

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 17:

No-one can, or needs to, transfer everything to the supreme power.

The Hebrew State before they elected Kings; its superiority.

Why the divine State could perish, and could hardly survive without rebellions.

[201] In Chapter 16 I presented a view of the supreme powers' right to do everything, and the natural right that each person has transferred to them. That account fits pretty well with what actually happens, and ·relevant· human behaviour could change so as to bring it ever closer to my account. But the account will never fit reality in every detail; it must always be in some respects merely theoretical. Why? Because ·the account speaks of (1) the supreme power as having unlimited power to do what it wants to do, and of (2) the individual man's transferring to the supreme power *all* his rights. And (2) no-one will ever be able to transfer his power (and thus his right) to someone else so completely that he stops being a man, and (1) there won't ever be any supreme power that can do everything it would like to do. It might want you

- to hate someone who had been good to you, or
- to love someone who had harmed you, or
- not to be offended by insults, or
- not to want freedom from fear;

but commanding you to do those things would be pointless, because obedience would involve going against the laws of human nature.

Experience teaches this very clearly. Men have *never* surrendered all their right and transferred *all* their power to someone else; indeed, they have retained enough power and right •to keep the supreme powers afraid of them, •and to put the State in greater danger from *them* (despite their having been deprived of ·most of· their right) than from *enemies*.

If men *could* be so thoroughly deprived of their natural right that they were left powerless, unable to do anything except by the will of those who held the supreme right, then the latter—the rulers—*could* reign over their subjects in the most oppressive manner and have nothing to fear from them. [Here and elsewhere, including the five occurrences in chapter 20, 'oppressive' translates *violentum*. The thought is of a government that has to *force* the subjects to obey because what it wants of them goes against their grain, so to speak.] But I don't think anyone would regard that as really possible. So we have to adopt the picture in which each person keeps many things for himself, so that *those* aspects of his behaviour depend on no-one's decision but his own.

To understand of how far the right and power of the State extend, one needs to know this: the State's power is not limited to what [202] it can compel men to do *from fear*; it extends to everything that it can *somehow* bring men to do in compliance with its commands. What makes a man a *subject* is his obedience, whatever the reasons for it. [In the rest of this paragraph, in the interests of clarity, Spinoza's text is amplified in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't signify.] Someone might obey a governmental command because

- (1) he is afraid of punishment, or
- (2) he hopes for a reward, or
- (3) he loves his country, or
- (4) he has been prompted by some other feeling or attitude.

If he acts for any of these reasons, he is still acting in accordance with the command of the supreme power, and his doing so falls under the general heading of ‘things that the subject does in accordance with the government’s commands’. You might think:

‘That’s not right. A line must be drawn between **(1)** and the other three. It’s only in connection with **(1)** fear of punishment that State control is exercised; in the other cases, the person is acting by his own decision and in accordance with his own judgment.’

On the contrary, in **(1)** and indeed in *everything* that a person does he acts by his own decision and in accordance with his own judgment. If someone’s acting by his own judgment entailed that he acts by his own right and not the right of the State, it would follow that the State has *no* right over him. The only way to avoid that conclusion is to allow that the State’s right and power can be at work when the subject acts by his own decision and on his own judgment. And then there is no way to draw the line: we have to conclude that the State’s authority is involved in *everything* that a subject can be brought to do in accordance with the commands of the supreme power—whether he is motivated by love, by fear or (the more usual case) by hope and fear together, by reverence (an emotional mix of fear and wonder), or whatever. In any of these cases, he acts in virtue of the right of the State, not his own right.

This is also very clearly established by the fact that obedience is less a matter of physical action than of internal mental action, so that the person who is *most* under the control of someone else is the one who is *wholeheartedly* set on obeying all the other’s commands. Thus, the ruler with the greatest authority is the one who *reigns in the hearts* of his subjects. Don’t think that it’s the person who is most feared who has the greatest authority—for if that were right,

the greatest authority would be possessed by the subjects of tyrants, because the tyrants are really scared of them!

A further point: although hearts can’t be commanded in the way that tongues can, they can to *some* extent come under the control of the sovereign, who has various ways of bringing it about that most of men believe, love, and hate whatever he wants them to. This doesn’t happen through direct command—the sovereign ‘doesn’t say ‘Love x!’ and ‘Hate y!’—but we can see from experience that when it happens it is often guided into happening by the sovereign and is an exercise of his power, i.e. happens according to his right. There is no conceptual incoherence in the thought of men who, when they

believe,

love,

hate,

despise, or

are gripped by any kind of affect—*any* kind—

do so through the right of the State.

[203] This lets us conceive the right and authority of the State to be pretty broad, but it will never be broad enough to give the government power to do absolutely anything that it wants to do. I have already shown this clearly enough, I think. And I’ve said that it’s not part of my plan to show how, ‘despite this limit on State power’, a State could be formed that would be securely preserved for ever. Still, my plan *does* require me to discuss ‘a part of that large topic, namely, what the main things are that supreme powers ought to grant to subjects, in the interests of the greater security and advantage of the State. I’ll lead us to knowledge of that by ‘noting what divine revelation taught Moses about this ‘matter of security of the State’, and then ‘weighing the history of the Hebrews and their successes.

Both by thinking about it and from experience we see very clearly that the State's survival depends chiefly on the loyalty of its subjects, on their virtue, and on their reliability in carrying out commands. But it's harder to see what kind of government is needed for them to maintain their loyalty and virtue. The rulers and the ruled are all human, and so are inclined to prefer pleasure to work. And those who have experienced the fast-change mentality of the masses are almost in despair about it, because the masses aren't governed by reason but only by affects. They rush headlong in all directions, and are very easily corrupted by greed or by extravagant living. Each person thinks that he alone knows everything, and wants everything to go according to his way of looking at things; he regards a thing as fair or unfair, right or wrong, to the extent that he thinks that it brings *him* profit or loss; in his vanity he disdains people who are his equal, and won't put up with being directed by them; out of envy for the greater reputations or fortunes of others (for these are never equal), he wants misfortune to come to them and is delighted when it does. There's no need for me to go into details. Everyone knows how it goes: the wicked man can't stand the present state of affairs and is determined change it, his heart being full of the impetuous anger that comes from his hatred for his own poverty.

So here is our task: To get in ahead of all these ·destructive· events, setting up the State in such a way that there's no room left for subversive activity—in such a way, indeed, that everyone, no matter what his cast of mind, prefers the public right to private advantage. People have come up with various solutions (because the problem *needs* to be solved), but we haven't yet reached the point where a State is in more danger from its enemies than from its own citizens, [204] and governments don't fear their enemies more than they fear their subjects. Consider the example of

the Roman State: its enemies couldn't defeat it, but it was often conquered and horribly oppressed by its own citizens, particularly in the civil war between Vespasian and Vitellius. [Spinoza refers to Tacitus for details, and then gives the example of what Alexander the Great is reported to have said to friends, about a ruler's having more to fear from internal treachery than from foreign wars. Then:]

That's why in past times anyone who seized control of a throne tried to make himself secure by persuading the people that he was descended from the immortal gods. It's pretty clear that usurpers thought that as long as their subjects and everyone else believed them to be gods rather than fellow-humans, they would willingly accept their rule and easily surrender themselves to them. [Spinoza gives the examples of the Roman Emperor Augustus and Alexander the Great, quoting from Alexander the remark that 'often a false belief has been just as effective as a true one'. He reports that Alexander's supporter Cleon tried to convince his people, the Macedonians, that Alexander should be treated as though he were a God. 'When the King enters the banquet hall,' Cleon said, 'I will prostrate myself on the ground, and so should everyone else.' Then:]

The Macedonians had too much good sense to behave like that; only men who are complete barbarians allow themselves to be deceived so openly and become slaves who are of no use to themselves. But others have had better success in persuading men •that Kingship is sacred and acts on God's behalf on earth, •that it has been established not by human consent but by God, and •that it is preserved and defended by God's special providence and aid. In this way monarchs have devised other means to secure their rule. I shan't go into all that. To get to where I want to go, I shall (I repeat) note and weigh only the things that divine revelation once taught Moses about this.

I have already said in chapter 5, that the Hebrews, after their escape from Egypt, were no longer bound by the laws of any other nation, and were permitted to institute new laws for themselves as they pleased, and to occupy whatever lands they wanted. Freed from the intolerable oppression of the Egyptians, and not contractually bound to any mortal, they regained their natural right to do anything that it was in their power to do, and each of them could again decide whether he wanted to keep his natural right or to surrender it by transferring it to someone else.

Placed in this natural condition, they decided to transfer their right only to God and not to any mortal. (This was on the advice of Moses, in whom they had the utmost trust.) Without hesitation they all made the same promise—with one shout—to obey absolutely all God’s commands and not to recognize any law except what he laid down as law by prophetic revelation. And this promise—this transfer of right—to God was made in the same way as I have depicted it in an ordinary society where men decide to surrender their natural right. . . . See *Exodus 24:7*.

To make the contract valid and lasting and free from any suspicion of fraud, God delayed making it until after they had experienced his amazing power, which was all that had enabled the Hebrews to survive [206] and would be all that enabled them to survive in the future (see *Exodus 19:4–5*). It was their belief that only the power of God could preserve them that led them to transfer to God all their natural power to preserve themselves (which they may have thought they had on their own account), thus transferring all their right. [The point of that parenthetical bit is that in Spinoza’s view anything that a man naturally has is something that is given to him by God = Nature.]

So God alone ruled over the Hebrews, this contractually based authority was rightly called ‘the Kingdom of God’, and God was rightly called ‘the King of the Hebrews’. So •enemies

of this State were God’s enemies, •citizens who tried to usurp his authority were guilty of treason against God, and •the laws of this State were laws and commands of God.

In this State, therefore, •civil law and •religion (which I have shown consists only in obedience to God) were one and the same thing. The tenets of religion weren’t •doctrines that were taught; they were •laws and commands that were issued; piety was regarded as justice, and impiety as a crime and an injustice. Anyone who failed in his religious duties lost his citizenship and was therefore regarded as an enemy; anyone who died for religion was considered to have died for his country; and no distinction at all was made between civil law and religion. That State could be called a ‘theocracy’, because its citizens were not bound by any law except the law revealed by God.

But this whole account is really about what the Hebrews believed, rather than what was actually going on; for in fact the Hebrews didn’t transfer *any* of their right of government! You’ll see that this is so when I have explained how this State was administered—that being my next task.

