

*Transcendent Immanence: יהוה or Jehova  
in Spinoza's Concept of God*

by

Henry Owh

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology of  
Emmanuel College and the Department of  
Theology of the Toronto School of Theology. In  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Theology awarded by  
the University of St. Michael's College

Toronto 2000

© Henry Owh



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*

*Our file* *Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-57448-2

Canada

In Memoriam

*Bong Suk Owh and Northrop Frye*

# Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
I. Introduction	1
i. Reaction of Spinoza's Contemporaries to the TTP	4
ii. German Romantic Reaction to Spinoza	17
iii. Twentieth-century Views on Spinoza	25
II. God of the <i>Ethics</i>	30
i. Spinoza's Concept of God in <i>Ethics</i> Part I	32
ii. Modern Readings of <i>Ethics</i>	36
iii. Descartes and Spinoza	42
III. God of the TTP and God of the <i>Ethics</i>	49
i. Maimonides and Spinoza	52
ii. <i>Jehova</i> and the God of the <i>Ethics</i>	58
iii. Religion and Philosophy	68
IV. Conclusion	78
Bibliography	84

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents and Barb for their patience and love. I would not have been able to complete this work without the sacrifices they have made for me. I would also like to thank Professor George P. Schner for introducing me to Spinoza, and for his patience and guidance. He made writing this paper a thoroughly enjoyable experience.

## I. Introduction

Deinde notandum in Scriptura nullum nomen praeter Jehova reperiri, quod Dei absolutam essentiam, sine relatione ad res creatas indicet. Atque ideo Hebraei hoc solum nomen Dei esse proprium contendunt, reliqua autem appellativa esse; & revera reliqua Dei nomina, sive ea substantiva sint, sive adjectiva, attributa sunt, quae Deo competunt, quatenus cum relatione ad res creatas consideratur, vel per ipsas manifestatur.<sup>1</sup>

Again, it should be observed that in Scripture no word but Jehovah is to be found to indicate the absolute essence of God, as unrelated to created things. That is why the Hebrews contend that this is, strictly speaking, God's only name, the others names being forms of address; and it is a fact that the other names of God, whether substantive or adjectival, are attributes belonging to God in so far as he is considered as related to created things, or manifested through them.<sup>2</sup>

Since the publication of *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth TTP) in 1670, Spinoza's concept of God has elicited strong critical responses based on conflicting interpretations. For over three hundred years, he has been called an atheist on the one hand and a pantheist on the other by Jewish, Christian and secular philosophers, for identifying God with Nature. Today, there is no consensus as to how we should identify Spinoza and categorize his concept of God. Some, like Leo Strauss, still consider Spinoza's concept of God to be atheistic, while others, like Jonathan Bennett and Yirmiyahu Yovel, agree with the German Romantic philosophers in saying that it is pantheistic. For Edwin Curley, however, neither atheism nor pantheism, but materialism best describes Spinoza and his views on God. Alan Donagan also does not think either atheism or pantheism accurately describes Spinoza's philosophy. His opinion is that the term that best describes Spinoza's concept of God is "panentheism," which Martial

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedictus Spinoza, *Opera*, 4 vols., ed. Gebhardt, vol. 3 (Heidelberg, 1925), p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1989), p. 216.

Gueroult first suggested in 1968,<sup>3</sup> since it denotes the fact that Spinoza's concept of God is "naturalistic," not in a pantheistic sense of identifying Nature as God, but in the sense that God is in everything.

One of the main reasons these different interpretations of Spinoza's concept of God persists among scholars is that they discuss Spinoza's concept of God within the philosophical framework of the *Ethics* as the primary text. Even when they allude or directly refer to Spinoza's other works, they read them in the context of the *Ethics*. For example, when Curley refers to one of Spinoza's earlier work, *Metaphysical Thoughts*, he draws materials from this work to support his reading of the *Ethics*. Alan Donagan does not fare any better in his essay, "Spinoza's Theology." He comments that *Ethics* has to be read in conjunction with the TTP, but goes on to interpret Spinoza's theology in the context of his reading of *Ethics* also.

