

**BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY  
AND RELIGION:  
SPINOZA, THE BIBLE,  
AND MODERNITY**

**Volume I: Hermeneutics and Ontology**

Brayton Polka



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# 1

## Introduction: The Challenge of Spinoza to Modernity

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Whatever one generation learns from another, no generation learns the essentially human from a previous one. In this respect, each generation begins primitively, has no task other than what each previous generation had, nor does it advance further, insofar as the previous generations did not betray the task and deceive themselves. . . . There perhaps are many in every generation who do not come to faith, but no one goes further. . . . But the person who has come to faith (whether he is extraordinarily gifted or plain and simple does not matter) does not come to a standstill in faith. Indeed, he would be indignant if anyone said this to him, just as the lover would resent it if someone said that he came to a standstill in love; for, he would answer, I am by no means standing still. I have my whole life in it. Yet he does not go further, does not go on to something else, for when he finds this, then he has another explanation.

Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*<sup>1</sup> [1843] (121–23)

THE CHALLENGE THAT SPINOZA PRESENTS to his readers is the very modern one that Kierkegaard articulates so poignantly in *Fear and Trembling*. Can we moderns go further than faith, further than being a faithful human being, further than keeping faith with the essentially human? Can we go further than love, further than the golden rule of loving our neighbor, indeed, of loving our enemy as ourselves? They say, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling* observes with polemical irony, that anyone, certainly a progressive Hegelian philosopher of the nineteenth century, can go further than Abraham. But what would it mean to go further than Abraham in his faith for his

God and in his love for his son Isaac? Does Jesus (or Muhammad) go further than Abraham? Does Spinoza? Do we?

The challenge that the major texts of Spinoza represent for modern readers is, in one sense, simply that of learning to become adequate readers of them, as is true of all great texts. Indeed, we must learn to apply to them the simple hermeneutical rule that Spinoza famously articulates in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* for the Bible: the texts of Spinoza are to be read from themselves alone. Or we can interpret them in light of the principle that is central to the *Ethics*: truth is its own standard. Or we can recall the pair of principles that Spinoza makes central to his third major work with which we shall be concerned in this study, the *Political Treatise*. On the one hand, Spinoza is insistent that no state can be based on the foundation of reason alone, for we must take fully into account the fact that human beings are ruled by their (non-rational) affects. On the other hand, Spinoza is no less insistent that no state can be said to serve the essential ends of humanity if it is not founded on reason. A more explicitly hermeneutical rendering of the relationship between affect and reason (between what is called in the *Ethics* a passive or an inadequate idea and an active or an adequate idea) is the paradox that Spinoza propounds in terms of the Bible. The Bible is replete with errors. Yet the fundamental teaching of the Bible—love of God and neighbor—not only is true but indeed could not have been (or be) falsified without the very attempt to falsify it being thereby exposed. If the attempt to falsify the principle of the golden rule were successful, we would not even know it. For we would then be back in what Spinoza calls the natural state (the state of nature), or in the garden of Eden before Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, in which, as Spinoza writes in the *Political Treatise*, all human beings are enemies, that is, subject to power that is not their own. What the natural state or garden signifies is that human beings are ignorant of the fact that they contradict both each other and themselves. In other words, they are ignorant of the very nature or law of contradiction itself.

To become adequate readers of Spinoza's texts, to read them from themselves alone, is to ask about their relationship to their past, above all, to their biblical past, and about our relationship to them in relation to their past. What is our past or history such that Spinoza may be said to be central to its constitution? The challenge that Spinoza poses to modernity is that, in reading his texts, we are confronted with how, indeed, we understand or conceptualize modernity. In arguing that we are to read the Bible from itself alone—that is, in light of its fundamental teaching of the politics and ethics of the love of God and neighbor—does Spinoza understand himself to go beyond Abraham, to go beyond faith and love? But how would that be possible if the very principle of interpretation that he applies to the Bible is the principle that, in

his judgment, the Bible teaches from beginning to end and that could not be falsified without our knowing it? How, then, do we understand, conceptualize, or interpret Spinoza? What is his relationship to Abraham or, more generally, to the Bible and to the history constituted by the Bible in all of its manifold history that is Jewish, Christian, Muslim—both secular and modern?

Spinoza argues, as we shall see, that his central purpose in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* is to separate philosophy from theology such that neither is the hand-maiden of the other—in sharp contrast to Thomas Aquinas who, typical of high medieval scholastics, held that philosophy was ancillary to (the *ancilla* or handmaiden of) theology. But does the separation of philosophy from theology mean for Spinoza that philosophy goes further than theology, reason further than faith, or the secular further than the religious? If Spinoza intended us to believe that he has gone further, if he intended us, his philosophical readers, to believe that we have gone further than Abraham, then he would simply have reversed, and so reinstated, the very hierarchical dualism of scholastic thinkers that he had intended his separation of philosophy from theology to overcome. We may recall that one of the most celebrated ideas of Spinoza—the very apex of the *Ethics*—is the intellectual love of God. Perhaps the most important claim that Spinoza makes in the three texts on which I shall concentrate here—his three mature texts, written in the 1660s and 1670s—is that knowledge of God is the only knowledge that is adequate to the human mind. Or to put this same claim differently: human beings possess adequate knowledge of God. In making knowledge—the intellectual love—of God the very basis of the ethical (and therefore also the political?) life of human beings, does Spinoza go beyond Abraham? Or would he agree with the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling* that, while he does not go further than Abraham—for how can one go further than knowledge of God?—at least he is not to be accused of standing still? He does not go on to something else, “for when he finds this, then he has another explanation.”

Spinoza does, indeed, have another explanation of his relationship to Abraham, to the Bible, to what we, his readers, may call the history of philosophy and its relationship to theology: the logos, the word, the logic of God. My study is, in a sense, an extended commentary on that explanation and on the many ways—profound, challenging, perplexing—in which Spinoza advances his explanation. Central to that explanation, to the separation of philosophy from theology, is God. Indeed, in holding that human beings have adequate knowledge of God, Spinoza makes individuals responsible for their ethical (and political) lives. There are no excuses. Ignorance, of God, is not an option for human beings. Readers familiar with Spinoza’s major works—and with the scholarship on the relationship of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to the *Ethics*—are vividly aware of how controversial is Spinoza’s conception of the

