, so he can't possibly be eager to love justice and to obey God. But people can be mistaken from simplicity of heart, and Scripture doesn't condemn ignorance ·or honest doctrinal error·, as I have shown, but only wilful disobedience.

[Spinoza now repeats the core of what he has been saying in this chapter, decorating it with further details. Something that he hasn't said before is this:] The common mentality of men **[177]** is extremely variable, so that a single opinion may move different men in different ways: a doctrine that moves *this* person to pray may move *that* one to laughter and contempt. So there *are* no articles of *universal* faith that honest people could disagree about. Articles of faith can be pious in relation to one person and impious in relation to another, because they have to be judged only by the works ·they lead to·. The only doctrines that belong to the universal faith are the ones that obedience to God absolutely

posits, and the lack of which makes obedience absolutely impossible.

[This says something of the form:

$Bel \rightarrow Ob$  and  $not-Bel \rightarrow not-Ob$ ,

meaning that the belief in question is *sufficient and necessary* for obedience. Spinoza may have thought he had said the same thing in his definition ('*faith* is thinking. . . etc.'. a page back), but he didn't, because his definition has the form:

$not-Bel \rightarrow not-Ob$  and  $Ob \rightarrow Bel$ .

These two are equivalent to one another, and they don't entail  $Bel \rightarrow Ob$ .] As for beliefs that lie outside this essential core of faith: each person knows himself better than anyone else does, so it must be left to him to judge which beliefs will best serve *him* in reinforcing his love of justice. This approach, I think, will leave no room for controversies in the Church.

And I don't shrink from listing the articles of the universal faith, or the basic principles of Scripture as a whole. The things I have shown in chapters 12 and 13 all point to this:

•There is a supreme being, who loves justice and loving kindness; and we shan't be saved unless we obey this being and worship him by practising justice and loving kindness toward our neighbour.

This makes it easy for us to determine what doctrines are essential to the faith. They are just precisely these:

**1.** God exists, i.e. there is a supreme being who is supremely just and merciful, i.e. is a model of true life. Anyone who doesn't know or doesn't believe that God exists can't obey him or acknowledge him as a judge.

**2.** God is unique; for it's undeniable that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration and love towards God. Devotion, admiration and love arise only from something's being excellent by comparison with everything else.

**3.** God is present everywhere, or everything is open to his view; for •if people believed that some things were hidden

from him, they would have doubts about the fairness of his justice in governing the universe, and •if they merely weren't aware that he sees everything, they wouldn't be aware of the fairness of his justice.

**4.** God has the supreme authority [see note concerning *jus* on page 4] and dominion over all things. He doesn't do anything because he is compelled to by a law, acting only from his absolute good pleasure and special grace; for everyone is absolutely obliged to obey him, but he isn't obliged to obey anyone.

**5.** The worship of God and obedience to him consist only in •justice and in •loving kindness, i.e. loving one's neighbour.

**6.** Everyone who obeys God by living in this way [178] is saved, and everyone else—living under the control of the pleasures—is lost. If men didn't firmly believe this, they would have no reason to prefer to obey God rather than their pleasures.

**7.** God pardons the sins of those who repent. Everyone sins; so if we didn't accept this •doctrine about repentance bringing pardon, everyone would despair of his salvation, and would have no reason to expect God to be merciful. And another point: if someone loves God more intensely because he is sure that God (out of mercy and the grace by which he directs everything) pardons men's sins, then he really knows Christ according to the spirit, and Christ is in him.

It must be obvious to everyone that if men—all men—are to be capable of loving God according to the command of the law explained above, they must know these •seven• things; if even one of them is taken away, obedience is also destroyed.

Other questions about God simply don't matter. I mean such questions as:

•What is God (that model of true life)? Is he fire? spirit? light? thought?

•What makes God a model of true life? His having a just and merciful heart? Its being the case that all things exist and act through him, so that we also understand through him and see through him what is true, right, and good?

The answers to questions like these don't matter as far as faith is concerned. Think what you like about them—it doesn't make any difference. Here are some other questions that don't matter as far as faith is concerned:

- (1) Is God's being everywhere a fact about what he *is* or rather about what he *does*?
- (2) In God's directing everything that happens, is he exercising freedom or rather acting from a necessity of ·his· nature?
- (3) Does God •prescribe laws as a prince or rather •teach them as eternal truths?
- (4) When we obey God, are we •exercising freedom of the will or rather •acting from the necessity of the divine decree?
- (5) Is the reward of the good and punishment of the evil •natural or •supernatural?

As far as faith is concerned, *it doesn't matter* how you answer these questions and others like them, provided that none of your answers makes you less obedient to God or encourages you to think you have a license to sin. Repeating what I have already said: each person is bound to get these tenets of faith into a form that fits *his* level of understanding, and to interpret them *for himself* in whatever way makes it easiest to accept them unhesitatingly and with an undivided mind, so that he'll obey God whole-heartedly. We've seen that the faith was •initially written and revealed in a form that would fit the intellectual level and the opinions of the prophets and [179] of the common people of that time. Well, everyone •now is bound to fit the faith to his own opinions, so that

he accepts it without any mental conflict and without any hesitation. I have shown that faith requires •piety more than it does •truth. . . . The person who displays the best faith is the one whose behaviour best displays justice and loving kindness; he may not be the one who displays the best arguments! How salutary is this doctrine of mine? How greatly is it needed in the State, if people are to live peacefully and harmoniously? How many of the causes of disturbance and wickedness does it prevent? Everyone can answer these questions for himself.

Before leaving this topic, I should revert to a problem that I left dangling in chapter 1 [pages 10–12], regarding God's speaking to the Israelites from Mt. Sinai. The voice that the Israelites heard couldn't give them any philosophical or mathematical certainty about God's existence; but it was enough to make them *wonder* at God. . . .and to *motivate* them to obedience—which is what that manifestation was *for*. God didn't want to •teach the Israelites about his own intrinsic nature (about which he revealed nothing at that time); what he wanted was to •break their stubbornness and win them over to obedience. That's why he addressed them not with arguments but with the sound of trumpets, and with thunder and lightning (see *Exodus* 20:18).