This scholarly reliance on the *Ethics* is present in translations of Spinoza's works as well. In spite of the statements Spinoza himself makes regarding God as *Jehova* in the TTP, and what this name means to him, even the most recent translations of the TTP by Samuel Shirley pays little heed to the original Hebrew quotations and Latin translations that Spinoza provides, especially in the passages where Spinoza translates the Tetragrammaton as *Jehova*. Instead, Shirley relies more on stock phrases of the Authorized Version of the Bible. Edwin Curley's partial translation of the TTP in *A Spinoza Reader*, which offers a transliteration of the Tetragrammaton as *Yahoweh*, is no better. Curley is inconsistent in his transliteration. He offers only the Hebrew version of

---

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Genevieve Lloyd's *Spinoza and the Ethics*. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 40.

the name without making it clear whether or not Spinoza quotes the name in Hebrew or in Latin.

What is needed at present in Spinoza scholarship is a shift away from this trend of relying on the *Ethics* for an understanding of the concept of God towards an examination of Spinoza's remarks on God in the *Ethics* in conjunction with his statement in the TTP regarding the Tetragrammaton. This may seem to be a radical proposal. But Spinoza completed a draft of the first two chapters of the TTP at least 5 years before its publication. Also, he started working on the TTP in 1663, as well as taking four years off before completing the *Ethics* to finish the TTP. Unlike any other of his works, the TTP expresses not what God is, but who God is to Spinoza; and it helps us understand better Spinoza's definitions of philosophical terms that have long remained enigmatic.



### **i. Reaction of Spinoza's Contemporaries to the TTP**

When the TTP was first published, many people from all over Europe condemned Spinoza as an "atheist." At home in Holland, Willem van Blijenbergh, who had correspondence with Spinoza, wrote a scathing remark against the TTP. His abhorrence of the book is expressed thus:

It is a book...[that is] full of curious but abominable discoveries, the learning and inquiries. Every Christian, nay, every man of sense ought to abhor such a book. The author endeavours to overthrow the Christian religion and baffle all our hopes which are grounded upon it.<sup>4</sup>

Johannes Melchior and his teacher Samuel Maresius, who wrote one of the first responses to the TTP, were equally inimical. While Melchior saw Spinoza as trying "as Nero once did, to destroy Christian faith in one blow by robbing the historical, prophetic and apostolic books of the Scriptures of their authority,"<sup>5</sup> Maresius thought that Spinoza was "a formal atheist who is erring, because he leans on Descartes and on propositions of Hobbes in theology."<sup>6</sup> Lambert van Velthuysen also saw the TTP as subversive and atheistic. He thought it "banishes and thoroughly subverts all worship and religion, prompts atheism by stealth, or envisages such a God as can not move men to reverence for his divinity," and that Spinoza is "teaching sheer atheism with furtive and disguised

---

<sup>4</sup> Cited in John Colerus, "The Life of Benedict Spinoza," in *Spinoza, His Life and Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Frederick Pollock (London: C. K. Paul, 1899), p. 403.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in J. J. V. M. de Vet, "Letter of a Watchman on Zion's Walls: the First Reaction of Johannes Melchior to *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*" in *The Spinozistic Heresy*, ed. Paolo Cristofolini (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995), p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in de Vet, "Letter of a Watchman on Zion's Walls: the First Reaction of Johannes Melchior to *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*" in *The Spinozistic Heresy*, p. 38.

arguments.”<sup>7</sup> Jacob Batelier, a Remonstrant minister, and Johannes Bredenburg saw the TTP as a dangerous book to the Christian religion as well.<sup>8</sup> These outcries against the TTP resulted in its being banned from being advertised, sold and/or referred to in debates, academic discussions, or books in many parts of the Dutch republic.<sup>9</sup>