relationship between philosophy and theology, between ethics and politics, and so between the rare individual who possesses true (what Spinoza often calls speculative) knowledge of God and the *multitudo, plebs, vulgus, or populus* who do not possess true knowledge of God but yet have the capacity, as Spinoza, the first systematic theorist of democracy in history, argues in the last five chapters of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, to develop a democratic *pactum* or *imperium*. He repeats time and again that the biblical prophets did not possess true (philosophical or mathematical) knowledge of God and that the revelations of true moral doctrine that they received were *accommodated* to their imagination (as distinct from reason) and so to their (inadequate or false) opinions (and also to their historical character, temperament, time, place, occasion of prophesizing, etc.). But, as we shall see, the main burden of Spinoza's concept of accommodation is that it allows him to account for error—both textual and doctrinal—and thus to distinguish superstition (as false) from religion (as true). It is typical of Spinoza, as we shall see over and over again, to develop his argument—“another explanation”—in terms of opposed concepts that do not directly overlap. The reader is constantly confronted with the either/or alternative of viewing Spinoza's thought as *either* contradictory or dualistic (which it unreservedly is not) *or* dialectical (which it exquisitely is). In the case at hand, the opposed pairs of terms—superstition and religion, on the one hand; and religion and philosophy, on the other—are not homologous. Religion (the religion of Abraham and the biblical tradition of which he is the progenitor) is distinguished from both superstition and philosophy. But religion (or theology: these are identical terms in Spinoza) is not partly superstitious and partly philosophical. Religion—as love of God and neighbor—is true in the precise sense that superstition is not; and yet it is separate from—that is, it is not subordinate or ancillary to—philosophy.

Superstition is ignorance of God. More precisely, for Spinoza, superstition is the confusion of the human with the divine, the reduction of God to human ignorance and the projection upon God of human ignorance, consistent with the biblical critique of idols. To claim that God is supernatural, that he operates outside of the laws of nature in ways that are unknown (mysterious) to us, is, for Spinoza, to base (our) faith and (our) religion on (our) ignorance, than which nothing, he holds, can be more unworthy of either God or human beings. What he demonstrates in his trenchant critique of miracles is that, to make use of the formulations of Hegel and of Alyosha and his elder Father Zosima in the *Brothers Karamazov*, miracles presuppose (exhibit) faith. Faith cannot be demonstrated by miracles. First there is God. Then, existence—life, spirit—is a miraculous creation. Spinoza does not contemptuously dismiss biblical miracles in the later, pseudo-Enlightenment tradition of reducing them to priestly conspiracy, etc. Indeed, with his concept of accommodation

to the imagination of the authors and audiences of the biblical narratives, he views (defends) miracles as appropriate, in their time, for persuasively conveying the moral teaching of religion and piety: love of God and neighbor. Indeed, the real object of Spinoza's devastating critique is not miracles (as a characteristic and fitting element of biblical story) but rather their philosophical and theological commentators who, in claiming that they are supernatural and so beyond human comprehension, reduce God to human ignorance (of nature) and then project this human ignorance (of nature) back onto God as a source of supernatural knowledge of which human beings are ignorant. For Spinoza, to explain the known by the unknown is to make God a refuge of (a rationalization of or an excuse for) human ignorance. The result of superstitious belief in miracles as supernatural, than which there is no greater error, is, then, atheism. It is only when we do not confuse God with human beings but truly "separate" human being from divine being that we can be true to each.

If God is not supernatural and not beyond human knowledge—the refuge of human ignorance—is God natural? Running parallel to, yet again not strictly homologous with, Spinoza's argument that God is at once (separately) theological and philosophical is another perplexing pair of terms: *Deus sive natura*—God or nature. Spinoza insists that the infinite power with which God exists, acts, and directs all things is identical with the infinite power of nature and thus with the natural causes (laws) of all things. For thinkers in Spinoza's age the scandal was that God had thus been reduced to nature—whence the unhappy accusation of pantheistic (or atheistic) naturalism launched against Spinoza. The scandal in our age is that for thinkers Spinoza's God has thus been reduced to nature—whence the unhappy accolade of scientific (and atheistic) naturalism bestowed upon Spinoza. Earlier readers of Spinoza were unhappily scandalized that God was no longer the first cause or end of nature in the tradition of Aristotelian scholasticism. Later readers of Spinoza were happy to find no scandal in the reduction of God to the objects of nature in the tradition of mathematico-empirical science. But Spinoza is absolutely clear that God is neither the final cause of nature nor a finite object of nature. God is absolutely infinite and, as I indicated earlier, knowable only in, through, and by the human mind. For Spinoza, we do not arrive at knowledge of God through nature when nature is conceived of in terms of either finite end or finite object. He allows no argument from posterior effect to prior cause, in either the (antiquated) teleological or the (modern) scientific sense. While Spinoza is equally fervent in rejecting Aristotelian final causes and in embracing the new science of nature associated with Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Pascal, Boyle,<sup>2</sup> and Huygens (Newton's *Principia mathematica* was published in 1687, ten years after Spinoza's death), there is for him no argument to but only from the necessary,

eternal, absolutely infinite existence of God. *Deus sive natura*. God is (infinitely) natural. But nature is also (infinitely) divine. Has Spinoza naturalized God, or has he divinized nature? Has Spinoza, in his embrace of the infinite power of God as the power of nature, gone beyond Abraham? Or has he rather, in viewing the infinite power of nature as divine, at least not stood still and so entered the battle of existence on the side of Joshua, for whom, in the famous narrative (Jos. 10.12–14), the sun miraculously stood still for a sufficiently long time to enable him to leave the field of battle victorious?

For Spinoza we begin, necessarily, with the existence of God, with the necessary existence of the infinite power of God or nature. But who are we, we human beings, who begin with the necessary existence of God, for whom God necessarily exists? Just as Spinoza identifies God with the infinite power of nature, so he tirelessly insists that human beings, like all things (or modes) of nature, are necessarily subject to natural causation. Human beings are not a thing apart but are, rather, a part of nature and subject to the infinite, eternal laws of nature. In harmony with the identification of God and nature—*Deus sive natura*—we could say, consistent with Spinoza’s thought: *homo sive natura*: human being or nature. But, as always, the incongruous sets of terms that Spinoza generates (and that we can generate in his name in our efforts to grasp and to articulate his—indeed, our own—thinking adequately or congruously) concentrate the mind (or allow the mind to dissipate and distract itself among contradictions). Just as the equation of “God or nature” does not involve or express a reduction of God to finite nature (or the reduction of finite nature to God), so does it follow that human being—human nature—is not (only) finite as the objects (modes) of nature are (only) finite? Who is the human being such that s/he would presume to know God, the prophets, together with the author of the story of Job, ask? In Jeremiah we read: “I know, O Lord, that the way of man<sup>3</sup> is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps” (10.23). God challenges Job to tell him where he (Job) was when God created the world and who it was who determined its measurements.<sup>4</sup> Yet, according to the author of the Garden of Eden story, after God cursed man and woman with conception, desire, labor, and death and then clothed them with the garments of skins that he had made for them himself, he declares: “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever<sup>5</sup>”—and he drove him forth from the garden “to till the ground from which he was taken” (Gen. 3.22–23). Consistent with the author of Genesis, what the prophet Hosea finds lacking among his idolatrous people is precisely knowledge of God.<sup>5</sup> But on the day of restoration and renewed covenant, the Lord through the prophet promises the people: “And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in jus-



tice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord” (Hos. 2.19–20). What is knowledge of God if it is not the ethical responsibility—within the covenant—of knowing good and evil, of walking upright in the way of the Lord, as Hosea says in the final verse of his prophecy?