The last thing I have to show in this chapter is that there is no interplay between •faith (or theology) and •philosophy; indeed, the two aren't interrelated in any way. This will be evident to anyone who knows what faith and philosophy aim at and are based on, and how different they are in these respects. What philosophy aims at is *truth* and nothing else; what faith aims at is *obedience and piety* and nothing else. And philosophy is based on common notions [see note on page 40], and must be sought only from nature; faith is based on histories expressed in language, which must be sought only from Scripture and revelation. . . .

Thus, faith grants everyone the greatest freedom to philosophize. [180] There's nothing wicked about your thinking anything you like about anything; faith condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach opinions that are likely to encourage obstinacy, hatred, quarrels and anger. . . .

Finally, since the things I have shown here are the main points I want to make in this book, I don't want to go further without first begging you to think it worth your while to re-read chapters 13 and 14 rather attentively, to weigh them

again and again, and to believe me when I say that I didn't write them with the intention of introducing any novelties, but only to correct distortions that I hope will finally be corrected, some day. [Curley remarks that this paragraph seems to indicate that the end of the book is near, and conjectures that when Spinoza was writing chapters 1–15 he regarded them as the complete work (arguing for philosophical freedom on the basis of premises about religion and philosophy) and only later came to want to add chapters 16–20 (arguing for the same conclusion from premises about the State).]

## Chapter 15: Theology and reason: neither should be the handmaid of the other Why we are convinced of Scripture's authority

Those who don't know how to separate philosophy from theology debate the question of which of these is true:

- (1) Scripture should be the handmaid of reason.
- (2) Reason should be the handmaid of Scripture.

That amounts to asking which of these is true:

- (1) The meaning of Scripture should be adjusted to fit reason.
- (2) Reason should be adjusted to fit Scripture.

The sceptics, who deny the certainty of reason, accept option (2), whereas dogmatists accept (1). But I have already said enough to show that both parties are entirely wrong. . . . I have shown that Scripture doesn't teach philosophical matters, but only piety, and that everything contained in it has been adjusted to fit the intellectual level and preconceived opinions of the common people. So those who want to adjust

Scripture so that it squares with philosophy will have to •ascribe to the prophets many things they didn't think of even in their dreams, and •interpret their meaning wrongly. And on the other side, those who make reason and philosophy the handmaid of theology have to •admit as 'divine teachings' the prejudices of the common people of long ago, to •fill their minds with that stuff, and to •blind themselves. Both lots are behaving crazily, one with reason and the other without it.

The first person among the pharisees who frankly maintained that Scripture [181] should be adjusted to fit reason was Maimonides (whose opinion I examined in chapter 7 [page 69–71], refuting it by many arguments). And though this author had great authority among them, nevertheless most of them part from him in this matter, and follow the opinion of a certain Rabbi Jehuda al-Fakhar, who, in his desire to

avoid Maimonides' error, fell into another error that is its opposite.

Al-Fakhar maintained that reason should be the handmaid of Scripture and should be made completely subordinate to it. One might think that if a biblical passage in its literal meaning is •contrary to reason, it should be understood metaphorically, but al-Fakhar didn't hold with that. He thought that the only legitimate reason for understanding any passage metaphorically is that it is •contrary to Scripture itself, i.e. to its clear doctrines. That led him to this general thesis:

Anything that Scripture teaches dogmatically and asserts in explicit terms must be accepted unconditionally as true, simply because of the authority of Scripture. You won't find any other biblical doctrine that clearly and •explicitly conflicts with it. You may find some passages that •implicitly conflict with it, because Scripture's ways of speaking often seem to *presuppose* something contrary to what it has explicitly taught; and when that happens, the latter passages are to be explained metaphorically.

For example, Scripture teaches clearly that God is *one* (see *Deuteronomy* 6:4), and you don't find any other biblical passage saying outright that there is more than one God, though there are indeed passages where God uses 'we' in speaking of himself [see *Genesis* 1:26] and others where the prophets speak of God in the plural number [no clear examples of this], a way of speaking that *presupposes* that there is more than one God but doesn't show that this is what the writer actually meant. So all these passages are to be explained as metaphorical—not because it is contrary to reason that there should be more than one God, but because Scripture itself says outright that God is one. . . .

That's what al-Fakhar thinks. I praise his desire to explain Scripture through Scripture; but I find it astonishing that a man endowed with reason should be eager to destroy reason. It is true [182] that Scripture ought to be explained through Scripture when we are concerned with what the statements mean and what the prophets wanted to convey; but *after* we have unearthed the true meaning •in that way•, *then* we have to use judgment and reason in giving our assent to it. [The rest of this paragraph amplifies Spinoza's text in ways that the small-dots convention can't easily indicate.] If you think that reason, however much it may protest against Scripture, must still be made completely subordinate to it, then tell me this:

When we make this move of questioning a proposition P that reason endorses, because it conflicts with Scripture, how do we arrive at the judgment that P *does* indeed conflict with Scripture?

If we aren't guided by reason in judging that there is such a conflict, we must be blundering along like blind men, acting foolishly and without judgment. If we are guided by reason, i.e. if it is *reason* that tells us that P conflicts with Scripture, then we are allowing reason to control our acceptance of a bit of Scripture; and in that case we are in a frame of mind in which we wouldn't accept any proposition such as 'It is not the case that P' if it were contrary to reason.

And another point: *Can* anyone accept something in his mind in defiance of the protests of reason? What *is* denying something in one's mind except •being aware of• reason's protest against it? I have no words to express my amazement at •people's wanting to make reason—the divine light, •God's• greatest gift—subordinate to dead words on a page, words that could have been distorted by wicked men, and at •their thinking it's all right for them to

denigrate the mind, describing this *true original text* of God's word as corrupt, blind and lost,

while regarding it as a very great crime to

think such things about the written text, *a mere copy of God's word*.

They think it pious to trust nothing to reason and to their own judgment, but impious to doubt the reliability of those who handed down the sacred Books to us. This attitude isn't pious—it's stupid! What are they worried about? What are they afraid of? Can religion and faith not be defended unless men stay ignorant of everyone and say farewell to reason completely? Someone who believes this must fear Scripture rather than trusting in it. The fact is that religion and piety have their domain, and reason has its domain; the two can coexist in perfect harmony, with neither wanting to make the other its handmaid. I'll return to this shortly, but first I want to examine the position of the rabbi ·al-Fakhar·.