The Hebrews didn’t transfer their right to anyone else; •i.e. to any human being; rather, everyone surrendered his right equally, as happens in a democracy, and they cried out in one voice ‘whatever God says we will do’, with no mention of a mediator. So they all remained completely equal in this contract—•equally entitled to consult God and receive and interpret his laws, and •equally in possession of the whole administration of the State. That’s why they all equally went to God the first time to hear his commands. But at this first greeting they were so terrified, so stunned by thunder and lightning when they heard God speaking, that they thought their end was near. Full of fear, then, they went back to Moses and said:

What mortal ever heard the voice of the living God speak out of the fire, as we did, and lived? You go closer and hear all that the Lord our God says, and then *you* tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will willingly do it. [*Deuteronomy* 5:24–7.]

It's clear that by saying this they annulled the first contract and transferred to Moses, unconditionally, their right to consult God and to interpret his edicts. For now they were promising to obey not whatever God said •to them but whatever God said •to Moses (see *Deuteronomy* 5, after the ten commandments, and 18:15–16). This made Moses the sole formulator and interpreter of the divine laws, and thus also the supreme judge, who couldn't be judged in his turn by anyone. He was the sole agent of God among the Hebrews, i.e. had the supreme authority, since he alone had the right to consult God, to give God's replies to the people, and to compel the people to act on them. He *alone*, I say, because if anyone else tried to preach anything in God's name while Moses was alive, he was liable to punishment as a usurper of the supreme right, even if he was a true prophet (see *Numbers* 11:28).⁹

Notice that although the people chose Moses, they had no legal right to choose his successor. As soon as they •transferred to Moses the right to consult God, and •promised unconditionally to regard him as a divine oracle, they lost absolutely all their rights, and had to accept anyone Moses chose as his successor as though God had chosen

him. If he had chosen someone who would undertake the whole administration of the State, as he had done, having the right to consult God alone in his tent, and hence having the authority •to establish and repeal laws, •to decide about war and peace, •to send ambassadors, •establish judges, •choose a successor, and •administer absolutely all the duties of the supreme power, the State would have been simply a *monarchy*. And it would differ from other monarchies in only one respect: *they* are generally governed on the basis of a decree of God that is hidden even from the monarch himself, whereas the State of the Hebrews would, or should, have been governed by a decree of God revealed only to the monarch. [Spinoza goes on to say that this difference implies that the imagined Hebrew monarch would have more, not less, authority over his people than ordinary monarchs do. Then:]

But Moses didn't choose such a successor. [208] Instead he left the State to be administered by his successors in such a way that it couldn't be called democratic or aristocratic or monarchic, but *theocratic*. One person had the right of interpreting the laws and of passing along God's replies, and a different person had the right and authority to administer the State—according to laws already explained and replies already passed along. On this see *Numbers* 27:21. [Spinoza has a footnote here, commenting on the badness of every translation he has seen of *Numbers* 27:19,23.] So that these matters may be better understood, I shall explain the entire administration of the State in an orderly way.

⁹ In this passage two men are accused of prophesying in the camp, and Joshua says that they should be arrested. He wouldn't have done this if everyone had been permitted to give the people divine answers without Moses' permission. Moses chooses to acquit them, and he scolds Joshua for urging him to insist on his royal right at a time when he is finding his right of ruling so burdensome that—as we see in *Numbers* 11:14–15—he would rather die than rule alone. This is what he says to Joshua: 'Are you wrought up on my account? Would that *all* the Lord's people were prophets!' He was expressing the wish that the right of consulting God would return to the people, so that *they* would rule. Joshua had a correct view about what was right •or legal•, but not of what was suitable at that time. That is why Moses chastised him. . . .

First, the people were ordered to put up a building which was to be God's palace, so to speak, i.e. the palace of the supreme authority of that State. It was to be built not at the expense of one person but from the resources of the whole people, so that the house where God was to be consulted would be common property.

The Levites were chosen as the officials and administrators of this divine palace. Aaron, Moses' brother, was chosen as •the chief of these and •second in command to King God (if I may so put it). The law laid down that he would be succeeded by his sons. So he, as the person nearest to God, was the supreme interpreter of the divine laws, the one who gave the people the replies of the divine oracle, and finally, the one who petitioned God on behalf of the people. If along with these powers of interpretation he had also had the right to command that the laws be obeyed, that would have made him an absolute monarch. But Aaron was given no such powers. Indeed, not only he but his entire tribe, the Levites, were so far from having the civil command that they were deprived of the rights that the other tribes had—to the point where they weren't even entitled to a portion of land that could give them a living. Moses ordained that the tribe of Levi would be fed by the rest of the people, so that it would always be held in greatest honour by the common people, as the only tribe dedicated to God.

Next, an army was formed from the other tribes and was commanded •to invade the territory of the Canaanites, •to divide it into twelve parts, and to •distribute those among the tribes through a lottery. The right to make this division and distribution was given to twelve chosen leaders, one from each tribe, along with Joshua and the high priest Eleazar. Joshua was chosen as supreme commander of this army. He alone had the right to consult God regarding any new business that might come up, . . . but he was to

do this through the high priest, who alone received God's replies. He also had the right

- to uphold the commands of God communicated to him by the high priest,
- to compel the people to obey those commands,
- to devise and use means of carrying them out,
- to choose from the army anyone he wanted for special duty, and
- to send [209] ambassadors in his own name.

All decisions relating to war were to be made by him alone. The law didn't lay down any procedure for selecting a successor to Joshua in this post. There wouldn't be any successor until there was a national *need* for one, and then the selection would be made directly by God. At other times all matters of war and peace were to be administered by the tribal leaders, as I shall soon show.

Finally, Moses commanded everyone from age twenty to age sixty to take up arms to serve as a soldier and to form hosts [here = 'battle groups'] only from the people, hosts that swore loyalty not to the commander or the high priest but to religion, i.e. to God. So these hosts were called 'God's hosts' and he was called 'the Lord of hosts' . . .

From these commands that Moses gave to his successors we can easily gather that he was choosing the State's administrators, not its rulers. He didn't give anyone the right to consult God alone and whenever he wanted to; so he gave no-one the authority *he* had of establishing and repealing laws, making decisions about war and peace, and choosing administrators of the temple and of the cities. These are all functions of whoever has sovereignty. The high priest had the right to interpret the laws and give God's replies, but only •when asked to do so by the commander or the supreme council—not •whenever he wanted to (like Moses). The supreme commander of the hosts, and also the councils,

could consult God whenever they wanted to, but could receive God's replies only through the high priest. In Moses' mouth, God's words were *commands*; but in the mouth of the high priest they were only *replies*. They eventually came to have the force of commands through being accepted by Joshua and the councils.

And this high priest, who received God's replies directly from God, didn't have an army and weren't legally entitled to govern; while those who owned land had no legal right to make laws. The high priest—this was as true of Aaron as it was of his son Eleazar—was indeed chosen by Moses; but after Moses' death no-one had the right to *choose* the priest—the role of priest passed by law from father to son.

The commander of the host was also chosen by Moses. His right to the role of commander came not from the high priest but from Moses, who gave it to him. [210] When Joshua died, therefore, the priest didn't choose anyone to replace him; nor did the tribal leaders ask God whom they should make commander. Rather, each leader retained over his own tribe's armed forces the right that Joshua had had over all the armed forces of the Hebrews; and the command of the Hebrew army as a whole was exercised by all those leaders collectively.

There seems to have been no need for a supreme commander except when they had to fight a common enemy with their combined forces. The main case of this sort was in the time of Joshua, when no tribe had its own legally defined territory, and everything was held in common. Once the tribes had divided up among themselves the lands they held by right of war and the lands they had been commanded still to acquire, it was no longer the case that everything belonged to everyone, and so there was no longer any need for a common commander. Because of the division of the land, the members of any tribe had to view the members of

the other tribes not as fellow citizens but rather as allies. (In connection with their inter-relations of powers and rights, that is. In relation to God and religion they had, of course, still to be thought of as fellow citizens.) [For Spinoza's definition of 'ally', see item (4) on page 127.]

[Spinoza adds details of this matter, including biblical examples (two tribes forming a temporary alliance to defeat a common enemy, eleven tribes ganging up on a single tribe, the Benjaminites). He likens that Hebrew political entity to the Dutch Republic in which he lived—called the 'Federated States of the Netherlands'. And he offers a conjecture about something that the Bible doesn't clearly settle, namely what the rules of succession were for tribal leaders. Then:]

[..211] For my present purposes I don't need to know for sure whether that conjecture is right. What *does* matter is that I have shown that after Moses' death no-one had all the functions of the supreme commander. These things didn't all depend on the decision of one man or of one council or of the people as a whole. Some administrative matters were dealt with by one tribe, others by the other tribes in an equal partnership. This very clearly implies that after Moses died the State wasn't monarchical or aristocratic or democratic; it was (I repeat) *theocratic*. Its three theocratic features were these: (1) the temple was the royal palace of the State, and (as I have shown) the Hebrews of different tribes were all fellow citizens only because of their relation to the temple. (2) All the citizens had to swear allegiance to God as their supreme judge, the only one they had promised to obey in absolutely everything. (3) When a supreme commander of everyone was needed, God chose him. . . .

[..212] The next task is to see how far this political structure could guide people's minds, discouraging the rulers from becoming tyrants and the ruled from becoming rebels.

·WHY THE HEBREW LEADERS DIDN'T BECOME TYRANTS·

People who have or administer sovereignty always try to cover any crimes they commit under a pretext of legality and to persuade the people that they have acted honestly. It's easy for them to get away with this when they have sole charge of the interpretation of the law. That obviously gives them the greatest freedom to do whatever they want, a freedom that they lose if someone else has the right to interpret the laws or if the true interpretation is so obvious to everyone that no-one can doubt it.

This makes it clear that the leaders of the Hebrews were deprived of great opportunities for crime by the assignment to the Levites—and to them alone—the job of interpreting the laws (see *Deuteronomy* 21:5). These Levites had no administrative duties and no land of their own. Their whole fortune and honour depended on their interpreting the laws truly.

Also, the people as a whole were ordered to gather once every seven years in a certain place where the high priest instructed them in the laws. And each one was ordered to read and reread the book of the law alone, continuously, and with attention (see *Deuteronomy* 31:9–13 and 6:7).

So if a leader wanted the people to cherish him with the greatest honour, he had to take great care to govern entirely according to the prescribed laws, which everyone knew well enough. If he •did this, the people would venerate him as a servant of God's government and as acting on behalf of God. If he •didn't, he couldn't escape his subjects' intense hatred, for usually there is no greater hate than theological hate.