I linger over these key passages of Joshua, Jeremiah, Job, Genesis, and Hosea because the Bible is central to this study of Spinoza and modernity and because Spinoza makes the Bible central to his thought, as we shall see in the next chapter. One of the critical aims of my study is to show that what Spinoza understands by knowledge of God is fundamentally consistent with the Bible. It is precisely this point that most commentators have failed to realize. Indeed, they are, for the most part, silent on the tradition of thought out of which Spinoza emerges, except to say, vaguely, that he is critical of conventional Judaism and Christianity, which they associate with supernaturalism, about which the above biblical passages, it is important to note, make no mention whatsoever. Or commentators make vague claims about the indebtedness of Spinoza to Greek (and Roman) philosophy, without textual proof or analytical demonstration, as they fail to grasp what he means by the separation of philosophy from theology. (There are indeed tensions, ambivalences, and paradoxes in Spinoza in this area, as in others, as I have already begun to indicate and that will be a critical focus of my study.)

While I discuss the Garden of Eden story in detail, in light of Spinoza’s engagement with it in all three of his major works, only in volume II of this study, I shall briefly comment here on the most salient features of the passage cited above. The incongruity between the apparently harsh curse laid on Adam and Eve by God and his gracious clothing of them is heightened by the acknowledgment on the part of God that they have become like him in knowing good and evil. Then, lest Adam and Eve also eat of the tree of life and live forever, God expels them from the garden to inhabit the earth from which they (first!) came. But surely three elements of the curse—conception (sexual and spiritual), desire (sexual and spiritual), and labor (both child-birth and field work)—are central to human existence, to the good of created life (to the creation of life as good), even though (as) they involve pain and suffering (bodily and spiritual) or, we may say, fear and trembling.<sup>6</sup> What, then, are we to say about death, to which Adam and Eve are also condemned? Having become like God in knowing good and evil, they are expelled from the garden lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever. What would it mean to live forever? God through the prophet Hosea promises to betroth his lover, his beloved Israel, forever. Indeed, the tree of life returns at the very end of Hosea’s prophecy. Through the prophet God asks Israel what the Lord has to do with idols and responds himself: “It is I who answer and look after you. I

am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit” (Hos. 14.8).<sup>7</sup> Early in the prophecy, when the prophet’s wife, like Israel, plays the harlot, God through Hosea says about her: “And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Ba’al” (Hos. 2.8). Here we learn that the fruits of the earth are not givens for us to reach out and to take and so to make our own and to turn into idols—of eternal life. The fruits of the earth—all of creation—are the gifts of God. The tree of life—the evergreen cypress—is God himself: “from me comes your fruit.” Such is also the meaning of the Lord’s Prayer, when Jesus prays: “Give us this day our daily bread—on earth as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6.10–11).<sup>8</sup> Our daily bread is manna from heaven.

It is becoming clear, I think, that the tree of life, in the Garden of Eden story, represents a false conception of eternal life, one based on the givens of nature, from which Adam and Eve are expelled into the creative life of the covenant, in which God is like the Cyprus tree, whose fruits are the gifts of life. Man and woman are created in the image, not of nature but of God. But is this to suggest, too, that God does not enjoy eternal life as represented by the idols of nature? The concept of temporality that is central to the biblical story of creation, sin (fall), and covenant (redemption or salvation) is one that cannot be understood on the basis of either a supernatural (finite) God or a natural (finite) humankind. God is not supernatural in the sense, as Spinoza argues, that he breaks (suspends, renders contradictory) the laws of nature. Human beings are not natural in the sense that they can literally reach out and pluck the fruit of eternity. Is death, then, a curse or a blessing? The Deuteronomist commands us (members of the covenant) to choose life, not death (Deut. 30.19–20). But in the choice of life—note, again, that life is not a given but a gift—what is the place of death? What is the relationship between death and creation, between death and salvation, between death and eternal life (what Matthew addresses in and through his extraordinary series of kingdom parables)?

The concept of temporality central to the biblical understanding of eternal life is also that fundamental to the biblical concept of creation. What is the time of creation? When did (does? will?) creation take place? When God asks Job, in the passage referred to above, where he was when God created the world, Job is basically silent as God puts on a grandiose *son et lumière* show. Job is proper, patient, self-effacing, even abashed, yet ever attentive. He waits on God until his great display is over and then says simply that he knows that God can do all things and that no purpose of his can be thwarted. (This Job had never doubted. For it was only on the basis of his and also God’s commitment to existence that Job had questioned God, to the horror of his three friends, and also of Elihu, all of whom immediately associate suffering and loss—that is, doubt or fear and trembling—with lack of faith, when they are

precisely the opposite.) Indeed, Job continues, he spoke things that he did not understand and that he did not know (which is precisely what Job had incessantly repeated in his dialogue with God as he sought his response). Previously, Job continues, he knew of God through what he had heard about him; “but now my eye sees thee,” and he repents his words in dust and ashes (Job 42.1–6). The story of Job then ends with God reproving Eliphaz, together with his other friends, for not having spoken truly of him as “my servant” Job had, restoring Job’s fortune twofold, and showering his faithful servant with divine gifts. After reporting that Job lived for another one hundred forty years, the story ends: “And Job died, an old man, and full of days” (Job 42.17).