As I have said, he maintains that **(1)** we are bound to accept as true (or reject as false) anything that Scripture affirms (or denies); and **(2)** that Scripture never explicitly affirms or denies anything conflicting with something it explicitly says or denies in another passage. Surely anyone can see what bold blundering this is! Objections come crowding in. •The rabbi overlooks the fact that Scripture is made up of different Books, written at different times for different audiences by different authors. •He maintains this doctrine of his on his own authority (because neither reason nor Scripture says anything like it). [183] •He ought to have shown that every biblical passage that implies something contrary to others *can* satisfactorily be explained metaphorically, given the nature of the language and the purpose of the passage. •And he ought also to have shown that Scripture has reached our hands uncorrupted.

·DEMOLISHING AL-FAKHAR'S THESIS·

But let's examine the matter in an orderly way. About his first claim I ask: what if reason protests? Are we, even then, obliged to accept as true (or reject as false) what Scripture affirms (or denies)? He may say that there isn't anything in Scripture contrary to reason; but I reply that Scripture explicitly affirms and teaches that *God is jealous* (e.g. in the ten commandments, in *Exodus* 34:14, *Deuteronomy* 4:24, and several of other places), and that is contrary to reason; yet it is something that (·according to the rabbi·) we should accept as true. And if we find biblical passages implying that God is not jealous, they must be cleared of that implication by being interpreted metaphorically.

Another example: Scripture says explicitly that God *came down* onto Mt. Sinai (see *Exodus* 19:20), and it attributes other movements to him as well, ·e.g. in *Genesis* 3:8·, and it doesn't ever say explicitly that God doesn't move. And so (according to al-Fakhar) everyone must accept *God moves* as true. What about Solomon's saying (1 *Kings* 8:27) that God is not contained in any place? This •implies that God doesn't move (·because moving is going from place to place·), but it doesn't explicitly •say that God doesn't move; so we'll have to interpret it metaphorically, giving it a meaning in which it doesn't seem to deprive God of motion. . . .

In this way a great many things said in accordance with the opinions of the prophets and the common people—things that are declared to be false by reason and philosophy, but not by Scripture—must be accepted as true, according to the opinion of this author, because he doesn't allow reason to be consulted in these matters.

One of his claims that a certain passage is contrary to another only by inference, and not explicitly, is false. For Moses explicitly

(1) asserts that God is a fire (see *Deuteronomy* 4:24), and explicitly

(2) denies that God has any likeness to visible things (see 4:12).

The rabbi might reply that (2) doesn't deny •outright that God is a fire, but only denies it •by inference, so that the 4:12 passage must be interpreted so that it fits the 4:24 one. So he would have us accept that *God is a fire!* This is lunacy; but let us set these examples aside and bring forward another. [184] [The next example concerns the thesis that God sometimes thinks better of ('repents of') things he has done. Spinoza says that 1 *Samuel* 15:29 explicitly says that God never does this, whereas *Jeremiah* 18:8–10 explicitly asserts that he sometimes does.]

And another point: if one passage conflicts with another not directly but only by inference, what does *that* matter if the principle of inference is clear and neither passage allows of metaphorical explanations? There are a great many such passages in the Bible. . . .

So I have demolished both al-Fakhar's position and that of Maimonides, and have firmly established that •reason remains in charge of its own domain of truth and wisdom, while •theology is in charge of its domain of piety and obedience, neither of them being a handmaid to the other. As I have shown: it isn't in reason's power to prove that

•men can be made happy through obedience alone, without understanding things,

whereas •that's the only thing that theology does teach. All it commands is obedience, and it can't and doesn't want to do anything against reason. I showed this in chapter 14: theology tells us what the tenets of faith are, considered as sufficient for obedience; but as for what we are to make of those tenets from the point of view of truth or falsity—it

leaves that to be settled by reason, which is really the light of the mind, without which it sees only dreams and inventions.

What I mean by 'theology' here is just this:

•Revelation, insofar as it indicates the goal that I have said Scripture aims at (namely the ways and means of *obedience*, i.e. the tenets of true piety and faith).

This is what is properly called [185] 'the word of God'—a phrase that doesn't refer to a particular set of Books (see chapter 12 on this). If you consider the teachings of 'theology' taken in *this* sense, and bear in mind what its purpose is, you'll find that it agrees with reason and doesn't conflict with it anywhere, which is why it is common to everyone.

As far as the whole of Scripture in general is concerned, I showed back in chapter 7 that its meaning is to be determined only from *its* history, and not from the universal natural history that is the only foundation for philosophy [or the Latin could mean: 'which is the foundation only for philosophy'].

If after we have tracked down its true meaning in this way, we find that in odd places Scripture is contrary to reason, we shouldn't be thrown off by this. When we find something of this sort in the Bible, or something that men can fail to know without detriment to their loving kindness, we can be sure that it doesn't touch theology or the word of God, so that we can think what we like about it without running any moral risk. I conclude, therefore, with no ifs or buts, that Scripture is not to be adjusted to fit reason, and reason is not to be adjusted to fit Scripture.

You may want to object:

'You can't give a reasoned knock-down proof that the basic principle of theology—that men are saved only by obedience—is true, so *why do you believe it?* If you accept it without reason, like a blind man, then you too are acting foolishly and without judgment. And if you maintain that we *can* after all logically prove this

basic principle, then you'll have to allow that theology is after all a part of philosophy, and needn't be kept separate from it.'

In reply to this, I maintain that this fundamental tenet of theology can't be tracked down by the natural light of reason—or at least that no-one ever has logically demonstrated it—so that we have needed revelation to know it. But so far from 'acting foolishly and without judgment', we *can* use our judgment in arriving at moral certainty [i.e. the attitude that we might express by saying 'For all practical purposes I can take this to be settled'] with regard to it. Note 'moral certainty': we shouldn't expect to be able to be more certain of it than were the prophets to whom it was first revealed, and what *they* had was only moral certainty, as I showed in chapter 2.

So those who try to show the authority of Scripture by mathematical demonstrations are totally mistaken. The Bible's authority depends on the authority of the prophets; so it can't be demonstrated by any arguments stronger than the ones the prophets [186] used long ago to persuade their own people. Furthermore, our confidence about this can't be based on anything other than what *their* confidence was based on. And I have shown what that was: the whole certainty of the prophets was based on (1) a distinct and vivid imagination, (2) a sign, and—this being the main thing—(3) a heart inclined toward the right and the good. That is all they had to go by; so it is all they could offer to their listeners, and to readers such as us, as bases for their authority.