·FIVE MORE THINGS KEEPING HEBREW LEADERS HONEST·

1. Another means of restraining the unbridled lust of princes—a very important one—is **(a)** having an army formed from all the citizens (*all*—from age 20 to age 60), and **(b)** not being allowed to hire foreign soldiers by offering pay. This,

I repeat, was a matter of very great importance. **[213]** For it is certain that **(b)** princes can suppress their subjects merely by employing an army of mercenaries, and that **(a)** princes fear nothing more than the freedom of citizen soldiers, who bring freedom and glory to the state by their virtue, work, and sacrifice. [Spinoza cites an episode involving Alexander the Great as an example of a leader who was kept in check by fear of his own citizen army, and remarks that this inhibiting effect must have been much stronger with leaders of the ancient Hebrews, whose soldiers 'fought not for the glory of their leaders but for the glory of God'. Then:]

2. The only thing connecting all the leaders of the Hebrews was the bond of religion. If any one of them had defected from their religion and begun to violate the divine right of each individual, the rest could have considered him an enemy and rightly put him down.

3. There was always the fear of a new prophet. If someone whose life had been blameless showed by certain accepted signs that he was a prophet, that alone would have given him (as it gave Moses) the supreme right of command

- in the name of God revealed to him alone, and not (like the leaders)

- in the name of a God only consulted through the priest.

Such a man could easily draw an oppressed people to him, and convince them of anything he liked. But if the government had been going well and the people were *not* oppressed, the leader could—in advance of the appearance of any such prophet—adopt a stated policy that such a prophet would first have to submit himself to the leader's judgment about

- whether his life passed official scrutiny,

- whether he had certain and indubitable signs of his mission, and

•whether what he planned to say in the name of God agreed with accepted doctrine and with the civil laws of the country.

If the signs were insufficient or the doctrine was new, the leader could rightly condemn the ‘prophet’ [214] to death. Otherwise—i.e. if he *did* pass muster—he wouldn’t constitute a challenge to the leader, because everyone would know that he preached only because the leader authorized him to.

4. The leader wouldn’t be likely to govern corruptly because he had been put in charge of the state only because of his age and virtue, and not for any reason having to do with hereditary rights or nobility.

5. The leader and the whole army couldn’t be carried away by a desire for war. . . . As I have pointed out, the army was made up entirely of citizens; so the management of war was in the hands of the same men as the management of peace. Thus,

- a soldier in the camp was a citizen in civilian life,
- an officer in the camp was a judge in the civil court, and
- the commander in the camp was a leader in the State.

So no-one could want war for its own sake, but only for the sake of peace and to protect freedom. . . .

·WHAT KEPT THE HEBREW PEOPLE IN LINE·

So much for the reasons that held *the leaders* within their limits. Now we must see how *the people* were checked. It’s really very clear that they were kept in line by the basic way the State was constituted. You don’t have to look very hard to see that this constitution was sure to fill the hearts of the citizens with a love so special that it would be really difficult for them even to *think of* betraying their country or defecting from it. They must all have been in a frame of mind where they’d have suffered death rather than be under foreign rule. Why? Well, after they transferred their

right to God they believed that •their kingdom was God’s kingdom, that •they alone were the children of God, and that •other nations were God’s enemies. This led them into the most fierce hatred of other nations (a hatred they also believed to be pious—see Psalm 139:21–22). Nothing could be more loathsome to them than swearing loyalty to a foreign power and promising obedience to it. They couldn’t imagine anything more disgraceful or detestable than to betray their country, i.e. the very kingdom of the God whom they worshipped.

They even considered it a disgrace for anyone merely to go to live outside their country, because (they held) their country was the only place where they were allowed to worship God as they were obliged to do. That’s because it was the only land they thought to be sacred, all the rest being (in their view) unclean and profane. . . .

[.215] So the Hebrews’ love for their own country wasn’t simple *love*. It was *piety*, which (together with hatred for other nations) was so inflamed and fed by their daily worship that it must have become a part of their nature. [This is a good place to remember that ‘piety’ is mostly a matter of obedience to religious duties; see note on page 4.] How did their worship have these effects? Well,

(1) their daily worship was completely different from that of other nations, making the Hebrews altogether individual and completely separated from the others; and •there is also the stronger fact that

(2) their daily worship was absolutely contrary to that of other nations, so that they had a daily dose of ‘Down with foreigners!’, which was bound to lead to a continual hatred’s being lodged durably in their hearts.

It’s only natural that the most intense and stubborn hatred is the one that comes from great devotion, i.e. piety, and that

is believed to *be* pious. And course their hatred for foreign nations was also nourished in a more ordinary way, namely by the savage hatred that those other nations had for *them*.

Reason very clearly teaches, and experience confirms, that all these things—

- freedom from human rule,
- devotion to their country,
- an absolute right over all others,
- a hatred that was not only permitted but regarded as pious,
- regarding everyone else as hostile,
- the individuality of customs and rites

—could strengthen the Hebrews' hearts to bear everything, with special constancy and virtue, for the sake of their country. [Because of this cluster of feelings and attitudes, Spinoza goes on to say, the Jews couldn't bear to be under foreign rule, which is why Jerusalem was known as 'the rebellious city'. He quotes Tacitus saying that 'the mentality of the people' made Jerusalem an especially difficult target for the Romans. Then:]

·THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR, AND SOME OTHERS·

Hebrew citizens were prevented from thinking of defection or wanting to desert their country not only by •the factors I have been listing but also by •something else whose workings are utterly dependable and which is the mainstay and life of all human actions—I'm talking about self-interest. [Spinoza says that the evaluation of the previously listed factors 'depends only on opinion'. His point seems to be that there is some room for argument about the effectiveness of each of those factors, in contrast to self-interest, whose power to affect action is beyond question.] ·Although self-interest is a sure-fire cause in human behaviour generally·, [216] it had a special role in the Hebrew State. In no other State did the citizens possess their things with a stronger right than did the subjects of this State. Each

of them was the everlasting lord of his share of land, which was of same size as the leader's share. If someone was forced by poverty to sell his farm or field, it had to be restored to him when the jubilee year came around. Because of this procedure, and some others, no-one could be alienated from his firmly established goods. Nowhere could poverty be more bearable than in the Hebrew State, where loving kindness towards one's neighbour, i.e. your fellow citizen, had to be practised with the utmost piety, so that God their King would look with favour on them. So things could go well with the Hebrew citizens in their own country, and *only* there: outside it ·they could expect· only loss and shame.

Something else that helped greatly in •keeping the people in their native country and also in •avoiding civil war and removing the causes of disputes, was this: No-one was subject to his equal, but only to God; and loving kindness and love [*charitas & amor*] towards one's fellow citizen were thought to be the height of piety. This was considerably encouraged by the way they hated other nations, and the way the other nations hated them back.

Especially conducive ·to avoiding domestic disputes· was the strong discipline of obedience with which the Hebrews were brought up: they had to do everything according to definite laws. They weren't allowed to plough whenever they pleased, but only at certain times and in certain years, with the plough being pulled by only one kind of beast at a time. They could sow and reap only in a certain way and at a certain time. *Every* aspect of their life involved continual obedience (see chapter 5 on the use of ceremonies). This régime, to those who had become used to it, must have come to seem like freedom rather than bondage. A result must have been that no-one wanted anything that was forbidden, only what was commanded.

It must have been a great help also that at certain times of each year they were obliged to devote themselves to leisure and joy, not to satisfy their wishes but wishing to obey God. . . . There couldn't be a better device than this for steering people's hearts in a certain direction. The best way to win hearts is through the joy that arises from devotion, i.e. from love and wonder together. [217] And they wouldn't be likely to get bored with these recurring festivals, because they didn't occur often and their content varied. . . .

I think I have now explained, clearly though briefly, the principal design features of the Hebrew State.

·WHY DID THE HEBREWS FAIL?·

The questions that we still have to tackle are these:

- Why did the Hebrews so often fail to obey the law?
- Why were they so often subjugated?
- What made it possible for their State to be, eventually, completely destroyed?

Someone might answer that this ·triplet of failures· happened because *the people were wilfully disobedient*. But this is childish. ·It is always a puerile exercise to 'explain' a fact about a nation simply by postulating a feature of the national character·. *Why* was this nation more disobedient than other nations? Was it by nature? Of course not! Nature creates individuals, not nations, and individuals are sorted out into nationalities only by differences of •language, •laws and •accepted customs. It is only from •laws and •customs that a given nationality can get its particular mentality, its particular flavour, its particular prejudices. [Notice that Spinoza doesn't here give •language any role in the formation of national character.] So if we have to accept that the Hebrews were more disobedient than other mortals, we must attribute this to there being something wrong with either their laws or their accepted customs.

It's true: if God had wanted their State to be more stable, he would have set up its rights and laws differently, and provided a different way of administering it. So what can we say except that ·God treated them as he did because· *they made their God angry?* [Spinoza quotes Ezekiel 20:25–6, a strange passage in which God announces that he gave the Jews bad laws so as to 'render them desolate'. There are significant differences between the •King James and •Revised Standard versions of this, and between each of those and the •Latin and •Jewish Bibles and also •Spinoza's own translation. Let's by-pass this mare's nest.]

For a better understanding of these words, and of what caused the destruction [218] of the Hebrew State, we must note that ·God· intended at first to hand over the whole of the sacred ministry to the first-born, not to the Levites (see *Numbers* 8:17); but after everyone except the Levites worshipped the calf, the first-born were rejected and declared unclean, and the Levites were chosen in their place (*Deuteronomy* 10:8).

The more I think about this switch, the more it compels me to burst out in the words of Tacitus: what God wanted then 'was not their security but his revenge'. And I'm just amazed that there was so much anger in the divine mind that he established the laws—the *laws!*—aiming at vengeance for himself and punishment for the people. Real *laws* aim only at the honour, well-being and security of the whole people; so these things that God established weren't really laws. What they did was to create plenty of bases for accusing the Hebrews of being unclean: •the gifts they were bound to give the Levites and priests, •the need to redeem the first-born, •the compulsory per capita payments to the Levites, and •the fact that only the Levites were permitted to approach the sacred things.

There were always openings for the Levites to subject the others to moral criticism, and criticism flowed in the other direction as well, as I now explain. Among so many thousands of Levites there must have been many who were pushy and stupid 'men of God'; so the people kept track of the Levites' conduct (they were only men, after all); and when one Levite misbehaved, the people did what people *do*—blamed them all! So there was a continual rumble of discontent, and—especially when food-prices were high—unwillingness to feed these resented idle men who weren't even related to them by blood.