What does it mean that Job *now* sees God? Surely, the full meaning of creation, revelation, and salvation—of eternal life—is embodied in the temporality of this *now*. God is not (now) present to Job in one instant of time, as distinct from another. Rather, Job has learned (yet again) that his life is an eternal gift. His creation is now, as his betrothal to (his covenant with) God has been renewed forever. Yes, Job is repentant. His suffering has been terrible (and blameless), for such are the vicissitudes of existence of God’s faithful servant. Yes, Job dies. But he chose life—God chose him—eternally. Just as eternal life does not take place in some contradictory time after death (existence), so creation does not take place in some contradictory time prior to life (existence). Spinoza is harshly critical of the conceptions of creation that he finds in theologians and philosophers, as we shall see, precisely because they are not true to the Bible (although he does not exactly express himself in this way). They read the temporality of creation (and also of eternal life) in terms of first and final causes, thus subjecting both God and human beings to the idolatry of nature. One can well understand Spinoza’s severe criticism of Maimonides, which I shall be examining in the next chapter—and this critique directly engages creation!—when one takes note of the account of the Book of Job that Maimonides gives in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Maimonides views Job as representing Aristotelian philosophy, which is an inspired thought, given the enormous role that Aristotle played in thirteenth-century scholastic thought—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. But he also views Eplihaz, and not Job, as the true representative of the biblical, or divine, position, which shows us how difficult it is even for capacious thinkers to come to terms with the biblical concept of temporality as it involves both creation and eternal life. It is little wonder that Spinoza dedicated his life to the separation of philosophy from theology!

How we understand—together with Adam and Eve, Job, the prophets, and Jesus (and also Paul, a favorite authority of Spinoza)—the biblical concept of temporality and how it involves creation, eternal life, and death, is closely related to how we understand, as I indicate in volume II of my study, the

famously challenging conception of eternal life with which Spinoza concludes the *Ethics*. As a preview to engaging the issues involved in the biblical concept of temporality—the time of creation, eternal life, seeing God *now*, and death—it is worth drawing upon one of the paradoxes central to *Fear and Trembling*. Faith is said there to be the paradox that “the single individual”—the knight of faith: Abraham (Adam and Eve, Job, Hosea, Jesus)—is higher than the universal, when the universal is understood not as the covenant of single individuals or Kant’s kingdom of ends but as the commensurability of what is naturally sensate (the body) and what is naturally psychical (the soul)—as distinct from the spirit. “If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then *faith has never existed in the world precisely because it has always existed*” (55). I highlight Kierkegaard’s inimitable formulation of the paradox of biblical temporality. If faith has always existed—as universal, as naturally preceding the single individual whose spirit is the creative gift of God—then it has never existed. Then faith does not come into existence with the single individual. Then faith is not the task of every generation, the task of realizing, yet again, the essentially human. We can restate the Kierkegaardian paradox in yet more radical terms. If God has always existed—as universal, as supernatural—then God has never existed—as essentially, as substantially divine, what Spinoza calls the cause of itself (as had Descartes before him) in order to thwart the assimilation of divine substance to the teleology of Aristotelian first and final causes. Again, we ask: what is the temporality of the cause of itself? The use of opposed terms—cause of itself and cause through another; substance and mode; infinite and finite; God and human being—by Spinoza make it difficult for us to see, to begin with, that his conception of the cause of itself is true to the conception of temporality that we find in Job and Hosea. But we recall that Spinoza insists, always, that human beings possess adequate (if not complete) knowledge of God. Clearly, a finite thing of nature does not comprehend the infinite. The ascription on the part of Spinoza of freedom, eternity, infinity, and necessary existence to God (substance, the cause of itself) is, I shall show, congruent with the concept of biblical temporality that I have been sketching here and that I shall develop more fully in the chapters that follow.

Consistent with—central to—Spinoza’s concept of God as not supernatural (yet not contradicting or being contradicted by nature) and of his concept of human being as not natural (yet not contradicting or being contradicted by nature) is his proof of the existence of God, which, from the time of Kant on, we know as the ontological argument. What is so extraordinary about the ontological argument is that, in claiming to prove the necessary existence of God—that God exists necessarily, that necessity exists in and through God—it yokes necessity to existence and existence to necessity. Neither necessity nor

existence inheres, as such, in nature (in the cosmos). If necessity always existed as necessary, in the sense of the final cause of fatality (Aristotle's unmoved mover), then it has never existed as necessary. If existence was always necessary, then it was never necessary. I painfully go through these preliminaries to grasping the full sense of the ontological argument, for what lies at its core—necessary existence—has been largely dismissed or ignored in modernity (since Kant), except by Kierkegaard and Hegel. But the ontological argument that Kant named in his demolition of it has nothing at all to do with the ontological argument as originally formulated by St. Anselm in the later eleventh century and then taken up again in the seventeenth century, first by Descartes and then by Spinoza, as the ontological basis for eliminating Aristotelian teleology from the new science of nature and further by Spinoza for articulating a conception of political and ethical (democratic) sovereignty. What Kant demonstrates with magisterial authority is that necessity and existence inhere, not in objects of nature but rather in rational subjects (in desire, will, human practice: the bringing into existence of the kingdom of ends). Thus, while Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* destroys the ontological argument, based on Aristotelian (Neoplatonic) teleology—our ignorance of the one beyond being, of what is in itself—in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he silently reinstates it as the ethics of existence. Kant knows that the other term for necessary existence—when understood as characterizing rational subjects (whether divine or human), not natural objects—is freedom. It has been little appreciated since Kant that the ontological argument is consistent with—it is the philosophical articulation of—the biblical concept of creation (and its attendant concept of temporality). It is for this reason, as I have already noted, that Spinoza is relentlessly critical of inadequate concepts of creation, concepts that make God (and human being) blindly, fatally, dependent on the things of nature.

The ontological argument classically states that there is one thing that cannot be thought without necessarily existing—which is God. In chapter 3 I shall examine the logic and meaning of the ontological argument and its place in the history of biblical thought, and thus in modernity, in light of Spinoza's presentation of it in part I of the *Ethics*. But, by way of introductory orientation to the significance of the ontological argument, I want to note here how extraordinary is its fundamental feature, the very feature that post-Kantian (modern) thinking continues to ignore even as it presupposes it. What the ontological argument demonstrates, fundamentally, is the necessary relationship between thought and existence. God (the object, or rather the subject, of thought) does not exist outside of its thought (or idea), outside of the mind (or the idea) of the thinker who has the thought that God is the one thing that cannot be thought without existing necessarily. It is equally the case that one

cannot think without thinking something, necessarily. Thought, as Spinoza argues, as we shall see, is fundamentally active: we necessarily think (will, desire) something. Thought is always given in relation to the other—to content. It is no less the case, fundamentally, that existence is not given outside of thought (will, desire, what Spinoza calls *conatus*: effort, work, endeavor, power, activity: “striving”).