In other parts of Europe, people’s reaction to the TTP was similar. In England, neo-Platonists at Cambridge censured the TTP.<sup>10</sup> Among this group was Henry More who declared that Spinoza is a “perfect Cartesian” in a pejorative sense, and “no less than an infidel and an atheist”<sup>11</sup> for writing the TTP. In a letter to Lady Conway at Ragley, he expresses his strong feelings against the book by saying he is writing a rebuttal to it. He writes

I have come thus late to London by reason of Cuperus his Confutation of Tractatus Theologicopoliticus which Monsieur Van Helmont gave me at Ragley from a friend in Holland, in quires, which whyle it was a binding at Cambridge I fell a reading Theologicopoliticus the better to understand Cuperus his confutation when it came from binding. But I found this Theologicopoliticus such an impious work, that I could not forebeare confuting him whyle a [*sic*] read him....Proposing this Confutation of mine shall make up some part of this Philosophicall volume [*sic*].<sup>12</sup>

In Germany, Leibniz, who not only had personal contact with Spinoza, but also had good first-hand knowledge of Spinoza’s views, reacted more prudently than most, but

---

<sup>7</sup> Spinoza, *Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), p. 236. For a more detailed examination of van Velthuysen’s arguments against TTP, see Siebrand’s *Spinoza and the Netherlands* (Wolfeboro: Van Gorcum, New Hampshire, 1988), p. 78-95.

<sup>8</sup> See Wiep Van Bunge’s “Van Velthuysen, Batelier and Bredenburg on Spinoza’s Interpretation of the Scriptures” in *The Spinozistic Heresy*, p. 49-65.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Israel, “The Banning of Spinoza’s Works in the Dutch Republic (1670-1678)” in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism Around 1700*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 3-14.

<sup>10</sup> Rosalie L. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment. A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 66-96.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Colie, *Light and Enlightenment*, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Colie, *Light and Enlightenment*, p. 74.

still saw the book in a negative light as being anti-Christian. In a letter that he wrote in 1671, he says:

I have read the book by Spinoza. I am saddened by the fact that such a learned man has, as it seems, sunk so low. The critique that he launches against the holy books has its foundation in the *Leviathan* of Hobbes, but it is not difficult to show that it is often defective. Writings of this sort tend to undermine the Christian religion, consolidated by the precious blood, sweat and vigilance of martyrs. If only they can stimulate someone equal to Spinoza in erudition but exceeding him in his respect for Christianity to refute his numerous paralogisms and his abuse of eastern letters.<sup>13</sup>

Among the German scholarly reaction to the TTP, however, none was as effective in his attacks against Spinoza as Christian Kortholt, a theology professor at Kiel. His comments in *De tribus impostoribus magnis liber* (1680), which state that Spinoza is a hypocrite, atheist and an blasphemer and that the TTP is "a synopsis or compendium of atheism in the strictest sense of the word,"<sup>14</sup> were to influence German thinkers for about a hundred years. One of the main reasons Kortholt's work became the basis on which many of the future attacks in Germany against Spinoza depended is that there was not a widespread knowledge of the TTP in Germany during this time.<sup>15</sup>

This lack of first-hand knowledge of the TTP by the Germans does not mean, however, that the TTP was not readily available to readers. Latin versions had been available since 1670 to anyone who wished to read it. Also, there were translations of the TTP in various languages. An English translation of the TTP appeared in 1689, and then in 1737,<sup>16</sup> while a French translation was current by 1678. Even in Germany where a

---

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 301.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in David Bell's *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1984), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Luisa Simonutti, "Spinoza and the English Thinkers" in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 194.

translation of the TTP did not appear till 1787,<sup>17</sup> Latin editions appeared in several different impressions and editions in 1670 and 1672, and were reprinted a number of times afterwards.<sup>18</sup> According to J. A. Trinius, there were at least 129 refutations of Spinoza in German literature alone by 1759, excluding hostile comments in philosophical handbooks or dictionaries.<sup>19</sup>