So it's not surprising that in times of peace, when there were no more obvious miracles and there were no men of outstanding authority, the people became angry and mean and therefore *slack*; to the point where they didn't properly observe their old form of worship (discredited and viewed with suspicion by them, although it had been given by God), and hungered for something new. Nor is it surprising if the leaders—always trying to find a way to get the supreme right of command exclusively for themselves—gave in to the people and introduced new forms of worship, so as to bind the people to themselves and turn them away from the high priest.

If the State had been set up in accordance with God's original plan for it, the tribes would always have been equal in right and honour, and security would have been achieved. Who would want to violate the sacred right of his own blood-relatives? What would a man have put ahead of

- feeding his own blood-relatives, his brothers and parents, in accordance with religious duty?
- learning from his kin the interpretation of the laws?
- looking to them for God's answers? [219]

Also, the tribes would have remained much more closely united if the management of religious affairs had been evenly

distributed amongst them.

•But although the bare facts about the structure of religious authority seem to threaten trouble, there wouldn't have been anything to fear if God's choice of the Levites had arisen from something other than anger and vengeance. . . .

The historical narratives confirm the account I am giving. As soon as things eased up for the people while they were still in the desert, many of them (not of the common folk) began to find this assignment of priestly duties intolerable, and to think that Moses hadn't instituted *anything* by divine command, but had followed his own wishes in everything, choosing his own tribe before all the others and giving the right of priesthood to his own brother Aaron for ever. They staged a demonstration and confronted him with the claim that everyone was equally holy and that it wasn't right that he had been raised above everyone else [Numbers 16:3]. He couldn't quieten them; but when he used a miracle as a sign of God's confidence in him, all the rebels were annihilated [Numbers 16:31–35]. This started up a new rebellion, this time of the whole people. The first rebels, they thought, had been annihilated not by God's judgment but by the craftiness of Moses. According to them, he had quietened those rebels after they had been ground down by a plague or some other great calamity, so that they all preferred death to life. So all that happened was that •the rebellion failed—not that •harmony began.

Scripture is a witness to this, when God, after predicting to Moses that after his death the people would lapse in their loyalty to divine worship, says:

I know what plans they are devising, even now, before I bring them into the land that I promised on oath.
(Deuteronomy 31:21)

And a little later, Moses says to the people:

Well I know how defiant and stiff-necked you are: even now, while I am alive in your midst, you have been defiant towards the Lord; how much more, then, when I am dead! (31:27)

And we all know that that's just what did in fact happen. There were great changes, and a great license to do anything, luxury and idleness, with everything going from bad to worse; until eventually, after they had suffered many defeats, they completely broke away from the divine law, and wanted an ordinary human king so that the physical centre of the State would be not the Temple but a Court. In this way (they thought), what held the Hebrews together as a single nation would be •the rule of kings and no longer •divine law and the priesthood.

This encouraged new rebellions, and eventually led to the complete ruin of the whole State. For what can a king tolerate less than •ruling insecurely [220] and •having to allow a State within a State? ·How did those two factors come into the story? In three strongly inter-connected ways, which I now explain. **(1)** The first kings, chosen from the ranks of private citizens, were content with the degree of dignity to which they had risen. But after their sons took over the kingship by right of succession, *they* gradually began to change things so that they would have the right of governing entirely to themselves. They hadn't had this completely, because the right over the laws had depended not on them but on the high Priest, who guarded the laws in the sanctuary and interpreted them to the people; with the result that the kings were bound by the laws, like subjects, and couldn't legally repeal them or make new laws that would be equally authoritative. **(2)** The kings were also like their subjects in being treated by the Levites as secular, and therefore forbidden to deal with sacred matters. **(3)** The whole security of the State depended on the will of one

person, who was seen as a prophet. They had seen examples of this dependence in the great freedom with which ·prophet· Samuel gave orders to ·King· Saul about everything, and the ease with which Samuel transferred the kingship to David because of one bit of bad behaviour by Saul. ·Putting those three things together·, the kings •had a State within a State, and •ruled insecurely.

To remedy this situation, the kings allowed other temples to be dedicated to the gods, so as to by-pass the procedure of consulting with the Levites. Then they sought out a number of men who would prophesy in the name of God, so that they—the kings—could have 'prophets' ·of their own· to counteract the genuine prophets. But nothing that the kings attempted had any success in getting them what they wanted. That's because the genuine prophets—always prudent and alert—waited for an opportune time to strike back. The opportune time was *early* in the reign of a new king, when his rule was insecure because of people's strong memories of his predecessor. At that time it was easy for them to use their divine authority to get some rival to take legal control of the State (or of ·the secular· part of it), in the name of 'defending divine right'. The rival had to be a disaffected subject of the present king, and to be known to be virtuous.

But the prophets weren't able to make any real improvements in this way. Although they removed a tyrant from their midst, the causes ·of tyranny· remained; so all they achieved was to buy a new tyrant with a great expenditure of the citizens' blood! There was no end to dissension and civil wars, and in fact the causes for violations of divine law were always the same. The only way to remove them was by getting rid of the State altogether.

So now we can see how religion was introduced into the Hebrew State, and how that State could have retained its power for ever, if only the just anger of the lawgiver had

allowed it to continue ·with the same constitution· as it had at the outset. But this couldn't happen, so eventually the State had to perish.

I've been talking here only about the •first State. The •second one was hardly a shadow of the first: [221] the Jews were subjects of the Persians, and were bound by Persian law; and after they got free, their High Priests usurped the authority of leadership through which they obtained absolute control, wanting to be supreme in both civic and in religious matters. So there's not much I need to say about the second State. [The second State existed after the Jews were released from their Babylonian captivity. Babylon, now in Iraq, was at that time controlled by Persia.]

A question arises about the first State, which I have

claimed to be •durable (·if only God hadn't closed it down by a constitutional change·)—namely the question *Can it be imitated?* And ·if it can't be imitated closely·, *do we have a religious duty to imitate it as much as possible?* I'll answer these in the remaining chapters.

As a kind of book-end to the present chapter, I add a remark that I have already hinted at. The results I have reached in this chapter establish that •divine right—i.e. the right of religion—arises from a contract or covenant; the only right there can be where there is no contract is •natural right. So the Hebrews had no religion-based obligations to nations that weren't participants in a contract with them; they had such obligations only toward their fellow citizens.

Chapter 18: Inferring political tenets from the Hebrew State and its history

Although the Hebrew State, as I described it in Chapter 17, could have lasted for ever, no-one *now* can imitate it, and it wouldn't be wise even to try. If you wanted to transfer your right to God, you'd have to make a contract explicitly with him, as the Hebrews did; and that would require not only •your consent but also •God's. But God has told us through his apostles that his contract is no longer written with ink, or on stone tablets, but is written by the spirit of God in the human heart. Moreover, such a form of State would probably be useful only for people willing to live by themselves, without any foreign trade, shutting themselves

up within their own boundaries in isolation from the rest of the world. It couldn't be any use to those who need to have dealings with others. So it could be useful only for a very few people.

Although this ·Hebrew form of State· can't be imitated in every respect, it had many features that it's worthwhile to take note of and perhaps even to imitate. But (I repeat) I don't aim to treat of the State in detail, so I'll skip most of those things and note only points that are [222] relevant to my purpose. ·Two of them concern the division of authority·. •It isn't contrary to God's kingship to elect a supreme authority

to have the supreme right of command. After transferring their right to God, the Hebrews handed over the supreme right of command to Moses; so that he alone had the authority to make and repeal laws, to choose the ministers of sacred affairs, to judge, to teach, to chastise, and to govern all the people in every respect—all this in God's name. •Although the ministers of sacred affairs were the interpreters of the laws, it wasn't for them to judge the citizens or excommunicate anyone; for this was in the jurisdiction of the judges and the leaders chosen from the people (see *Joshua* 6:26, *Judges* 21:18, and 1 *Samuel* 14:24).

In addition to those points about the •formal structure of the Hebrew State, there are noteworthy things to be learned by attending to the •history of the Hebrews.

(1) There were no sects in their religion until after the high priests in the second Hebrew State had acquired the authority to make decrees and to handle the affairs of the State, and then—to make their authority truly permanent—seized the right of leadership for themselves and eventually wanted to be called Kings.

•How was that change in the power of the high priests relevant to the formation of sects?• It's not hard to see how or why. In the first State no decree could get its validity from the high Priest, because the priests had no right to issue decrees; their role was merely to pass along God's answers when asked to do so by the secular authorities. So they couldn't feel any drive to decree novelties, rather than merely administering and defending decrees that were familiar and accepted. Their only way of defending their own freedom against the wishes of the secular leaders was to keep the laws from being tampered with. But after they had acquired the authority to handle the affairs of the State, combining the powers of secular leadership with the powers of priesthood, each of them began to seek glory for his own

name, in religious *and* in secular matters. He did this by invoking priestly authority to settle everything, keeping up a rapid fire of new decrees governing ceremonies, the faith, and everything else, wanting these decrees to be just as sacred and authoritative as the laws of Moses. The result was that religion slumped into a pernicious superstition and that the true meaning and interpretation of the laws was corrupted.

Also: while the priests were busy trying to gain control of the leadership at the start of the restoration, they tried to get the common people on their side by •approving everything they did, even if it was impious, and [223] by •adjusting Scripture to fit the worst customs of the people. Malachi testifies to this in the most solemn terms. Having reproached the priests of his time, calling them men who 'scorn God's name' [*Malachi* 1:6], he lays into them thus:

The lips of a priest guard knowledge, and men seek rulings from his mouth; for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts. But you have turned away from that course: you have made the many stumble through your rulings; you have corrupted the covenant of the Levites—said the Lord of Hosts. [*Malachi* 2:7–8]

He goes on to accuse them of interpreting the laws as they pleased, and of acting on the basis not of what God wants but of what men want.

But there was no chance of the priests' doing this so carefully that •right-minded people didn't see what was going on. And •these people will have claimed, with growing boldness, that they weren't obliged to follow any laws except written ones, and that there was no obligation to observe the decrees that the deluded Pharisees. . . .called 'traditions of our forefathers'.

•That is a confident conjecture of mine, but it isn't a mere conjecture.—it is indeed something we can't have any doubt of—that

- the flattery of the priests,
- the corruption of religion and of the laws, and
- the incredible increase in the number of laws

provided many wide-open opportunities for arguments and disputes that couldn't ever be settled. When men start an argument in the fierce heat of superstition, and the legal system takes one side against the other, the people will never calm down, and are sure to split up into sects.