But (1) their ability to imagine things vividly is not something the prophets could share with the rest of us; so *our* whole certainty about revelation can only be founded on the other two considerations—(2) the sign and (3) the teaching about the right and the good. That is what Moses says too—explicitly. He commands the people to obey any prophet who has given a (2) true sign (3) in the name of God; and

says that they should condemn to death •any prophet who (not-2) predicts something falsely, even if he (3) does it in the name of God; and also •any prophet who tries (not-3) to seduce the people away from true religion, even if (2) he has confirmed his authority by signs and wonders (*Deuteronomy* 18:15–22 and 13:1–5). So a true prophet is marked off from a false one by (3) doctrine and (2) miracles taken together. . . .

So that's what obliges us also to believe Scripture—i.e. believe the prophets—namely (3) their teaching, (2) confirmed by signs. We see that the prophets commended loving kindness and justice above all, and weren't 'up to' anything else; which shows us that when they taught that men become blessed by obedience and trust they were (3) honestly speaking from a true heart. And because they reinforced this (2) with signs, we're convinced that in their prophecies they weren't just flailing around. We are further confirmed in this when we notice that every moral doctrine they taught fully agrees with reason. It's no coincidence that the word of God in the prophets agrees completely with the word of God speaking in us through reason. We infer these things from the Bible with as much confidence as the Jews once inferred the same things from the living voice of the prophets. [187] For I showed near the end of chapter 12 that as regards its moral teaching and its main historical narratives the Bible has come down to us uncorrupted.

So although we can't give a mathematical demonstration of this foundation of the whole of theology and Scripture—i.e. the principle that men are saved only by obedience—we can still accept it with sound judgment. When you are confronted by something that

- has been confirmed by so many testimonies of the prophets,
- is a great source of comfort to people whose reasoning powers aren't great,

- brings considerable advantage to the State, and
- can be believed with absolutely no risk or harm,

if you are unwilling to accept it merely because it can't be mathematically demonstrated, that's just *ignorance* on your part. As though in prudence we should never accept as true anything that can be called in question by some procedure of doubt; or as though most of our actions weren't uncertain and full of risk.

Those who think that philosophy and theology contradict one another, so that one or the other must be toppled from its throne and banished, do of course have some reason to be eager to lay firm foundations for theology by trying to demonstrate it mathematically. For only someone who was desperate and mad would be so rash as to push reason aside, denying the certainty of reasons and giving the arts and sciences the back of his hand! But although they have a reason for wanting to reach this conclusion, they are open to criticism: they are trying to call reason to their aid in order to repudiate it, looking for a certain reason why reason should be uncertain! In fact, in their eagerness to demonstrate mathematically the truth and authority of theology, so as to topple the authority of reason and the natural light, all they succeed in doing is to drag theology under the control of reason. It's as though they thought that theology has no brilliance unless it is illuminated by the natural light of reason!

If someone in that camp says 'I completely trust the internal •testimony of the Holy Spirit, and don't look to reason for help except in convincing unbelievers', *don't believe him!* It is easy to show that someone who says this is driven by vanity or by some emotion. From chapter 14 it obviously follows that the Holy Spirit gives •testimony only concerning good works, which Paul for that reason [188] calls 'the fruit of the Holy Spirit' (*Galatians* 5:22). (Really, the Holy Spirit is just the peace of mind that comes from knowing that one has

behaved well.) As for issues of truth and falsity and certainty of items of theory—e.g. in philosophical theology—the only 'Spirit' that gives •testimony about those is *reason*, which claims the domain of truth for itself, as I have shown. If someone claims to be certain of truths on the basis of any 'Spirit' other than reason, his boast is false: he is either •speaking under the influence of prejudices that reflect bad character or •ducking behind sacred things so as to protect himself from philosophical defeat and public ridicule. But it won't do him any good, for where can a man hide himself if he commits treason against the majesty of reason?

... Summing up: I have shown •how philosophy is to be separated from theology, •what each principally consists in, •that neither should be the handmaid of the other because each rules in its own domain without any conflict with the other, and •what absurdities, disadvantages, and harms have followed from men's astonishing way of confusing these two faculties with one another. . . .

Before moving on I want to repeat that I regard Scripture, or revelation, as very useful and indeed necessary. We can't perceive by the natural light of reason that simple obedience is the way to salvation. (I showed this in chapter 4: reason *can't* but revelation *can* teach that all we need for salvation or blessedness is to accept the divine decrees as laws or commands, and that they don't have to be conceived as eternal truths.) It's only revelation that tells us this, teaching that salvation comes by God's special grace, which we can't achieve by reason. It follows from this that Scripture has been a very great source of comfort to mortals. Everyone—yes, *everyone*—can be obedient; whereas only a small minority of human beings acquire a virtuous disposition from the guidance of reason alone. If we didn't have this testimony of Scripture, therefore, we would doubt nearly everyone's salvation.

## Chapter 16: The foundations of the State, the natural and civil right of each person, and the right of the supreme powers

Up to here I have been separating philosophy from theology, and showing how theology leaves everyone free to philosophize as he wishes without interference from theology. Now a fresh question arises: How far does this freedom of thinking—and of saying what one thinks—extend in the best kind of State? To tackle this in an orderly way, I must start with a discussion of everyone's natural rights—rights that don't involve the State or religion. Then I can get into the foundations of the State, from which I shall deal with the question. [Throughout all this, 'right' translates *jus*. See note on page 4.]

By the right and established practice of nature I mean the *rules of the nature of each individual*—rules that we think of as governing the existence and the behaviour of each thing. For example, it's because of their nature that fish swim, and that big fish eat small fish; so fish have a supreme natural right to swim, and big fish have a supreme natural right to eat little ones.

Here is my argument for that conclusion. **(1)** God has the supreme right to do all things. **(2)** The power of nature is just the power of God. Therefore **(3)** nature, considered just in itself, has the supreme right to do everything in its power, which is to say that the right of nature extends as far as its power does. But now **(4)** the universal power of the whole of nature is nothing but the assemblage of powers of all individuals together. So **(5)** each individual has a supreme right to do everything in its power, i.e. the right of each thing extends as far as its naturally settled power

does. And because the supreme law of nature is that each thing does its best to stay in existence, doing this for its own sake and without regard to anything else, it follows that each individual has the supreme right to do this, i.e. to exist and act as it is naturally made to do.