When the posthumous works of Spinoza were published in 1677, they did little to change the views many held against Spinoza and the TTP. In fact, Spinoza's other works, especially *Ethics*, became for them a proof of what they have been saying about the TTP and Spinoza's atheism. Henry More in his refutation of Spinoza's *Ethics* (1678) continues to call Spinoza an atheist, saying the notion that "necessary existence pertains to substance as substance, and the idea that there is but a single substance in the universe" are "the chief columns of atheism."<sup>20</sup> His assessment of Spinoza is that Spinoza is delirious:

Worthy delirium indeed into which, to the eternal ignominy of his name, he falls who would desert from Moses and the Prophets, and from Christ and the Apostles, nay would even deride them and withdraw himself to his own wisdom alone; justly, therefore, is he abandoned of God and Christ, and delivered to the dreams and delusions of his own mind.<sup>21</sup>

More's comments may appear to be overly critical of Spinoza, but none in Europe was as effective in branding Spinoza an atheist as Pierre Bayle from France. His *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) not only ran to five editions during the eighteenth century, but also became standard reading among the German university

---

<sup>17</sup> Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 1

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 1

<sup>20</sup> *Henry More's refutation of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Jacob. Alexander (New York: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1991), p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> *Henry More's refutation of Spinoza*, p. 117.

students after it was translated into German in 1741 and 1744.<sup>22</sup> In this book, Bayle not only described the TTP as “a pernicious and detestable book in which [Spinoza] slips in all the seeds of atheism,” but also attacked Spinoza, calling him a blatant atheist who advanced the concept of atheism in a systematic manner in the *Ethics*.<sup>23</sup> His main problem with Spinoza’s concept of God is the implications of the notion that there is only one substance, that this substance is God, and that all finite beings are modalities of God. He writes:

If it were true, then, as Spinoza claims, that men are modalities of God, one would speak falsely when one said, “Peter denies this, he wants that, he affirms such and such a thing”; for actually, according to this theory, it is God who denies, wants, affirms; and consequently all the denominations that result from the thoughts of all men are properly and physically to be ascribed to God.<sup>24</sup>

For Bayle, Spinoza’s concept of God leads to consequences where God will be not only changeable, with contradictory properties, but also full of “moral enormities.” The example he offers to prove this point runs thus: if Brutus killed Caesar, we can no longer say that Brutus killed Caesar, since it would be God who killed Caesar, and we cannot say that Caesar was killed by Brutus, since it would be God who is killed by Brutus. In short, Bayle sees Spinoza’s concept of God leading to the idea that it is God who is doing the killing and, in the end, it is God who is killing God’s own self. He writes:

in Spinoza’s system...all the phrases by which what men do to one another are expressed...have no other true sense than this, “God hates himself, he asks favors of himself and refuses them, he persecutes himself, he kills himself, he eats himself, he slanders himself, he executes himself.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1965), p. 293-95.

<sup>24</sup> Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, p. 309-310.

<sup>25</sup> Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary. Selections*, p. 312.

Even though the conclusions Bayle draws on Spinoza's concept of God no longer can stand on their own, Bayle disparaged Spinoza by making Spinoza's thoughts synonymous with atheism throughout Europe for the next hundred years.

The popularity of the use of the terms "atheist" and "atheism" by Spinoza's contemporaries to describe him and his views following the publication of the TTP may seem rather strange today. The fact that Spinoza himself writes in his letter to Henry Oldenburg dated October 7, 1665, that one of his primary reasons for writing the TTP is to "avert" the accusation of atheism<sup>26</sup> makes the charge of atheism even stranger. But there are several reasons why Spinoza was identified an atheist by various people, the first of which is mentioned in Spinoza's letter mentioned earlier, which shows that Spinoza's belief in God had very little effect in the manner with which others branded him an atheist:

I am now writing a treatise on my views regarding the Scripture. The reasons that move me to do so are these:

1. The prejudice of theologians. For I know that these are the main obstacles which prevent men from giving their minds to philosophy. So I apply myself to exposing such prejudices and removing them from the minds of sensible people.
2. The opinions of me held by the common people, who constantly accuse me of atheism. I am driven to avert this accusation, too, as far as I can.
3. The freedom to philosophise and to say what we think. This I want to vindicate completely, for here it is in every way suppressed by the excessive authority and egotism of preachers.<sup>27</sup>

For Spinoza, atheism was far removed from what he was thinking when he wrote on the scripture and on God. Yet, his views on these subjects were considered to be heterodox and dangerous by the people who were in positions of authority and power—i.e.,

---

<sup>26</sup> Spinoza, *Letters*, 30, p. 186.