(2) The •prophets (who were private individuals ·and not office-holders of any sort·) were so free in warning and scolding the people that the people were more annoyed than corrected; whereas they were easily led to change course when warned or punished by their •kings. Indeed, because of their authority to judge what actions would be pious and what impious, the prophets made a serious nuisance of themselves even to pious kings, reprimanding them if they were bold enough to treat some public or private business in a way that conflicted with the judgment of the prophets. [Spinoza cites an example from 2 *Chronicles* 16. Then:] There are also other examples showing that religion was more harmed than helped by such freedom ·to criticise·; not to mention the fact that **[224]** the prophets' hanging on to so much authority for themselves was a source of intense civil wars.

(3) As long as the people were sovereign, they had only one civil war, which finally came to a complete end (the winners had so much pity for the losers that did all they could to restore them to their former status and power). But after the people—without any previous experience of monarchy—replaced the original ·democratic· form of the State by a monarchical one, there was almost no end to civil wars, and the Hebrews engaged in battles of unprecedented ferocity. For in one battle (this is almost beyond belief) the men of Judah killed 500,000 men of Israel; in another, the

men of Israel

- slaughtered many men of Judah (Scripture doesn't say how many),
 - seized the King himself,
 - almost destroyed the wall of Jerusalem,
- and (to show there was no limit to their anger)
- stripped the Temple of everything movable.

Loaded down with enormous amounts of loot taken from their brothers, their thirst for blood satisfied, they •took hostages, •left the King with his almost destroyed kingdom, and •laid down their arms—their security coming not from the good faith of the men of Judah but from their weakness. A few years later, when the men of Judah had regained their strength, they went into battle again; and again the men of Israel were the winners, slaughtering 120,000 men of Judah, taking up to 200,000 of their women and children captive, and again seizing a great many spoils. [2 *Chronicles* 28:5–15] Exhausted by these and other battles (the histories don't say much about them), the men of Israel eventually fell a prey to their enemies.

Contrast that with the length of the interludes of absolute peace that the Hebrews enjoyed before the monarchy was started. Back then, they often had forty-year stretches of peace [*Judges* 3:11, 5:31, 8:28] and one stretch of eighty years, believe it or not [*Judges* 3:30]—periods when they lived harmoniously, without any external or internal wars. But after the Kings got control, the wars were about glory and not as previously about peace and freedom. So we read that all the kings waged wars (actually, all except Solomon, whose power showed up better in peace than in war, because his power consisted in his wisdom). ·As well as the desire for glory·, there was a pernicious lust for governing power, which meant that most of the kings reached the throne by a very bloody path.

(4) Finally, for as long as the people were the rulers, the laws remained uncorrupted and were observed more steadfastly. That is because before the kings there were very few prophets to nag the people, [225] whereas after they opted for monarchy there were always a great many at any given time. Obadiah, for example, saved a hundred prophets from slaughter, hiding them so that they wouldn't be killed along with the other prophets [1 *Kings* 18:4, 13]. And we don't find people being deceived by false prophets until after the power passed into the hands of kings. . . .

From this history of the Hebrew State we can learn four things:

(i) **How destructive** it is, both for religion and for the State, to allow the ministers of sacred affairs the right to make decrees or handle the business of government. Everything is *much* more stable if these people—these priests—are kept on a short leash so that they don't give any answers except when asked, and in the meantime teach and apply only doctrines that have already been accepted and are very familiar.

(ii) **How dangerous** it is to bring divine right to bear on things that are really matters of philosophical theory, and to legislate answers to questions that are or could be controversial. A person's opinions are under his control, and no-one can give that up; so there's something very oppressive about a law making it a crime to hold such-and-such an opinion. When there are such laws, what happens is mostly dictated by the anger of the mob. Pilate was yielding to the fury of the Pharisees when he ordered the crucifixion of Christ, whom he knew to be innocent. The Pharisees also created a religious stir, accusing the Sadducees of impiety (what they really wanted was just to dislodge the wealthier people from their high perch). Following the Pharisees' example, everyone has been driven by the same madness, which they call zeal

for God's law (how far each man takes this depends only on how much of a hypocrite he is). Everywhere they have persecuted men who are distinguished for their integrity and famous for their virtue, and *therefore* envied by the mob—publicly denouncing their opinions and inflaming the savage multitude in their anger against them.

It's hard to quell the people who impudently help themselves to a freedom to attack the opinions of others, because they do it all under the cloak of religion. This is especially true where the sovereign authorities have introduced a sect

what Spinoza wrote next: *cujus ipsae authores non sunt;*

which could mean: of which they are not themselves the founders;

or it could mean: in which they themselves have no position of authority;

because then they are seen not as interpreters of divine law but merely as adherents of a sect, i.e. as people who acknowledge the learned men of that sect as interpreters of divine law. That's why the authority of the legal system [226] about these matters is usually not worth much among the common people, whereas the authority of the learned sectarians, to whose interpretations they think even kings must submit, is very great. The safest way to avoid these evils is to tie piety and the practice of religion only to *works*, i.e. only to the exercise of loving kindness and justice, leaving everyone's judgment free in all other matters. I'll say more about this later.

(iii) **How necessary** it is, both for the State and for religion, to give the authority to distinguish right from wrong to the sovereign secular power alone. For if this authority to distinguish right actions from wrong ones couldn't be granted to the divine prophets themselves without great harm both to the State and to Religion, much less should

it be granted to those who don't know how to predict the future and cannot perform miracles. But I shall discuss this in detail later.

(iv) **How disastrous** it is for a people to opt for monarchy when •they have no experience of living under kings and •they have laws already established. They won't be able to bear the weight of so much control, •not being accustomed to it; and the monarch won't be able to endure the •already established laws and rights of the people, established by someone with less authority than a king has. Still less will he be willing to apply himself to •defending those laws—especially given that those laws won't have been set up to deal with monarchy but only with the people or the council that thought it was in charge. So if the king *did* defend the rights that the people used to have, he would seem to be the people's servant rather than their master. A new monarch will therefore work very hard to •establish new laws, to •transform the powers of the State to his own advantage, and to •reduce the people to a level where they can't deprive him of his throne as easily as they gave it to him.

But I mustn't suppress the fact that it's equally dangerous to get rid of a monarch, even if it's in every way clear that he is a tyrant. A people accustomed to royal authority and held in check only by it, will despise and deride any lesser authority. So if they depose one monarch they will need (as the prophets did long ago) to choose another *monarch* to replace him. But this new monarch will be a tyrant—he will *have to be* a tyrant. When he sees the citizens' hands, stained with blood from the slaughter of a king, and hears them glorying in their assassination, how could he regard that as a deed well done? . . . If he wants to be a king, and doesn't want to •acknowledge the people as the judge and master of kings or to •rule at their pleasure, he must first [227] avenge the death of his predecessor and set a contrary

example for his own benefit, so that the people won't •again dare to commit such a crime. But he'll find it hard to avenge the death of the tyrant by killing citizens unless at the same time he defends the conduct and political aims of the former tyrant, endorsing his actions and thus following closely in his footsteps.

That's how it comes about that the people can often change tyrants but can't ever destroy tyranny, changing a monarchic State into one of a different form. The English people have given us a deadly example of this truth, when they tried to find reasons to *justify* deposing their king [Charles I]. When they had removed him, they were utterly unable to change the form of the State. After much blood had been spilled, they reached the point where they hailed a new monarch under another name [Oliver Cromwell, whose title as a ruler was 'Lord Protector'], as if the whole issue had only been about the name! The new monarch could survive only if he •wiped out the royal family, •killed the king's friends and anyone suspected of friendship, and •launched a war •against the Dutch. He needed the war so as to •disturb the tranquillity of peace that is so conducive to murmurings of discontent, and to •confront the common people with urgent new crises that would steer their thoughts away from royal slaughter. The people didn't realize until it was too late that in trying to further the well-being of their country they had achieved nothing except to violate the right of a legitimate king and make things worse than ever. So as soon as they could, they decided to retrace their steps, and didn't rest until they saw things restored to their original condition.

You may want to object that the example of the Romans shows that a people can easily depose a tyrant; but I think that the Roman example strongly *confirms* my view. In their endeavour to depose a tyrant and change the form of the State, the Romans had two things going for them: •they

·already· had the right to choose the king and his successor, and •they weren't yet accustomed to obeying kings (because they were so rebellious; of the six kings they had had, they killed three). And yet, ·even with those two advantages·, all they achieved was to replace one tyrant by several of them—tyrants who inflicted misery on them by starting external and internal wars, until in the end the State reverted to monarchy, with only the name changed, as in England.

As for the Estates of Holland, so far as we know they never had kings, but only counts, who were never given the rights of government. . . . [..228] They always reserved for themselves the authority to advise the counts of their duty, and held onto the power to •defend this authority of theirs

and the freedom of the citizens, to •punish the counts if they degenerated into tyrants, and to •keep them under control in such a way that they couldn't get anything done without the permission and approval of the Estates [= governing committees, not elected democratically but representative of the people as a whole.] Thus, the Estates always held the right of sovereignty—a right that the last count tried to usurp. So there was nothing wrong with their ·getting rid of him and· restoring their original State, which had almost been lost.

These examples completely confirm my thesis that the form of each State must necessarily be retained, and that it can't be changed without risking ruin for the whole State.

Chapter 19:

The supreme civil authority is sovereign in all sacred matters. If we want to obey God rightly, external religious practices must be adapted to the peace of the State

When I said that those (and only those) who have sovereignty have jurisdiction over everything, and that 'all law' depends solely on their decision, I meant not only *civil* law but also *law concerning sacred matters*. For they must interpret and defend this law also. I'm saying this loudly here, and will treat it in detail in this chapter, because many people flatly deny that the sovereign ·civil· powers have authority over sacred matters, and won't recognize them as the interpreters of divine law. They claim for *themselves* a license to criticize the civil governing powers, and even to

excommunicate them from the Church (as Ambrosius once did to the emperor Theodosius). But in doing this they are dividing the sovereignty, and indeed trying to find a way to become sovereign themselves. I'll show this later in the present chapter.

But I want first to show •that religion gets to have the force of law only because the sovereign ·civil· power says that it does, •that God has no special kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty, and •that religious worship and the exercise of piety [229] must be adapted to

the peace and well-being of the State, so that the forms of worship must be chosen purely by the sovereign powers, who must also be their interpreters.