Thus we see that neither thought nor existence is at base a category of nature (and yet, as Spinoza insistently repeats, they are not opposed to nature: they neither contradict nor are contradicted by nature). Existence is not found outside of consciousness: existence is, in principle, self-conscious. Thought is not found outside of existence: thought is not disembodied (or supernatural) but always, in principle, actively engaged in and with existence. It is little wonder, then, that Descartes—with his first principle of “I think, therefore I am”—is the progenitor of modern thought. But it is frequently ignored that the logic of this “therefore” is neither deductive nor inductive. Existence (I am) is not deduced from a prior principle of thought; nor is it inferred from the prior experience of thought. The logic of this ontology, as Descartes especially makes clear in his Replies to the Objections of the *Meditations of First Philosophy* that he published along with the *Meditations*, is ontological (dialectical): thought and existence are given together. That is, they are separate from each other in the precise sense that each is mutually dependent on the other: we do not start with (or from) one and arrive at the other. Either we start with both thought and existence, or we make no beginning at all (which is precisely, as we shall see, the position in the Greek world where thought, or consciousness, is fatally opposed to—it is the contradiction of—existence, or being, and vice versa). It is ignored even more frequently that, although Descartes begins with the *cogito ergo sum* as his first principle of philosophy, the burden of his demonstration is to show that there is no beginning outside of God, which is a precise summary of the ontological argument (that Descartes recoups in his unrelenting onslaught on the Aristotelian teleology that had rendered scholastic thinking in the tradition of Aquinas incapable of adequately accounting for either thought or existence, whether divine or human). In his *Ethics* Spinoza reverses the Cartesian trajectory by beginning with God and ending with the human individual *conscius* of self, God, and things. But what Spinoza actually shows us, as we shall see, is that, consistent with his great mentor Descartes, all beginnings are double, split, dialectical—involving, at once, both thought and existence, both self and other, and so equally God and human being.

Given the reciprocal relationship of thought and existence that is central to the ontological argument, it follows that the richer or the poorer one’s thinking is the richer or the poorer the subject of one’s thought is. The re-

verse position equally holds. The richer or the poorer the subject of one's thought is the richer or the poorer one's thought of the subject is. The content of one's thought is necessarily one's God, adequate or inadequate. It follows yet further that the ontological argument demonstrates the existence (and thought) of God no more (or other) than it demonstrates the thought (and existence) of the human being. God does not exist outside of the thought of the human subject, and the human subject does not think outside of the existence of God. Alternatively, God does not think (will, decree) outside of the existence of the human subject—the human subject is the focus of divine thought (revelation)—and the human subject does not exist outside of the thought (or what Spinoza calls the idea) of God.

Because, as I argue, the ontological argument is at once biblical and modern, it raises in acute fashion the question whether modernity is (essentially) secular and whether the Bible is (essentially) religious. In different terms, since the thought and the existence of God, in the Bible, involve and express the thought and the existence of human beings—in their covenantal relationship with God—is it at all evident that modernity is any less religious than it is secular? Is the Bible any less secular (human) than it is religious (divine)? Is the ontological argument itself secular or religious? What we shall actually find, as we probe the thought of Spinoza, is that the ontological argument bears (supports, creates) our concepts of both faith and reason, of both theology and philosophy, precisely as, in separating them, it distinguishes between divine being and human being, between self and other, such that neither is ancillary to (or the contradiction of) the other. Abraham is called the father of faith, and Descartes is called the father of modern philosophy. But who is the father of whom? In *Fear and Trembling* we read that “the one who will work gives birth to his own father” (27). Does Abraham, in not standing still, get at least as far as Descartes? Does Descartes, in getting at least as far as Abraham, not stand still? In constituting the ontological argument of St. Anselm as the very structure of modern thought and existence, does Descartes not find “another explanation” for not standing still, yet in not going further than Abraham?

While Spinoza cannot be said to go further than Descartes, we can also say that he does not stand still in getting at least so far. For he sees what Descartes does not yet see, which is that the ontological argument is ethical in its structure. There is one thing that cannot be loved without existing necessarily (freely), and that is the neighbor. Alternatively, there is one thing that cannot exist without being loved necessarily (freely), and that is the neighbor. Every human being is commanded, necessarily, to love God above all (natural) things and his neighbor as himself (and not as a natural object). It is fitting that Spinoza makes the ontological argument the very basis of the work that he entitles *Ethics*, which is incomparably the single, most comprehensive (and perhaps

also the most demanding and, at first reading, the most rebarbative) of any single work in the history of philosophy (or religion?). It is also fitting that in his first great work, the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza makes love of neighbor, the golden rule of loving your neighbor as yourself, the hermeneutical basis of the Bible. While he insists that the doctrine taught by the prophets (together with the apostles and Jesus) is moral, and not what he calls mathematical, from what Spinoza writes we can see clearly that the moral doctrine of Scripture is necessary, for at least two reasons. In the first place, Spinoza acknowledges that the moral truth of the Bible cannot be deduced by reason from prior universal principles. Revelation was (is) necessary; or, in other words, religion is separate from reason and not reducible to it. In the second place, it is inconceivable, Spinoza equally acknowledges and as I noted above, that the doctrine of charity could ever be falsified or lost in the sense of being reduced to error such that it would be indistinguishable from it. For in that case we would have no basis for even knowing that we were in error. Error (or sin) would then be reduced to ignorance, and we would be back in the Socratic world of the fatally blind, contradictory opposition between thought and existence, between self and other. The moral principle of charity cannot be doubted, or, in other words, it is precisely that which makes doubt possible (necessary). What Descartes had earlier demonstrated with incomparable insight<sup>9</sup> is that doubt is possible only insofar as it necessarily rests on the self-conscious act of the existing subject who thoughtfully doubts. *One* doubts *something*; and, in so doubting, one substantiates the existence no less of the doubter than of that which the doubter doubts. Thought possesses existence; and existence is not found outside of (self-conscious) thought. Love of God and neighbor, as Spinoza explicates the hermeneutical standard of the Bible, is a necessary (absolute and universal) truth. The hermeneutical principle that *caritas* is its own standard, the standard both of what is true and what is not true in Scripture, is identical with the formulation of the ontological argument in the *Ethics* that truth is its own standard: the necessary truth that cannot be thought without existing (and that cannot exist without being thought).