<sup>27</sup> Spinoza, *Letters*, 30, p. 185-86.

preachers and theologians—as well as by the common people who were influenced by their teachings. They used the word “atheism” to signify this fact and to attack the non-orthodox ideas expressed by Spinoza: namely, identifying God with “Nature” (a term which will be discussed later). It did not matter to them whether or not Spinoza actually denied a belief in God. As Michael Buckley points out in his *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, while discussing the branding of Spinoza as an atheist by his contemporaries: “The name of God was not in question—both Spinoza and his subsequent critics treated the name with reverence—but the definition.”<sup>28</sup> The real problem with Spinoza’s TTP for his contemporaries was not that Spinoza denied a belief in God, but that the God he discusses in the TTP was seen as not only different from the transcendent God of Judaism and from the personal God of Christianity, but also a threat to the Jewish and Christian orthodoxy and their creed regarding God, requiring such polemics against Spinoza and his views and the banning of his works in many cities throughout Holland.<sup>29</sup>

This strong religious reaction against the TTP and Spinoza’s views arose from Spinoza’s own comments on the prophets and revelation, on errors in the Bible, on miracles, and on God. They saw Spinoza as doing away with the authority of the Bible. As Lambert de Velthuysen remarks in his letter to Jacob Ostens:

the doctrine of the political theologian...in my judgment banishes and thoroughly subverts all worship and religion, prompts atheism by stealth, or envisages such a God as can not move men to reverence for his divinity, since he himself is subject to fate; no room is left for divine governance and providence, and the assignment of punishment and reward is entirely abolished. This, at the very least, is evident from the author’s writing, that by his reasoning and arguments the authority of all Holy Scripture is impaired, and is mentioned by the author only for form’s sake; and it

---

<sup>28</sup> Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origin of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> See Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, p. 295-298.

similarly follows from the position he adopts that the Koran, too, is to be put on a level with the Word of God.<sup>30</sup>

Velthuysen's main problems with Spinoza's TTP are twofold. First, he considers that Spinoza presents God as subject to fate. In his view, Spinoza thereby undermines God's providence and relevance since fate rather than God rules over the universe. Second, he sees Spinoza's comments on the prophets and on errors in the Bible as taking away the authority of the Bible. He postulates that this would make the Bible no greater a book than any other, and thus would turn it into an ordinary text. His fear here is that we would lose what he considers to be the only authoritative book on God and God's laws for humanity.

The problems Velthuysen has with Spinoza's views on the authority of the Bible, divine revelation, the prophets and God are echoed in the twentieth century by Leo Strauss. In his "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*," Strauss proclaims the TTP to be primarily an atheistic work by saying

One has to see whether there are not anywhere in Spinoza's writings indications, however subtle, of a strictly atheistic beginning or approach. This is, incidentally, one reason why the *Treatise* should be read, not merely against the background of *Ethics*, but also by itself.<sup>31</sup>

According to Strauss, if we are to read the TTP properly, we will have to read it "by starting from Spinoza's concealed atheistic principles" because the word "God" in Spinoza's works "is merely an appeasive term."<sup>32</sup> In his view, Spinoza's treatment of God and the scriptures do away with God, the authority of the Bible and the relevance of divine revelation in Biblical studies. He writes,

---

<sup>30</sup> Spinoza. *Letters*, 42, p. 236.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Strauss. *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 189.

<sup>32</sup> Strauss. *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p. 189.