I am speaking specifically about •the exercise of piety and about •the external practice of religion, not about •piety itself and the •internal worship of God. That is, I'm not talking about the means by which the mind is brought to the wholehearted *internal* worship of God, because the control over a given person's internal worship of God and his state of piety belongs (as I showed at the end of Chapter 7 [page 72]) to that person himself; it *can't* be handed over to anyone else. And I think that what I wrote in Chapter 14 shows clearly enough what I mean here by 'God's kingdom'. I showed back there that a person fulfils God's law if he pursues justice and loving kindness according to God's command; from which it follows that a kingdom is God's if justice and loving kindness have in it the force of law and of a command. *How* does God teach and command the true pursuit of justice and loving kindness—by the natural light or by revelation? It makes no difference. It doesn't matter *how* that goal is revealed, provided that it has sovereign authority and is the supreme law for men.

So if I show now that **(1)** justice and loving kindness can get the force of law and of a command only from the authority of the State, then, since **(2)** the State's authority is all in the hands of the sovereign ·civil· powers, I can easily draw the conclusion that **(3)** religion gets the force of law only by the decree of those who have the right to command, and that God has no special kingdom over men except through those who have governmental authority.

Well, things I have already said make it obvious that **(1)** the pursuit of justice and loving kindness acquires the force of law only from the authority of the State. I showed in Chapter 16 that *in the state of nature* •reason has no more

right than •appetite—'You have a right to do anything you can' can be said both to those who live according to the laws of appetite and to those who live according to the laws of reason. That's why in talking about the state of nature we couldn't find any work for the concept of sin to do, or the concept of God as a judge punishing men for their sins. We had to steer purely by the thought that all things happen according to laws common to the whole of nature, and that (as Solomon puts it) 'the same fate is in store for all: for the righteous and for the wicked, for the good and pure and for the impure' [*Ecclesiastes* 9:2]), and there's no place for justice or for loving kindness. How was a proper status to be accorded to the teachings of true reason (which are, as I showed in chapter 4 discussing the divine law, the divine teachings themselves)? How could they come to have the full force of law? For that to happen it was necessary for each person to surrender his natural right, [230] handing it over to •everyone, or to some •group of people, or to •one individual. Only then could we bring justice and injustice, equity and inequity, into the story.

From all this. . . it follows that God has no kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty.

I repeat that it doesn't matter whether we think of religion as •revealed by the light of nature or •revealed by the prophetic light. The demonstration I have given is universal, because religion is the same, and has equally been revealed by God, whether men became aware of it in one way or in the other. Even prophetically revealed religion couldn't have the force of law among the Hebrews until each of them gave up his natural right and all of them agreed among themselves that

•they would obey only commands that were revealed to them prophetically by God.

This is just like the procedure in a democratic State where

the people agree among themselves

•to live only according to the dictate of reason.

Didn't the Hebrews also transfer their right to God? Well, that's what they meant to do, but in fact—as we have seen—they retained absolutely the right of sovereignty until they transferred it *to Moses*. From then onwards *he* was the King, having that position outright, with no conditions on it and it was only *through him* that God reigned over the Hebrews.

It's because religion gets the force of law only from the authority of the State that Moses couldn't punish Sabbath-breakers while people were still under their own control (see *Exodus* 16:27); but after they made the covenant [= 'contract'] through which each of them surrendered his natural right, observation of the Sabbath acquired the force of a command from the authority of the State ·which could be punished by that same authority· (see *Numbers* 15:36).

And this is also the reason why revealed religion stopped having the force of law when the Hebrew State was destroyed. It's beyond question that when the Hebrews transferred their right to the King of Babylon, God's kingdom and the authority came to an end *right then*. For by that act they completely abolished the contract by which they had promised to obey God in everything he told them to do, [231] which was the basis for God's kingdom, and they *couldn't* stand by that contract any longer, because now they weren't their own masters. . . .

Jeremiah explicitly warns them of this: 'Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord in its behalf; for in its prosperity you shall prosper' (*Jeremiah* 29:7). They couldn't 'seek the welfare of the city' as ministers of State, but only as servants (which is what they were), by showing themselves to be obedient in all things. . . .and by observing the rights and laws of the State, different as these

were from the laws to which they had become accustomed in their own land.

From all this it clearly follows that among the Hebrews religion got the force of law only from the authority of the State. When the State was destroyed, religion could no longer be regarded as the command of a particular State, but only as a universal teaching of reason. I say 'of reason' because universal religion wasn't yet known from revelation. So I conclude, without any ifs or buts, that

religion, whether revealed by the natural light or by prophetic light, gets the force of a command only through the decree of those who have governing authority, and that God has no special kingdom over men except through those who have sovereignty.

You can get a firmer grasp of this, and a further reasons for it, by considering some things I said in chapter 4. I showed there [page 39] that all God's decrees involve eternal truth and necessity, and that God can't be conceived as giving laws to men in the way a prince or legislator does. Divine teachings, therefore, whether revealed by the natural light or by the prophetic light, don't get •the force of a command directly from God; they must get •that from (or through the mediation of) those who have the right to rule and make decrees. Our thought of God as reigning over men and directing human affairs according to justice and equity *essentially* involves those mediators.

This is also confirmed by experience itself, because ·we find that· there's no sign of *divine* justice except where just *people* rule. . . . Indeed, this has caused many people to question whether there is any such thing as divine providence, these being people who had thought that God reigns directly over men and steers the whole of nature for their benefit.

[232] So we know from experience and through reason that divine right depends purely on the decrees of •the supreme

·civil· powers, and it follows from this that •they must also be its interpreters. Let us now see how they go about this. It's time now to show that if we want to obey God properly our external religious worship, and all our religious activity of any kind, must be made consistent with the peace and preservation of the State. When I have demonstrated *that*, it won't be hard to explain *how* the supreme ·civil· powers are the interpreters of religion and religious duty.

It is certain that piety towards one's country is the highest kind of piety, because if sovereignty is destroyed,

- nothing good can remain,
- everything is at risk,
- only anger and immorality rule, and
- everyone lives in terror.

It follows from this that any—*any*—·seemingly· pious act that you can perform **for** a neighbour becomes impious if it does some harm to the State as a whole; and, conversely, that any ·seemingly· impious act that you perform **against** a neighbour counts as pious if it is done for the sake of preserving the State. [Spinoza gives two fairly unconvincing examples, one imaginary and the other from Rome in the 4th century BCE. Then:] So the supreme law, to which all laws—human and divine—must be accommodated, is *the well-being of the people*. Now, it's up to the sovereign ·civil· authority to decide what is necessary for the well-being of the whole people and the security of the State, and to issue commands that back up its decisions. So it is also the duty of that authority to determine what religious duties each person has with respect to his neighbour, i.e. to decide *how* each person is obliged to obey God.

This makes clear to us in what way the sovereign ·civil· authorities are the interpreters of religion. It also makes clear **(1)** that if you are to obey God rightly you must adapt your religious practices to the public interest. We are bound by

God's command to cherish absolutely everyone in accordance with our religious duty, and to harm no-one; which implies that no-one is permitted to aid one person at the expense of another, much less at the expense of the whole State; from which **(1)** follows. It also follows **(2)** that if you are to obey God rightly you must obey all the commands of the sovereign ·civil· power. Why? Because the only way a private person can know what *is* in the State's interest is from the decrees of the sovereign authorities, they being the only ones whose job it is to manage public business; from which, together with **(1)**, **(2)** obviously follows.

[233] This is also confirmed in practice. [He gives examples. Then:] As I showed in chapter 17, for the Hebrews to preserve the freedom they had acquired, and have absolute control over the lands they occupied, they had to adapt religion to their own State, and to keep other nations at arm's length. That's why they were told 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy' (*Matthew* 5:43). But after they were defeated and led into captivity, Jeremiah taught them to care for the peace of Babylon, to which they had been led as captives [*Jeremiah* 29:7]. And after Christ saw that they were going to be dispersed through the whole world, he taught them that they should behave piously—in accordance with religious duty—towards absolutely everyone. All these things show, as clearly as can be, that religion has always been adapted to the interests of the State.

You may ask: 'Christ's disciples were private men—what right did they have to preach religion?' I answer that they did this by right of their Christ-given power over unclean spirits (see *Matthew* 10:1). At the end of chapter 16 I dealt explicitly with this [page 131]. I said that everyone was bound to keep faith even with a tyrant, except for people to whom God has, by a single unquestionable revelation, promised special aid against the tyrant. So it's not permissible for

you to take this—i.e. the disciples’ defiance of tyrannical rulers—as an example unless you too have the power to perform miracles! This is also clear from Christ’s telling •his disciples not to fear [234] those who kill the body (see *Matthew* 10:28). If he had said this to •everyone, •and everyone had accepted it, governments would be useless, and what Solomon said—*Fear the Lord, my son, and the king* (*Proverbs* 24:21)—would have been impious, which it certainly isn’t. So we have to accept that the authority Christ gave to his disciples was given to them in particular, and that the rest of us can’t follow their example.

Some of my opponents have claimed to distinguish sacred law from civil law, and argued that the •civil• sovereign controls only the latter, whereas the former is in the hands of the universal church. These arguments are too flimsy to be worth refuting. [Spinoza goes on to address one mistake that these opponents make, namely misunderstanding the fact that at certain stage in Hebrew history the high priest was in charge of religious matters. What the opponents don’t understand, Spinoza says, is that the high priests were given the authority for this *by Moses*, and they were understood as deputising for him, even after he had died. In the second Hebrew State, he adds, the priests *did* have a supreme right to manage religious affairs, but then they also had the supreme civil power, so again there was no splitting of power along the religious/secular line. Then:]

So we can’t doubt that these days sacred matters are entirely controlled by the supreme •civil• authorities. . . . [..235] Without their authority or consent no-one has the right and power to administer these things—to •choose religion’s ministers, to •decide and stabilise the foundations of the Church and its doctrine, to •settle questions about the details of religious duty, to •excommunicate someone or receive someone into the Church, or even to •provide for the poor.

I have shown that all this is *true*; it is also demonstrably necessary for the preservation of religion as well as for the survival of the State. Everyone knows how much weight the common people attach to religious authority, and how intently they listen to whoever has it; so we can rightly say that the person who has religious authority has the most powerful control over their hearts. Any attempt to take this authority away from the supreme •civil• powers, therefore, is an attempt to divide the sovereignty, which will necessarily give rise to quarrels and conflicts that can never be settled—which is what happened ago with the kings and priests of the Hebrews. . . . For what can the supreme •civil• powers decide if they don’t have authority in religion? With any decision concerning war and peace, or anything else, they’ll have to wait for someone else to tell them whether something they think it would be good to do is permissible from a religious point of view. . . .