It is important to remember, always, that Spinoza does not call his concept of necessary existence the ontological argument (although Kant, in naming, as he demolishes, the ontological argument and so saving it as the necessary relationship of subjects, understood with utter lucidity that what was at stake in it was nothing less than the relationship between necessity and existence). Furthermore, Spinoza does not directly relate his hermeneutical standard of moral truth, as found in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, to his (putative) mathematical demonstration of the existence of God in the *Ethics*. Indeed, as I indicated earlier, how he understands the relationship between the two works and thus between religion (as moral certitude) and ethics (as mathematical certitude),



or between imagination and reason, has been one of the most misunderstood and thus one of the most controversial topics in Spinoza scholarship. But once it is truly comprehended that the ontological argument—linking (as it no less separates) necessity and existence—is at once biblical and modern, and so ethical, we shall be in a position to grasp the profound integrity of Spinoza's thought.

Spinoza typically ascribes necessity to what he calls mathematical (or geometrical) demonstration. But the paradox here is that the content of so-called mathematical demonstration is the necessary existence of God. Notwithstanding Spinoza's perfervid (or perverse?), naturalistic rhetoric, God is no mathematical theorem but the true—the profoundly, the only satisfying—content of human thought and existence: that in which the human mind finds what Spinoza calls *acquiescentia* (which I translate as “active acceptance,” given that the term “acquiescence” in English tends to suggest merely passive acceptance). We shall see that for Spinoza the concept of necessity (together with the concepts of the eternal, the absolute, the universal, and the infinite) does not involve logical entailment, when logic is understood to be governed by the law of contradiction. It involves, rather, ontological entailment: that which cannot be thought (or doubted or desired . . .) without necessarily existing (and that which cannot exist without being necessarily thought).<sup>10</sup> The paradox here is that charity, as found in biblical revelation, is no less necessary—in terms of the ethical imperative: love your neighbor as yourself—than the putatively mathematical demonstration of the existence of God. Indeed, the hermeneutical strategy that is required to make sense of the tensions, ambivalences, and (yes, at times) inadequacies of Spinoza's thought is, as I have already indicated, to work through, with careful deliberation, the pairs of opposed terms—those, in fact, that are central to the ontological argument!—that typically characterize it and not to take at face value those formulations whose apparent contradictions can and are to be resolved in light of the truth of their deeper ontological content. But this is precisely the principle of hermeneutics that Spinoza articulates in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and that he claims, as we shall see, is based on the method of interpreting nature from itself alone (by the necessary principles of rational demonstration). The hermeneutical circle is complete!

We shall apply—we have no choice but to apply: it is an ethical, an ontological imperative—the necessary, universal method of interpretation that Spinoza formulates in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* to the *Ethics* (and to the *Political Treatise*). This method states, with beguiling simplicity, that the Bible is to be interpreted from itself alone. The Bible is to be separated from, so that it is not directly dependent on, the immediate interests (or idols) of the reader. But, since our acquiescence in the Bible involves and expresses active (and not

merely passive) acceptance, we also have to use our judgment in determining what is necessarily true in the Bible: its moral doctrine. For if we accepted (or rejected) the word of the Bible merely passively, we would be subject to idolatry, than which there is no greater sin conceivable in the Bible. It thus turns out that the hermeneutics of interpreting the Bible from itself alone demands (creates) readers who are called to interpret the Bible from themselves alone. The Bible, together with the principle of hermeneutics that it creates in and for its readers, is itself grounded in the very doctrine that it reveals to its readers, the doctrine of charity. The Bible must love—show respect for—its readers as it also makes them subject, necessarily, to the standard of love that cannot be thought without existing and that cannot exist without being thought (willed). It follows, therefore, that readers, in judging the Bible, are no less subject to the judgment of the Bible. The story that the Bible tells is ultimately their (our) story. It tells the story of its readers—sinful, faithful, rational human beings—as they constitute the community for which and in which the Bible is (and continues to be) written. (We shall have occasion to ponder Spinoza’s remark that there would not appear to be any prophets living today.) The readers of the Bible, while they cannot in good faith aspire to go further than Abraham, that incomparable Cartesian, can, with the alternative interpretation of the ontological argument, reasonably get as far as Abraham without in the least standing still.

We have seen that, because the ontological argument—the necessary relationship between thought and existence—is at once biblical and ethical, it separates God and human beings as it brings them into a covenantal relationship one with the other. But the fact that God does not exist outside of the thought of human beings (to think God is to exist humanly) and that human beings do not exist outside of the thought of God (to exist humanly is to think God) means that the ontological argument at once constitutes and is constituted by a beginning, an origin, a principle that is split, doubled, duplicated from the beginning. We do not begin with (the existence or the thought of) God and arrive at the (existence or thought of) human being. It is equally the case that we do not begin with (the existence or thought of) human being and arrive at (the existence or the thought of) God. We—who are we?—begin, from the beginning, doubly, with both human and divine being, with both self and other.<sup>11</sup>

Yet Spinoza begins part I of the *Ethics*, which is entitled, simply, “Concerning God,” with the definition of substance in the terms of the ontological argument. It is God, or substance as the cause of itself, alone that cannot be conceived without existing. It is to the existence of God alone that necessity is to be attributed. Right from the beginning of the *Ethics*, then, its readers are thrust into the position of Job. Where were (are) they when God created (creates) the thought and existence of human beings? Where were (are) they when

God was (is) defined as necessary existence, when God became (assumes) the conception (definition) of existing necessarily? At the end of their harrowing engagement with the *Ethics*, do its readers finally attain the *beatitudo*, the blessing of Job? Do they recognize in the necessary existence of God his omnipotence (that he can do all things) and his omniscience (that no purpose of his can be thwarted)? Do they acknowledge things too wonderful for them to have understood and to have known, because what they heard was based on hearsay (philosophical and theological tradition), whereas now they can say: “my eyes see thee”? In despising, now, their words of frustration and anguish and in experiencing repentance (I assume here the electronic equivalent of dust and ashes!), are they rewarded, doubly, for having, from the beginning, spoken truly of God? Or do readers remain in the position of Eliphaz and his friends, including Elihu (not to mention Maimonides and other great scholastics of the High Middle Ages of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—those posterior to St. Anselm and prior to William of Ockham and Nicholas of Cusa) and never comprehend the fact that the necessary existence of God is the most glorious of human ideas, precisely because it is not and cannot be found apart from or outside of human thought and existence?