In this matter of rights and powers, there's no difference  
—between •men and •other individuals in nature,  
—between •men endowed with reason and •others who are ignorant of true reason, or  
—between •fools and madmen and •those who are in their right mind.

Whatever *any* thing [190] does according to the laws of its own nature, it does with supreme right, because it acts as it has been made to act by nature, and can't do otherwise.

Consider two men who both live only under the rule of nature: **(1)** one of them doesn't yet know reason, or hasn't yet acquired a virtuous disposition, and is governed solely by the laws of appetite; while **(2)** the other directs his life according to the laws of reason. *Each man has the supreme right to act as he does*—**(1)** the ignorant and weak-minded man has the supreme right to do whatever his appetites urge, and **(2)** the wise man has the supreme right to do everything that reason dictates. This is what Paul teaches, when he says that there was no sin until there was the law, i.e. no sin so long as men are considered as living only according to the rule of nature [see *Romans* 4:15 and 5:13].

So if we want to know what natural right a given man has, we don't consult reason but merely ask 'What does he

want?’ and ‘Is he able to get it?’ ·You may like the thought that· all people are naturally led to act according to the rules and laws of reason; but that is just wrong. In fact, all people are born ignorant of everything, and even those have been well brought up reach a relatively advanced age before they •come to know the true principle of living and •acquire a virtuous disposition. Until that happens—if indeed it *does* happen—they have to live and take care of themselves as best they can by their own power, i.e. by the prompting of appetite alone. Why? Because nature has given them no alternative, having denied them the power to live according to sound reason. They aren’t obliged to live according to the laws of a sound mind, any more than a cat is bound to live according to the laws of a lion’s nature!

Now, take some person x whom we are to consider as being only under the rule of nature, and some item y that x thinks will be useful to him—whether he is led to this by sound reason or prodded into it by his appetites and emotions. What I have been saying implies that x is permitted, by supreme natural right, to want y and to take it in any way that he finds convenient—by force, deception, entreaties, or whatever. So he is also permitted to regard as an enemy anyone who wants to prevent him from getting y.

From this it follows that the right and established order of nature, under which we are all are born and under which most people live, does not prohibit

disputes,  
hatreds,  
anger,  
deception, or  
anything at all that appetite urges.

In fact it prohibits nothing except

things that no-one wants and things that no-one can get.

This isn’t surprising, because nature isn’t constrained by the laws of human reason, which aim only at •two things—man’s true advantage and preservation. [191] What governs a man’s nature is an •infinity of other factors—ones that make sense in relation to the eternal order of the whole of nature, of which a man is only a small part. What makes individual things exist and act as they do is the necessity of this ·order·. So when anything in nature strikes us as ridiculous, absurd, or very bad, that’s because we •don’t know the whole picture, •know very little about the order and coherence of the whole of nature, and •want everything to be directed according to the usage of our reason, even though what ·our· reason says is bad isn’t bad in relation to the order and laws of *nature as a whole* but only in relation to the laws of *our nature*.

Still, it’s unquestionably much more advantageous for men to live according to the laws and secure dictates of our reason, which (I repeat) aim only at men’s true advantage. Moreover, everyone wants to live securely and as free from fear as possible. But this state of affairs can’t occur while •everyone is permitted to do whatever he likes, and •reason has no more authority [*jus*] than hatred and anger do. That’s because everyone who lives in an environment of hostility, hatred, anger and deception lives *anxiously*, and does his best to avoid these things. Also, as I showed in chapter 5, if we consider that without *mutual aid* men must live most wretchedly and without any cultivation of reason, we’ll see very clearly that •to live securely and prosperously men *had* to join forces, and that •this led them to bring it about that each *individual’s* natural right to everything was turned into a right that they all had *collectively*, so that upshots would no longer depend on the •force and •appetite of each one but rather on the •power and •will of everyone together.

But this arrangement wouldn’t have done them any good if they tried to follow only what appetite urges, because the

laws of appetite draw different people in different directions. So they had to devise a system—firmly deciding on it and promising one another to maintain it—in which everything was to be done according to the dictate of reason (which no-one ventures to oppose openly, for fear of seeming mindless). This involved each of them in deciding •to rein in his appetites when they urged him to harm someone else, •to avoid doing anything to anyone that he wouldn't want done to himself, and •to defend the rights of other people as though they were his own.

How *could* they enter into such a contract, making it valid and lasting? The answer to this will have to square with this universal law of human nature:

Everyone pursues anything that he judges to be good, unless he •hopes for something better [192] •from not pursuing it• or •fears a greater harm •from pursuing it•. Each person chooses what he judges to be the greater or two goods, or what seems to be the lesser of two evils. Between any two goods, each person chooses the one he judges to be greater, and between two evils, the one that seems to him lesser.

(Note that I refer explicitly to the option that the person *judges* to be better or that *seems* to him to be worse; I am not speaking of what really *is* better or worse.) The above law is so firmly inscribed in human nature that we should count it among the eternal truths that no-one can be ignorant of.

But from this it follows necessarily •that anyone who promises to give up the right he has to all things is trying to deceive, and that no-one—absolutely *no-one*—will stand by his promises unless he fears a greater evil or hopes for a greater good.

To understand this better, suppose a robber forces me to promise him that I will give him my goods when he demands them. Since . . . I have a natural right to anything that I *can*

get, I have a natural right to make this promise without intending to keep it. Another example: suppose that I have sincerely promised someone that I won't eat or drink anything for twenty days, and that I then come to see that this was foolish and that I'll do myself great harm by keeping my promise. Since the natural law [*jus*] obliges me to choose the lesser of two evils, I can with supreme right [*jus*] break faith with such a contract, and take back my promise. My natural right permits this, I'm saying, whether the stupidity of my promise is something that I •clearly see for sure or merely •believe because it seems right. Either way, I'll fear a great evil and will be led to do my best avoid it.

From all this I infer that a contract can have force only if it is useful to us. If the usefulness goes, so does the contract, which becomes null and void. That's why it is foolish to demand of someone that he keep faith with you *for ever*, unless at the same time you work to bring it about that violating the contract will bring more harm than good to the violator. This is especially relevant to •the contract involved in• the instituting of a State.