I shall discuss one example of this; it’s typical of all the others that have occurred down through the centuries. When the Roman Pope was unconditionally granted this supreme authority in religious matters, he started a gradual process of getting all the kings under his control, until he rose to the peak of sovereignty. From then onwards, the various kings—and especially the German Emperors—who tried to lessen his authority were unable to make the slightest dent in it. On the contrary, their activities vastly *increased* it! But what the kings •couldn’t do using iron and fire ecclesiastics •such as Luther• •could do using the power of their pens. . . .

Things that I said in chapter 18 show [236] that the growth of religion and piety is considerably helped by having the supreme authority in religious matters in the hands of the supreme •civil• powers; for we saw there [item (2) on page 153] that although the •prophets themselves were endowed with a divine virtue, they were still just private men, and their

freedom in warning, scolding and reproaching the people irritated them rather than setting them right. On the other hand, when the •kings warned or chastised the people, it was easy to put them on the right path. We have also seen that quite often the kings themselves—followed by most of the people—turned away from religion, simply because they didn't have this right unconditionally. . . .

You may want to ask: 'In that case, who will have the right to defend piety when those who have sovereignty choose to be impious? Are *they* still going to be its interpreters?' I reply with a question: 'What about the ecclesiastics (who are also men, and private individuals whose only duty is to take care of their own affairs) or whoever else you want to be in charge of sacred matters—if they choose to be impious, are *they* still going to be the interpreters of piety?'

If those who have sovereignty choose to follow their own interests, things will certainly go downhill—sacred affairs and secular ones—whether or not the authorities have control over sacred matters. But they'll go down faster if private men try defend divine right by sedition. So there's *nothing* to be gained by denying this right to the •civil• supreme powers; on the contrary, it only makes matters worse. For denying them this right is sure to make them impious (as were the Hebrew kings who didn't have this right unconditionally)—thereby moving damage to the whole State from the 'might happen' category to the 'is certain to happen' one. So we have a triple-result concerning the thesis that

Divine right, i.e. the right concerning sacred matters, depends absolutely on the decree of the supreme •civil• powers, who are its interpreters and defenders.

The thesis is **(1)** true, **(2)** good for the security of the State, and **(3)** good for the increase of piety. So we can identify those who are ministers of the word of God: they are the ones who teach the people piety by the authority of the supreme •civil•

powers, and adapt their teaching to the public interest as defined by government decrees.

A question arises: Why has there always been dispute about this right •of religious command• in Christian States, whereas the Hebrews seem never to have quarrelled about it? Given how obvious and necessary the truth of this matter is, it might seem downright *weird* that it has always been disputed, [237] and that the supreme •civil• powers never had this right •of religious command• without controversy—indeed, without great danger of rebellions and of harm to religion. If I couldn't clearly explain this, I might feel that I had to back down, dismissing everything I have shown in this chapter as being merely theoretical—the kind of speculation that couldn't be applied in practice.

But if you look at the origins of the Christian religion, you'll see clearly what the explanation is. The Christian religion wasn't initially taught by kings, but by private men who—against the will of those who had sovereign power and whose subjects they were—for a long time customarily addressed meetings in private churches, set up and conducted sacred ceremonies, arranged everything by themselves, and made decrees; all without giving any thought to issues about sovereignty. And when, much later, religion began to be introduced into the State, it was the ecclesiastics who had to teach it—their version of it—to the Emperors. So it was easy for them to get recognized as its teachers and interpreters—and also as shepherds of the Christian flock and (as it were) God's deputies. And they took care of their own interests by prohibiting marriage to the supreme ministers of the Church and interpreters of religion, so that Christian kings couldn't muscle in and take this •religious• authority for themselves. They also increased the number of religious doctrines, and mixed them up so much with philosophy that the supreme interpreter of religion had to

be a supreme philosopher and theologian, and had to have abundant spare time in which to engage in a great many useless speculations.

Among the Hebrews the situation was very different. Their •Church began at the same time as their •State did, and Moses, who had absolute political authority, taught the people religion, ordained sacred ministries, and chose the ministers for them. That's why royal authority was valued very highly among the people, and why the kings

had great authority in sacred matters. Although after Moses' death no-one had absolute sovereignty, we've seen that the •political leader had the right to make decrees about all matters, sacred and otherwise. [Spinoza continues this, for about a page, going into details of Hebrew history to illustrate his thesis that among the Hebrews 'the whole practice of religion and the whole sacred ministry depended entirely on the King's command'.]

Chapter 20: In a free State everyone is permitted to think what he likes and to say what he thinks.

[239] If it were as easy to govern men's minds as it is their tongues, every ruler would govern in safety and no rule would be oppressive. Everyone would live as their rulers wanted them to, and would be *obedient* in all their judgments about what is true or false, good or evil, right or wrong. But as I pointed out early in chapter 17, one person's mind can't be absolutely controlled by someone else. No-one can transfer to another person his natural right or power of reasoning freely, and of forming his own opinions on any topic; •so no-one can be compelled to do this. This is why rule over minds is considered oppressive, and why the supreme authority seems to wrong its subjects and to usurp their rights when it tries to prescribe to each person •what he must embrace as true and what reject as false, and •what reasons he must have for his devotion to God. These things are within the

individual person's control, and he *can't* give up that control even if he wants to.

Admittedly there are various ways—some of them almost incredible—in which one person *x* can influence the judgment of another person *y*, and though these don't involve *x* in directly commanding *y* to believe this or that, they can have *y*'s mind depending so much on *x* that it's not entirely wrong to say that *y*'s mind is under *x*'s control. But however ingeniously this has been done, it hasn't ever wiped out men's knowledge from their own experience •that each person is well equipped with his own faculty of judgment and •that men's minds differ as much as their palates do. Though Moses very thoroughly took control of his people's judgment—not deceptively but through his divine virtue, which led them to think he •was divine and •spoke and

acted always with divine inspiration—even he couldn't escape rumours and perverse interpretations of the doctrines he taught. Other monarchs are even less able to do this. . . .

[240] Therefore, however much the sovereign authorities are believed to have a right over everything, and to be the interpreters of right and piety, they'll never be able to stop men from forming *their* own opinions about everything on the basis of *their* state of mind, and from having whatever emotions arise from those opinions. It's true of course that they have a right to regard as enemies anyone who doesn't think absolutely as they do about everything; but my present topic is not what is *right* but what is *beneficial*. They have a *right* to rule with the utmost oppressiveness, condemning citizens to death for trivial offences; but everyone will agree that governing in that way reflects poor thinking. Indeed, because such government brings great danger to the whole State, we can deny that they have the absolute •power to do such things. So we can •after all• deny that they have an absolute •right to do them, because (as I have shown) the rights of sovereign authorities reach as far as their power but no further.

So no-one can surrender his freedom to judge and think what he likes; everyone, by the utmost right of nature, is master of his own thoughts. From this it follows that if the sovereign authorities of a State try to make men (with all their different and conflicting views) always speak according to what *they* prescribe, they will get only the most unfortunate result. •It's no use suggesting that this policy might work, through people's mainly not saying anything: not even the wisest know how to be silent, much less the common people! It's a common vice of men to share their thoughts with others, even when there is need for secrecy. So a régime that denies each person the freedom to say and teach what he thinks must be very oppressive. A régime that grants this freedom

to everyone will be a moderate one.

But it can't be denied that treason can be committed by words as well as by deeds. While it's •impossible to take this freedom of speech completely away from subjects, it would be *very* dangerous to grant it completely. Let's think about *how far* this freedom should be granted to each person, i.e. how far it can be granted without harming the peace of the State and the sovereign's authority. As I remarked at the start of chapter 16, my main purpose in these final chapters is to investigate this question.

The account I have given of the foundations of the State obviously imply that what the State is *for* is not to act as a despot, holding men down by fear and making them subject to someone else's control. Rather, it is [241] to free each person from fear so that he can live as securely as possible, retaining to the utmost his natural right to exist and act without hurting himself or anyone else. The State's purpose, according to me, is not to change men from rational beings into beasts or automata, but rather to bring it about that

- they don't risk anything by fully using their mental and physical powers,
- they use their reason freely,
- they don't contend with one another in hatred, anger or deception, and
- they don't deal unfairly with one another.

So the purpose of the State is really **freedom**.

Next point: When a State is being formed, it is essential (I noted this earlier) that *all* the decision-making power be held

- by everyone,
- by some •specified group of• people, or
- by one person.

Free men vary a lot in their judgments; and each man thinks that he alone knows everything; so there's no chance of their

all thinking alike and speaking with one voice; so people *couldn't* live together peaceably unless each one surrendered his right to act solely on the basis of *his* decisions.

That concerns *acting on* his own decisions; the person doesn't give up his right to reason and judge for himself. So you are infringing the authority of the sovereign powers if you act in a way that goes against a decision they have made; but you aren't infringing anything by •thinking and •judging as you think fit. And the same goes for •speaking as you think fit, as long as you are speaking or teaching on the basis of reason alone, and not with deception, anger, hatred, or any intention to alter the governmental set-up on your own initiative. For example, if someone thinks that a law ought to be repealed because it is contrary to sound reason, and submits his opinion to the judgment of the supreme power. . . .in the meantime doing nothing that breaks that law, he deserves well of the State, as one of its best citizens. But if he does this as a way of •accusing the government of unfairness and •making the people hate it, or if he wants seditiously to get rid of that law, against the will of the government, he's just a troublemaker and a rebel. [In that sentence, 'the government' translates *magistratus* = 'magistrate' or •'magistracy'. When the word occurs once in chapter 7 and twice in chapter 18, it is translated by •'legal system'. But its many occurrences in the present chapter are translated by 'the government', except in one place where it seems that Spinoza really does mean to narrow his spotlight from •government to merely •its law-enforcement arm.]

So we can see how each person can say and teach whatever he likes without detriment to the right and authority of the supreme powers, i.e. without harming the peace of the State: all that's needed is for him to leave to the governing authorities every decision about what is to be *done*, and to refrain from *doing* anything contrary to their decisions, even

if this often involves his doing things that are contrary to *his own* openly expressed judgments about what would be best. He doesn't offend against **(1)** justice or **(2)** piety by acting in that way; indeed, it's how he must act if he is to show himself to be just and pious. [242] As I have already shown, **(1)** justice depends only on the decree of the sovereign authorities; so no-one can be just unless he lives according to the decrees he has received from them. And I showed in chapter 19 that the height of piety is exercised in seeking the peace and tranquillity of the State, which can't be preserved if each person is allowed to live according to his own decisions. So it's impious to act according to your own decision, contrary to the decree of the sovereign authority of your State; for if everyone were allowed to do that the State would go down. And in acting in obedience to the decrees of •the sovereign authority, you *can't* be acting in a way that is contrary to the decrees of •your own reason; because when you decided to transfer to the governing authorities your right of living according to your own judgment, it was *your reason* that urged to do this! . . .