Just as the ontological argument itself has become largely incomprehensible to moderns, so it has also not been generally understood that the very structure of the five parts of the *Ethics* embodies, as it explicates, the ontological argument as the necessary relationship between thought and existence, between self and other, between human being and divine being. Part I of the *Ethics* is, to begin with, extraordinarily incomprehensible, just as Job finds the silence of God incomprehensible, because, while we readers feel the action of (Spinoza’s conception of) God condemning us to the ash heap of innocent (blameless) helplessness, we do not understand where this definition—the proof—of God as necessarily existing comes from or how we are to comprehend (justify) it. But if, like Job, we do not give up on God, if we continue to demand a response from the text, we persevere in our reading. Part II of the *Ethics* introduces mind—the thought, conception, or idea of God (that we human beings possess); and slowly it begins to dawn on us that God does not exist outside of the human mind, outside of (without) our conception or idea of God. Then, as I show in volume II of this study, comes part III of the *Ethics* on the affects, which introduces us to the reality of human effort to comprehend God: *conatus*. But, again, it is all too easy to be seduced by Job’s friends in the guise of philosophical commentators. For how does the endeavor (*conatus*) on the part of each natural thing (mode) to persevere, as much as it finds within itself (I paraphrase proposition 6), embody (comprehend or justify) the ontological argument necessarily linking divine thought and existence? Yet, that is precisely the question that the friends of Job relentlessly put

to him. Who is he to question God's power and justice? Is not the fact that Job is suffering the total loss of temporal fortune—although not of his existence, or of his mind (which God does not include in the terms of his wager with Satan at the beginning of the story)—proof of the worthlessness of human effort? How, in other words, does the *conatus* of persevering in one's actual essence (I now paraphrase proposition 7), as Job perseveres, demonstrate the necessary existence of God?

Let it suffice to say at this point that the glory, the mystery, the miracle of the *Ethics* is that (how) human (self-) consciousness, as *conatus*, comes into existence as the adequate knowledge of God demonstrating the necessary relationship between thought and existence, at once divine and human. At the very end of the fifth and last part of the *Ethics*, entitled "Concerning the Power of Intellect or Concerning Human Freedom," Spinoza presents his final, definitive pair of opposed terms—no longer between God and human beings but now between, rather, two human beings: *ignarus* (the fool of the Psalms who denies God in his heart, or the friends of Job whose superstitious, idolatrous belief in the supernatural prevents them from seeing that necessary existence defines human being no less than divine being) and *sapiens* (persevering Job). In contrast to the individual who, in his ignorance, finds the ontological argument of the *Ethics* to be incomprehensible, is the individual whose wisdom is constituted by knowledge of God as necessary existence. "Conscious of self, of God, and of things by a certain eternal necessity, he never ceases to be but always possesses true acquiescence of mind." By the end of the *Ethics* the attributes that, at the beginning of the text, were central to God and to the ontological argument—necessity and eternity—are now comprehended as true no less of human beings who are conscious of themselves, God, and things: I think (God), therefore (necessarily and eternally) I am. Has not the reader of the *Ethics* been doubly rewarded for persevering in his hermeneutical existence until he finds himself acquiescing in its necessity?

Spinoza's challenge to modernity is radical, for it is as old and as new as Abraham. To take up that challenge, which is the undertaking of this study, is to locate ourselves as moderns in the history, in the story in and through which modernity comes into existence and to which Spinoza makes so significant a contribution. We read in *Fear and Trembling* that "everything depends on one's position" (75). "Position" here has to do with the stages (or spheres) of existence, with one's calling (by God), with what is identified in Kierkegaard's text as the absolutely necessary position: the gift of life as the absolute relation (of human beings) to the absolute (God and neighbor). The position on which everything in life depends absolutely, necessarily, is not reducible to one's (finite or given) role or status in life, relative to the role or status of others. Spinoza has not been thoroughly or essentially comprehended

because he has not been positioned absolutely (adequately) in relation either to his past or to his future, which is no less our past (and future). For us moderns to become adequate readers of Spinoza we have to position ourselves such that, in reading Spinoza reading his past (history), we are also engaged in reading our own (past) history. Spinoza's challenge to us moderns is to think through, once again, how the absolute relation to the absolute, the position that cannot be thought without existing necessarily, is at once our past and our future, both old and new.

The simple (meaning: primitive, elemental) reason that Spinoza has not been adequately comprehended; that modernity has not been understood to presuppose the absolutely necessary position of our relationship to the Bible; and that the ontological argument has not been grasped as providing the structure of modern ethics (and politics) is that the success of (the) Enlightenment has obscured for us its familiar, theological roots. Rather, it has not been adequately understood that the essentially human, the position that Spinoza in the *Ethics* associates with *homo liber* (the free individual whose meditation is of life, not of death), presupposes the concept of necessary existence and thus the ontological argument proving the existence of God. It is interesting to note that so fierce and timely a critic of religion (Christianity) as Nietzsche acknowledges that that which is most familiar to us, that in which we are most deeply rooted, is that which presents us with the most acute problem of comprehending. Because we are so used to the familiar, because we are so at home or at one with it, it is precisely the canny, the *heimlich*, that "is most difficult to 'know'—that is, to see as a problem; that is, to see as strange, as distant, as 'outside us'" (*Gay Science*, #355). So Nietzsche himself makes the uncanny discovery that his challenge to modernity that God is dead, together with his own position of atheism, presupposes the concept of truth that is rooted in what he calls the ascetic critique of Christianity.<sup>12</sup> To get to know ourselves, to recognize ourselves, we have to become other than ourselves. So once again we make the uncanny, the *unheimlich*, the alienating discovery that, in order to find ourselves, we have, first, necessarily, to lose ourselves—in the ontological argument; and thus we regain the position of Job as the perplexed, lost, alienated reader of the *Ethics*. The reason, then, that Spinoza, together with modernity, has not been adequately comprehended is that the relationships that are fundamental to the biblical tradition—human being and God, self and other, thought and existence, philosophy and theology, reason and faith, the secular and the religious—are constantly rendered contradictory when articulated in the oppositional terms of Greek metaphysics (many and one, appearance and reality, matter and form, body and soul, time and immortality). This explains why, as Kant observes, every age has to confront the same old—and new—dualisms of skepticism and dogmatism, of empiricism and rationalism. Few are the texts—of whatever medium: poetry,

fiction, the fine arts, music, philosophy, religion . . . —that overcome by appropriating these oppositional dualisms and so bear witness to the miraculous transformation of contradiction into paradox.

The challenge of Spinoza to us moderns is to see that the very constitution of modernity is founded on the ontological argument, whose fundamentally ethical structure comprehends the covenantal relations of human beings and God of which the Bible gives the classical articulation. If we fail to see that central to Spinoza's modernity is the Bible and if we equally fail to see that central to the Bible is its modernity, then we shall be unable to grasp the necessity (the absolute truth) of relationship binding together the pairs of opposites that are utterly fundamental to Spinoza and to the whole of the biblical tradition down to the present: thought and existence, philosophy and theology, human being and God, time and eternity. The result, then, will be to lose both Spinoza's and our own modernity. Spinoza's challenge to us moderns is that, in order to read him comprehensively, we have to have a comprehensive reading of modernity and so of ourselves. But the reverse proposition is equally true. If we are to have an adequate reading of modernity, and so of ourselves, we must comprehend how and why Spinoza is so very central to that reading. If we read Spinoza comprehensively, we shall have a comprehensive reading of modernity, and so of ourselves. If we do not read him comprehensively—if we are not open to being read comprehensively by the three major texts of Spinoza that are central to this study—then we shall fail to comprehend both modernity and our position within it.