If everyone could easily be led by the guidance of reason alone, and *saw* how supremely useful—indeed: necessary—the State is, then everyone would utterly detest deceptions and would perfectly keep his promises out of a desire for this supreme good, the survival of the State. . . . [193] But it is *far* from true that everyone can easily be led by the guidance of reason alone! In fact, everyone is drawn by his own pleasure, and most of the time the mind is so filled with greed, pride, envy, anger, etc. that there's no place •in their motivational set-up• for reason. Thus, when someone makes a promise or enters into a contract with evident signs of sincerity, we can't be certain that he will keep the promise unless something is added to it. For by natural right he can act deceptively, and the only thing that binds him to keeping the contract is

hope of getting something good by keeping it or his fear of suffering harm by breaking it.

Now, I have shown that each person's natural right is determined only by his power—i.e. that he has a *right* to do anything that he *can* do—and from this it follows that when one person *x* transfers some of his power to someone else *y*, he thereby gives to *y* a corresponding amount of his right. And it also follows that someone who has the supreme power over everyone else—compelling them by force and restraining them by their fear of the supreme punishment that *everyone* fears—has the supreme right or supreme authority over everyone else. But he'll keep this right only as long as he keeps this power of doing anything he wants to do. Without that power, his command will be precarious, and any stronger person can please himself whether to obey him.

This puts us into a position to answer the question:

- How can a society be formed without coming into conflict with any natural right?

The answer to that raises a further question:

- How can there be a contract that is really secure against being breached?

Here's the procedure that answers both questions: Each person transfers all his power to the society, which alone will retain the supreme natural right over everything, i.e. the *sovereignty* that each person will be bound to obey, either freely or from fear of the supreme punishment.

The right of such a society is called 'democracy', which is defined as *a general assembly of men that has, as a body, the supreme right to do anything that it has the power to do*. It follows that the supreme power is not constrained by any law; everyone is obliged to obey it in everything. For everyone had to contract to this, either tacitly or explicitly, when they transferred to the sovereign power all their power

of defending themselves, i.e. all their right. 'Transferred all their power?' Well, if they had wanted to keep anything for themselves, they ought at the same time to have made preparations for defending it safely; but they didn't do that, and indeed couldn't do it without dividing and consequently destroying sovereignty; so, yes, they submitted themselves absolutely to the will of the supreme power, handing over to it all their power. Since they did this unconditionally, being compelled to it by necessity [194] and urged to it by reason, we are obliged to carry out all the supreme power's commands, even the stupid ones; because the only alternative is to be enemies of the State, and to act contrary to reason, which urges us to defend the State with all our powers. [The switch from 'they' to 'we' in that sentence is Spinoza's.] Reason orders us to obey even the stupid commands, this being the lesser of two evils.

[Spinoza says next that there's usually little risk of absurd or stupid orders from the supreme power, because giving such orders will weaken the supreme power, thus moving it towards losing its power and thus its right over everyone else; so it is in the rational interest of those who constitute the supreme power to govern sensibly. And in a democratic State, he adds, there is even less reason to fear absurdities, because in a large legislative assembly it is almost impossible for the majority to agree on one absurd action. Then:]

Someone may want to object:

You are making subjects *slaves*—i.e. people who act as they are ordered to act, unlike a free man who acts as he pleases.

But this view of the difference between slavery and freedom is completely wrong. A person who is led by his own pleasure and can't see or do anything advantageous to himself—*he* is the real slave! The only free person is the one whose life is completely guided by reason and nothing else. It's true that

when you act on a command—i.e. when you *obey*—there is a certain lack of freedom; but what makes someone a slave is not *that* but rather the reason for the action. If the action aims at the advantage not of the person who acts but of the person who tells him how to act, then the agent is indeed a slave, and is useless to himself. But in a Republic, a State where the supreme law is the well-being of the whole people and not that of the ruler, [195] someone who obeys the supreme power in everything shouldn't be called a 'slave', useless to himself, but rather a 'subject'. So the freest State is the one whose laws are founded on sound reason. Why? Because that is a State in which each person can be free whenever he wants to,<sup>8</sup> i.e. can wholeheartedly submit himself to the guidance of reason. Similarly, children are obliged to do whatever their parents command, but that doesn't make them slaves, because parents' commands are primarily concerned with the welfare of the children.

So we recognize a great difference between a slave, a son, and a subject. I define these as follows:

**slave:** someone who is bound to obey the commands of a master whose commands are aimed at his own advantage rather than that of the slave.

**son:** someone who does things that are to his own advantage, in obedience to the commands of a parent.

**subject:** someone who does what is for the advantage of the collective body, and thus also for his own advantage, in obedience to the commands of the supreme power.

I think I have shown clearly enough what the basis is for the democratic State. I chose to treat democracy in

preference to any other form of government because it seemed the most natural one, and the one that comes nearest to giving to each person the freedom that nature gives him. That's because in a democracy no-one transfers his natural right to someone else in such a way that that's the end of it, and there will never be any further consultation between them. Rather, the subject transfers his natural right to the majority of the whole society of which he is a part. In this way, the subjects all remain equal, just as they were previously in the state of nature. Another reason for singling out democracy for explicit treatment is its being the form of government that fits in best with my plan to discuss the utility of freedom in the State.

I shan't go into the bases for other forms of political power. [Spinoza explains that his fundamental account of political power, according to which subjects serve their own interest by transferring their powers to a central power or authority, applies equally whatever form the central power has. Then:]

Now that I have shown what the foundations and right of the State are, it will be easy to settle [196] how various concepts work within the civil State. Specifically, to explain what these are: (1) individual civil right, (2) somebody's *wronging* someone, (3) justice and injustice, (4) an ally, (5) an enemy, (6) the crime of treason.

(1) All we can mean by '**individual civil right**' is each person's freedom to preserve himself in his condition, which is fixed by the edicts of the supreme power and is defended only by its authority. For after someone has transferred to some person or group x his right to live as he pleases, a right that used to be settled only by his power, i.e. after he has

<sup>8</sup> A man can be free in *any* kind of civil State. He is free to the extent that he is led by reason; what reason urges (Hobbes notwithstanding) is peace in all circumstances; and peace can't be had unless the common rights of the State are maintained without infringement. Thus, the more a man is led by reason—i.e. the more free he is—the more steadfastly he will maintain the rights of the State and obey the commands of the supreme power of which he is a subject.

transferred his freedom and his power to defend himself, he is obliged to be guided in his life solely by x's judgment and defended solely by x's protection.