The facts about how States are formed enable us not only to •see how each person can use his freedom of judgment without infringing on the authority of the government, but also to •work out which opinions in a State are subversive, namely: any opinion which, as soon as it is accepted by someone, destroys the agreement by which that person surrendered his right to act on his own decisions. Here are some examples:

- The supreme power isn't entitled to *be* the supreme power,
- No-one is obliged to keep his promises,
- Each person ought to live according to his own decisions.

Someone who holds such an opinion is subversive not

because of what he thinks but because of what his opinion implies for people's behaviour. Just *having* such an opinion cancels the assurance the person has (tacitly or explicitly) given to the supreme power. As for opinions that don't involve any such act as breaking a contract, getting revenge, or giving vent to anger, there's nothing subversive about *them*—except perhaps in a State that has gone bad somehow, e.g. one where superstitious and ambitious men who can't bear free-minded people get such a great reputation that the common people value their authority over that of the supreme [243] powers. I don't deny that there are also some opinions that seem to be concerned only with •truth and •falsity but are stated and spread around in a spirit of hostility that makes them tantamount to calls to subversive action. I pinned these down in chapter 15, leaving reason free over the rest of the territory.

A final argument: if we attend also to the fact that the loyalty of each person to the State, like his loyalty toward God, can be known only from his works, such as loving kindness towards his neighbour, we'll have no doubt that •the best State allows everyone the same freedom to philosophize that I have shown that •faith does.

It's true of course that such freedom sometimes has drawbacks. But what was ever so cleverly devised that no disadvantages could arise from it? Trying to shape laws so that they head off in advance all the disadvantages will do more harm than good; so various kinds of bad behaviour can't be prohibited by law, which means that they must be allowed, harmful though they may be. Think of all the evils arising from extravagant living, envy, greed, drunkenness and so on! Yet we put up with these things—these •vices—because they can't be ruled out by laws. The same holds even more strongly for freedom of judgment—we can't rule it out by law, and it is a •virtue. . . . More than that, it is utterly

essential for the development of the sciences and the arts, which can't flourish except in the hands of people who have a free and uncoerced judgment.

Suppose this freedom *could* be suppressed, and that men could be so restrained that they didn't dare *whisper* anything that the supreme powers hadn't prescribed. This couldn't be done in such a way that they didn't even *think* anything that the supreme powers didn't want them to think. So this would be a State in which men were constantly thinking one thing and saying another, so that the honesty that is so very necessary in a State would be corrupted. Abominable flattery and treachery would be encouraged, along with deception and the corruption of all the good arts.

But in fact it *couldn't* happen that everyone spoke within predetermined limits. The harder the authorities try to take away this freedom of speech, the more stubbornly men will resist. Not everyone, of course; not the greedy or the flatterers or others whose characters are weak [244] and whose greatest joy comes from thinking about the money in their coffers and having bloated bellies. But there will be resistance from those whom a good upbringing, integrity of character, and virtue have made more free.

Very many men are so constituted that the thing that infuriates them most is being regarded as criminals because of their sincerely held beliefs, including the ones that move them to dutiful conduct towards God and men. This leads them to curse the laws and to do anything they can against the legal system; and they are •proud rather than •ashamed to start rebellions and do other things—*any* other things—that will further their cause.

From this fact about human nature, it follows that laws restricting people's opinions don't affect rascals but only honest men. Their target—whether or not this was the legislators' intention—isn't •to restrain scoundrels but rather

•to make life difficult for honourable men. Such laws can't be maintained without great danger to the State.

Anyway, such laws are completely useless. Those who think that the opinions condemned by the laws are sound won't be *able* to obey the laws; while those who reject those opinions will regard the relevant laws as privileges for *them*, and will glory in them so much that the government won't ever be able to repeal them even if it wants to. . . . To these considerations I would add the conclusions I drew from the history of the Hebrews in chapter 18, item (ii) on page 148.

Finally, think of the many schisms in the Church that have been occurred because governments were willing to settle controversies among scholars *by laws*! Men wouldn't have fought so unfairly, gripped by such wild fanaticism, if they hadn't hoped to get the laws and the government on their side, to triumph over their opponents to the applause of the mob, and to acquire honours.

One could know just by thinking about it that that's how things would work out, but experience confirms it all the time. Laws of this kind, •telling everyone what to believe and •forbidding everyone to speak or write against this or that opinion, have often been instituted as a concession (or rather a surrender!) to the anger of those who can't endure free minds and who can, by a kind of grim authority, stir up the turbulent mob into mad hostility towards. . . .whatever they like. But •calming the mob would be so much better than •pandering to their fury by •passing useless laws that can't be violated except by those who love the virtues and the arts, thereby •making the State so narrow-minded [245] that it's no longer a place for men whose thoughts are free. What could be more damaging to a State than that honourable men should be exiled as outlaws because they •hold and don't know how to •hide opinions that are different from those of the government and the mob? Treating men as

enemies and condemning them to death, not because of any crime but merely because they think like free men—tell me, what could be more fatal to the State than *that*? Or letting that scourge of evil men, the gallows, become •the noblest stage for displaying paradigm examples of great endurance and virtue, putting the authorities to shame? And that is what would happen, because anyone who knows that the condemned man is honest. . . .will think it honourable, not a punishment, to die for a good cause, and glorious to die for freedom.

What sort of example will be set? As to the cause for which the man is dying: **(1)** ignorant and weak-minded people won't have any idea of what it is, **(2)** rebellious people will hate it, and **(3)** honest people will love it. His death couldn't serve as an *example* except to people who would try to follow him or at least would sing his praises. [Curley suggests that in item **(2)** Spinoza is referring to the priests. He supports this by pointing to the passage starting 'A question arises. . . ' on page 155.]

So men should be governed in such a way that they can live together in harmony while holding different and even contrary opinions. They *must* be governed in that way—freedom of judgment *must* be granted—if it is to be the case that

•honesty, not insincere agreement, is valued, and •the supreme powers retain their full sovereignty rather than rather than being compelled to knuckle under to the sedition-minded.

We can't doubt that this is the best type of government, with the fewest drawbacks, because it's the one that fits best with human nature. I have shown that in a democratic State (which is the closest one to the state of nature) everyone agrees to *act*—but not to judge or reason—according to the common decision. That is: because it can't be that all men think alike, they agreed that the course of action that had the most votes would be regarded as having been decided on,

while still retaining the authority to cancel such decisions when they saw better ones. The less this freedom of judgment is allowed to men, the more we depart from the most natural condition, and hence the more oppressive is the rule.

The next points to be established are •that this freedom has no drawbacks that can't be avoided simply by the authority of the supreme power, and •that only by this authority can men who openly hold conflicting opinions be easily restrained from harming one another. I don't have to look far for examples. The city of Amsterdam [246] has experienced the fruits of this liberty ·of thought and speech·, including great growth and the admiration of all nations. In this most flourishing republic, this outstanding city, people of every nation and sect live harmoniously together. Before they extend credit to someone, all they want to know is whether he is rich or poor and whether he has a reputation for being trustworthy. They aren't in the least interested in what his religion or sect is, because that wouldn't have any relevance in any legal proceedings. *No* sect is so hated that its followers aren't protected by the legal system [*magistratus*] and its officers, as long as they harm no-one, give each person his due, and live honourably. Compare this with earlier times when the religious controversy between the Remonstrants and the Counter-remonstrants started to make politicians and the Dutch provincial assemblies *jumpy*. The troubles finally degenerated into a schism—a near civil war, resulting in the start of the Orange régime·. That course of events provided plenty of examples of three facts: •laws passed to settle religious controversies stir people up rather than disciplining them, •some people take unlimited license from such laws, and •schisms don't come from a great zeal for truth—which is a source of gentleness and consideration for others—but from greed for power.

All this makes it as clear as day that the real schismatics are those who condemn the writings of others, and sedulously incite the unruly mob against the writers, and that the real troublemakers are those who try in a free State to take away freedom of belief, despite the fact that it *can't* be suppressed. The writers themselves aren't schismatics: they write mostly for a learned audience, and depend only on reason ·rather than on rabble-rousing oratory·. So here is what I have shown:

(1) It is impossible to deprive people of the freedom to say what they think.

(2) This freedom can be granted to everyone, without harm to the right and authority of the supreme powers; and anyone can *keep* it, without harm to that right, provided he doesn't think it entitles him to launch a new law into the State, and doesn't do anything contrary to the existing laws.

(3) This same freedom can be granted to everyone without disturbance of the peace of the State, with no drawbacks that can't easily be controlled.

(4) Everyone can have this freedom without any loss of piety.

(5) Laws passed about speculative (doctrinal) matters are [247] completely useless.

(6) The peace and piety of the State and the authority of the supreme powers are threatened not by •permitting this freedom but by •*not* permitting it. [Spinoza now repeats points he has already made in this chapter. The main point is that 'punishing' honest people won't deter anyone whom the State needs to deter, and will upset honest citizens. Then:] Also, this kind of legislation

- corrupts cultural pursuits and honesty,
- encourages flatterers and traitors, and
- gives hostile people something to crow about, because a concession has been made to their rage—they

have turned the powers that be into *followers* of the doctrine of which they are considered to be the interpreters. That's what emboldens them to usurp the authority and right of the sovereign powers, and to boast unblushingly that they have been chosen immediately by God and that *their* decrees are divine, and should take precedence over the merely human decrees of the supreme ·civil· powers.

It's just perfectly obvious that all these things are completely antithetical to the well-being of the State.

So I conclude here, as I did in chapter 18, that the best way for the State to be secure is for piety and religion to be found only in the practice of loving kindness and justice, and for the authority of the supreme ·civil· powers concerning

both sacred and secular matters to be exercised only over *actions*, with everyone being allowed to think what he likes and to say what he thinks.

That brings me to the end of what I wanted to say in this book. I have only to add that

I gladly submit the whole thing to the examination and judgment of the governing authorities of my country. If they judge that anything in it conflicts with the laws of the country or threatens the general welfare, I take it back. I'm aware that I am a man and ·therefore· may have erred. Still, I have tried very hard not to go wrong, and taken care especially that whatever I might write would be entirely consistent with the laws of my country, with piety and with morals.