In this study on hermeneutics and ontology, together with my companion study on politics and ethics, I undertake to show, in systematically working through the pairs of opposed terms that are central simultaneously to Spinoza, to the Bible, and to the ontological argument—human being (nature) and God, thought and existence, self and other, philosophy and theology—that (how) Spinoza's thought comprehends biblical interpretation (hermeneutics), politics (*homo liber*: democracy), and ethics (love of neighbor) within a consistent, comprehensive framework of ontology whose principle and consummation are the intellectual love of God. I combine close textual analysis of individual passages—interpreting the text from itself alone—with an eye, always, to the *doctrina*, the teaching, of the text(s) as a whole. Spinoza appears to claim, as we shall see, that texts whose truth depends on reason and mathematical demonstration do not require interpretation, unlike the Bible, whose (metaphoric) language, in being accommodated to the imagination of both prophets and people, demands of its readers careful distinction between its literal meaning, its *sensus*, and its spirit (truth). But the delicious irony here is that the bristling armature of definitions, axioms, propositions, demonstrations and the like render the *Ethics* utterly opaque until we realize that, as I in-

dicated above, the necessity of its demonstration is not mathematical but ontological, expressing the necessary (free) relation between thought and existence. Spinoza seems, at times, so perplexed by the infinite resources of biblical language, when combined with our extremely limited (historical) knowledge of it, that his theory of accommodation is easily (and often) misread as reducing language to the imagination of the prophets and people. Since, however, he profoundly understands that truth inheres not in language but in *doctrina*—in the necessary relationship of thought and existence: the golden rule of loving your neighbor as yourself—we cannot and must not read the *Ethics* as saying that truth is found outside of language, in the mind or heart, as if it were directly available to us. Indeed, it is precisely the complex interweaving of the propositions and their demonstrations—not to mention the interplay between them and the myriad of explanatory notes, introductory prefaces, and summary appendices with which Spinoza bucks up his “formal” demonstrations—that confronts us with the necessity of having to work through their pairs of opposed terms. For it is precisely the language of the *Ethics*, not its metaphors, in this case, but its pairs of opposed terms, as I keep noting, that demand that we position them within the ontological doctrine of which they are, when truly understood, so rich an exposition.

Spinoza’s challenge to us moderns is to discover that it is solely on the basis of comprehending the relationship between hermeneutics—founded on the golden rule of interpreting the neighbor as we wish the neighbor to interpret us—and the ontological argument—demonstrating the necessary relationship between thought and existence—that we can appropriate, at once faithfully and rationally, the terms of the opposition between philosophy and theology, between human being and divine being, and not be reduced by their opposition to contradiction. Thus, in chapter 2, I shall discuss Spinoza’s conception of the Bible and the hermeneutics that it demands as found in chapters 1–15 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. In chapter 3, I shall show how parts I and II of the *Ethics*, on God and mind, articulate the two basic elements of the ontological argument, the existence of God and the thought of the human being. In chapter 4 I shall conclude this volume with reflections indicating that, in coming to see—with the eyes of blessed Job—the interrelationship between hermeneutics and the ontological argument, we can acquiesce in the thought of Spinoza with a satisfaction that is as rare as it is profound.

## Notes

1. For information on works cited in this study, consult the bibliography.
2. Spinoza criticizes Boyle’s empiricism in letters 6 and 13.

3. Consistent with the RSV translation, in this study I use “man” (“men”) in the ungendered sense of the Latin *homo* (*homines*), which Spinoza constantly uses, and not in the gendered sense of the Latin *vir* (and its cognates virtue, virility . . .). It would, in my judgment, be artificial to avoid the language of “man” in explicating the thought of Spinoza (i.e., when paying close attention to his language).

4. Job 38.4–5.

5. See Hos. 4.1, 6; 6.7.

6. I omit here that part of God’s curse on Eve that Adam her husband “shall rule over you” (Gen. 3.16). Even if this passage can be saved, I view it, in the spirit of Spinoza, as accommodation (on the part of both author and audience) to the sociological reality (hierarchical gender relations) of the age.

7. I have not attempted to preserve the prosody of the passages that I cite from Hosea.

8. I have transposed these two lines from Matthew. Also see Luke 11.3.

9. Already St. Augustine had clearly seen in the *City of God* that the fact that we are deceived (or that we are sinners) supports, not the academic skeptics (in the tradition of Plato) but the faithful. We who are deceived (in good faith) know that we are deceived. We are not deceived that we are deceived—about something (necessarily existing). (If we were deceived that we were deceived, then we would not even *know* that we were deceived; and we would be back in the world of Socratic ignorance.) Thus deception (like Cartesian doubt) presupposes, necessarily, the existence both of the one who is deceived and of that about which one is deceived. Anselm also had clearly seen, in the *Proslogion*, that, when the fool of the Psalms says in his heart that there is no God, the fool has to be understood as saying (as desiring to say, to communicate, to think, to enact) something. It might well be, we could add, that the fool’s God is foolish (i.e., impoverished or idolatrous in conception). But the fool cannot communicate his doubt (deception) about God to us or even to himself without presupposing (bringing into existence) the dialectic of self and other, of thought and existence, of human being and divine being. Spinoza’s polemic against doubt (that it presupposes the necessary relation between thought and existence) is consistent with Cartesian certitude, as we shall see.

10. Descartes makes clear both in the Replies to the Objections to the *Meditations* and in his brilliant (and neglected) *Search for Truth* that the “therefore” logic of the cogito and of its doubting (and thus of the ontological argument for the existence of God) is not based on the law of contradiction. See note 50 in chapter 2.

11. Otherwise, as I shall show in chapter 3, we would find ourselves back in the Greek world of Socrates in which no beginning can be made either in the world of appearances (which contradict and are contradicted by their natural end) or in the world of forms (which, as the end of nature, are identical with their natural end).

12. See *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III.27 (where Nietzsche cites the aphorism in the *Gay Science* in which he acknowledges his uncanny rootedness in the critique of Christianity). See Kulak’s study on the relationship between origin and critique in Nietzsche.