(2) Someone is **wronged** when a citizen or subject is compelled to suffer some harm from someone else, contrary to the civil law, i.e. contrary to the edict of the supreme power. There's no place for the concept of *wronging* outside the civil State; and within the State a subject can't be wronged by the supreme power, which has a right to do anything; so *wronging* can occur only among individual persons who are obliged by civil law not to harm one another.

(3) **Justice** ·considered as a virtue· is a firm resolve to assign to each person what belongs to him according to civil law. And **injustice** ·considered as a kind of action· is depriving someone (under some legal pretext) of what belongs to him according to the laws as properly interpreted. Justice and injustice are also called 'equity' and 'inequity' respectively, because those whose job it is to settle disputes are obliged to . . . treat everyone as equals, and to defend the right of each person equally, without coming down unfairly hard on the rich or disregarding the poor.

(4) **Allies** are citizens of two different States which, to avoid the danger of war or to gain some other advantage, agree not to harm one another, and indeed to help one another in cases of need, though each retains its own sovereignty. This contract will be valid for as long as its basis persists, i.e. as long as common dangers make the contract useful to both sides. At a time when there is no reason to hope for some good from it, no-one will *make* a contract and if one already exists no-one is obliged to *keep* it. A contract automatically lapses when this good-for-both-sides basis for it disappears. That's what we clearly find from our own experience. When two States enter into such an agreement not to harm one another, each of them still does its best

to prevent the other from becoming too powerful, and they don't trust one another's word unless they can see clearly the advantages for both in keeping the agreement. Failing that, they fear deception, and not without reason; for nobody will trust the words and promises of someone else who [197] has the supreme power and retains the right to do whatever he likes. Well, nobody but a fool who doesn't know what rights come with supreme power! For someone who has the supreme power, the supreme law must be: 'Do whatever favours· the well-being and advantage of *your* State.'

·Don't see this as a cold-blooded rejection of real morality·. If we bring piety and religion into the story, we find that it is downright *wicked* for someone who has sovereignty to keep his promises at the expense of his own State's welfare. When a sovereign sees that some promise he has made is detrimental to his State, he can't keep it without betraying the promise he has given to his subjects—and his strongest obligation is to keep *that* promise. . . .

(5) An **enemy** is whoever lives outside the State in such a way that he doesn't recognize its sovereignty as its ally or as its subject. What makes someone an enemy of the State is not *hatred* but *right*. A State has the same right against

- anyone who doesn't recognize its authority by any kind of contract

as it has against

- anyone who has done it harm.

Either way, it is entitled to compel him, in any way it can, either to surrender or to become an ally.

(6) The **crime of treason** can be committed only by subjects or citizens, people who have—either tacitly or through an explicit contract—transferred all their right to the State. A subject is said to have committed treason if he has in any way tried to seize the right of the supreme power for himself or to transfer it to someone else.

Why do I say ‘has *tried*’? Because if the traitor *succeeds*, it’s then too late for the State to charge him with treason because by then it has lost its power to do anything about it. That’s why nearly all active prosecutions for treason concern attempts, not successes.

Why do I say so strongly ‘has tried *in any way*’ to seize the right of the supreme power? I want the definition of *treason* to cover both attempted power-grabs that •harm the State and ones that perfectly clearly •work to the advantage of the State. Even in a case of the latter kind, the person has committed treason and is rightly condemned. Consider the situation of the military in time of war. If a soldier leaves his post and attacks the enemy, without his commander’s knowing anything about it, he is rightly condemned to death for violating his oath and the commander’s authority; and this is the case even if his attack was well planned and successful. There’s nothing controversial about *that*. But not everyone sees equally clearly that every single citizen is always bound by this same right, although the reason for this is exactly the same. The State must be preserved and directed by the policy of the supreme power alone, and the citizens have agreed unconditionally that this right belongs only to the supreme power; so if any citizen has tried to act on behalf of the State without the knowledge of the sovereign power, [198] he has violated the sovereign power’s authority, has committed treason, and is rightly condemned—however much advantage to the State would certainly have followed from his intervention if he had carried it through, as I have said.

You may want to challenge the position I have been defending, by asking:

Isn’t it obviously contrary to the revealed divine law to maintain, as you have, that in the state of nature anyone who doesn’t have the use of reason has

the supreme right of nature to live according to the laws of appetite? The divine command binds all of us equally—those who have the use of reason and those who don’t—to love our neighbour as ourselves. Doesn’t it follow that we will be acting wrongly if we live by the laws of appetite alone, and harm other people?

It’s easy to reply to this objection if we focus on what the state of nature is, and especially on its being prior in nature and in time to religion. No-one knows *through nature* that he owes any obedience to God; indeed, no-one can get this knowledge through reason at all, but only from revelation, confirmed by signs. [At this point Spinoza has a footnote referring the reader to one of his end-notes. Its size and importance are a reason for incorporating it into the main text at this point.]

•SPINOZA’S END-NOTE•

[264] When Paul says [Romans 1:20] that men are ‘without excuse’, speaking of men who do not glorify God and aren’t thankful to him, this may seem to mean that they can’t escape punishment for their disobedience. But that is just Paul speaking to humans in terms they understand; his *real* topic isn’t ‘excuses’ in the ordinary sense of that term. We see this in *Romans* 9, where he explicitly teaches that God has mercy on those he wants to have mercy on, and hardens those he wants to harden; and that men are ‘inexcusable’ not because

•they have been forewarned yet went ahead and sinned anyway,

but only because

•they are in God’s power, like clay in the power of the potter

—the potter who from a single lump of clay makes one beautiful object and one humdrum one. So the notion of punishment for disobedience has no place in what Paul

was really saying.

As for natural divine law, whose chief precept (as I said [on page 37]) is to love God: This notion of *law* might seem to be a peg on which to hang the notion of obedience, but that is wrong too. When I call it a 'law', I am using that word in the sense philosophers give it when they label as 'laws' the common rules of nature according to which all things happen, and there's obviously no question of (dis)obedience to *this* kind of 'law'! Loving God isn't a matter of obedience to a command; love for God is a virtue that anyone who rightly knows God necessarily possesses. Obedience has to do with the will of the commander, not with the necessity and truth of the matter.

Furthermore, we can't possibly be subject to a naturally knowable command by God, because we have through nature no knowledge about God's will; it's only by revelation that we can know whether God wills that men should revere him in the way they might revere a human prince. Contrast that with our certain knowledge, not from revelation, that whatever happens happens only by God's power.

[At this point in the end-note, Spinoza switched from *lex* to *jus*—each translated here by 'law'.] I have shown that so long as we don't know the cause of the divine laws, they seem to us to be laws of the sort that are laid down or enacted; but as soon as we learn their cause they stop being 'laws' in that sense and are accepted as eternal truths. Thus, obedience turns into love—the love that comes from true knowledge as necessarily as light comes from the sun.

So we can, indeed, love God according to the guidance of reason; but we can't obey God according to the guidance of reason, because by reason we can't . . . conceive of God as establishing laws like a prince.

·END OF SPINOZA'S END-NOTE·

So before revelation no-one is bound by divine law, because no-one can possibly know of this law. We mustn't run the state of nature together with the state of religion; we should think of it as having no religion or law, and hence no sin or violation of right. That's how I have been taking it, with support from the authority of Paul.

Why is the state of nature to be thought of as predating and not involving divine law? I have given one reason: men in the state of nature *don't know* the divine law. But there is also another, namely the fact that everyone is born into freedom. If you are dubious about *that*, consider: if all men were naturally bound by divine law, or if the divine law were itself a law of nature, there'd have been no need for God to enter into a contract with men and to bind them by an agreement and an oath. So we have to agree, with no ifs or buts, that divine law began when men explicitly promised God to obey him in everything. By doing this they in effect surrendered their natural freedom, and transferred their right to God, which is what I have said happens in the civil State. More about this later.

[In the next few paragraphs, *summa potestas* will be translated as 'sovereign', as though the holder of the highest power = authority in the State were always one man. This is just for ease of exposition; it doesn't reflect any thesis held by Spinoza, who—as we have seen—allows that the *summa potestas* may be a group of people, or indeed the collective of all the members of the State.] Another possible objection to what I have been saying:

'According to you the sovereign retains his natural right, and that by right everything is permitted to him. But actually he is bound by this divine law just as much as subjects are.'

This difficulty arises from a misunderstanding not of the state of nature but of the right of nature. Each person in the state of nature is bound by revealed law in the same way as

he is bound to live according to the dictates of sound reason: [199] because it is more advantageous to him and necessary for his well-being. If he prefers not to do this, he may go his own way—at his own risk. So the only *decision* that binds him to live in a certain way is *his*, not anyone else's. He doesn't have to recognize the authority of any human judge, or of any rightful defender of religion. I contend that the sovereign has retained this right. He can of course consult men, but he isn't bound to recognize anyone as a judge, or to recognize any human being other than himself as a defender of any right. What if there are indubitable signs that a certain person is a prophet whom God has expressly sent? In that case the sovereign is compelled to recognize the authority of a judge, but the judge is God himself, not the prophet.

If the sovereign chooses to disobey God as revealed in his law, he'll be doing this at his own risk, and will be the loser by it; but he won't be in conflict with either civil or natural law. Why? Well, the civil law depends only on *his* decree; and the natural law depends on the laws of nature, which are adapted not to religion, which is concerned only with human good, but to the order nature as a whole, i.e. to the eternal decree of God, which we don't know. . . .

Another question that may arise:

What if the sovereign commands something contrary to religion and to the obedience that we have promised to God in an explicit contract? Which command should we obey—the divine or the human?

I'll discuss this in more detail later, so here I'll be brief: we must obey God above all others, when we have from him a certain and indubitable revelation. You might think that this sometimes puts religion above the State, but it doesn't, because the sovereign has the supreme right to make and enforce his own judgments concerning religion—e.g.

concerning whether there has been a revelation, and if there has, what it means—and everyone [200] is bound to go along with his judgments about this. What binds them? The pledge of obedience that they have given to the sovereign, which God commands them to honour in every case. If you don't see why this is so, remember that the both natural law and divine law give to the sovereign the sole responsibility for preserving and protecting the rights of the State, and obviously he can't do this unless he can lay down the law about religion. The point is that, as we know from experience, men are very apt to go wrong about religion, and to *invent* religious doctrines—different inventions for different casts of mind—which then draw them into quarrels and competition. If it weren't for the fact that each person is obliged to accept what the sovereign authorities say about things that *they* think pertain to religion, then no-one would be bound by any civil statute that *he* thought was contrary to his faith and superstition; so the right of the State would depend on the beliefs and feelings of individual subjects, and its authority would be shattered.

But if those who have the sovereign authority are pagans, not Christians or Jews, there are two possibilities. (1) We shouldn't enter into any contracts with them, and should resolve to endure extreme suffering rather than transfer our right to them. For example, Eleazar wanted while his country was still somewhat independent to give his people an example of constancy to follow, so that they would be prepared to bear anything rather than allow their right and authority to be transferred to the Greeks, and undergo anything so as not to be forced to swear loyalty to the pagans. [This is found in 2 *Maccabees* 6:18–31, this being a book that is recognised as part of the Old Testament by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox versions of Christianity but not by the Jews or Protestants.] (2) But if we already have entered into a contract and transferred our

right to them, that means that we have given up the right to defend ourselves and our religion, so we are bound to obey the supreme civil power and to honour our assurance to it—and if we don't do this voluntarily we should be forced to do it. The only exceptions occur when God has either by a very clear revelation promised his special aid against a ·pagan· tyrant or specifically willed an exception ·in this particular case·. ·Here's an example of the general point and of the special exceptions·. Out of all the Jews in Babylon only

three young men were willing to disobey Nebuchadnezzar because they were sure that God would come to their aid (·*Daniel* 3:12·). Daniel, whom the King himself revered, was a fourth special case (·6:15·). But all the rest unhesitatingly obeyed when the law compelled them to; perhaps reflecting that it was by God's decree that they were subject to the King, and that the King held his sovereignty and preserved it by God's guidance. . . .