The chief aim of the Treatise is to refute the claims which had been raised on behalf of revelation throughout the ages; and Spinoza succeeded, at least to the extent that his book has become *the* classic document of “rationalist” or “secularist” attack on the belief in revelation.<sup>33</sup>

On one level, it can be argued that if Spinoza believed in God, it does not make sense why Spinoza would be hostile to the traditional belief in the authority of the Bible. unless, as Strauss notes, Spinoza is an “atheist” at heart. Indeed, if Spinoza is implying in his works that the God of traditional religion really cannot exist, his refutation of the purity of prophetic revelations and rejection of anthropomorphic representations of God are certainly an affront against the orthodox Jewish and Christian views on God. Errol E. Harris sums up the matter when he notes in his *Salvation from Despair*, in a chapter entitled “The Absurdity of Atheism,” that

The charge of atheism brought against him by his contemporaries was based chiefly on his identification of God with Nature and his denial of the traditional theological attributes of God. The existence of a God as commonly imagined by adherents and exponents of traditional religion he rejects in no uncertain terms.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, Strauss’ assessment of the TTP as an atheistic text contradicts certain fundamental points of the TTP. First, nowhere in the TTP does Spinoza ever reject the existence of God. Instead, he makes it explicitly clear that he not only believes God to exist but also believes this God to be the primary cause and the sustainer of all things.

Secondly, Spinoza does not discount divine revelation. Spinoza’s definition is in fact quite similar to the traditional definition as offered by Maimonides: “Prophecy, or Revelation, is the sure knowledge of some matter revealed by God to man.”<sup>35</sup> But the difference between what orthodox Jewish and Christian theologians say and what Spinoza

---

<sup>33</sup> Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> Errol E. Harris, *Salvation from Despair* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 33.

asserts is that Spinoza considers revelation to occur mainly in the human mind rather than in the physical world since he considers the concept of "the nature of God" to be contained in the human mind:

Since...the human mind contains the nature of God within itself in concept, and partakes thereof, and is thereby enabled to form certain basic ideas that explain natural phenomena and inculcate morality, we are justified in asserting that the nature of mind, insofar as it is thus conceived, is the primary cause of divine revelation.<sup>36</sup>

And thirdly, Spinoza may not consider the Bible to be a record of the words God actually spoke to the prophets, but he does not reject the authority of the Bible where God's true revelations are concerned. In fact, he affirms the notion that the Scripture is a collection of writings that relates what God said to humanity through the prophets in order that "true virtue" is taught. One of the main problems he has with the prophets' account of God's revelation is their authenticity:

An examination of the Bible will show us that everything God revealed to the prophets was revealed either by words, or by appearances, or by a combination of both. The words and appearances were either real and independent of the imagination of the prophet who heard or saw, or they were imaginary, the prophet's imagination being so disposed, even in waking hours, as to convince him that he heard something or saw something.<sup>37</sup>

Spinoza's questioning of the authenticity of the revelation to the prophets does not mean however that he doubts there are moments of real revelation:

Although this seems to prove that prophetic revelation is a matter open to much doubt, it nevertheless did possess a considerable degree of certainty...For God never deceives the good and his chosen ones.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 59.

<sup>37</sup> See Spinoza, TTP, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 74

The problem Spinoza has with the prophets' version of divine revelation is the manner in which they relate their experience of it. In his view, divine revelation as it is told by the prophets contains tainted accounts and descriptions of God and what God said since they vary in content. Spinoza attributes this variance in the biblical accounts of revelation to the fact that the imagination of each individual prophet shaped it according to their own temperament, power of imagination and beliefs:

revelation...varied...in the case of each prophet according to his temperament, the nature of his imagination, and the beliefs previously held. It varied with temperament in this way, that if the prophet was of a cheerful disposition, then victories, peace and other joyful events were revealed to him; for it is on things of this kind that the imagination of such people dwells. If he was of gloomy disposition, then wars, massacres, and all kinds of calamities were revealed to him. And just as prophet might be merciful, gentle, wrathful, stern, and so forth, so he was more fitted for a particular kind of revelation. In the same way, too, revelation varied with the type of imagination. If the prophet was a man of culture, it was also in a cultivated way that he perceived God's mind; if he lacked an orderly mind, in a disorderly way. The same applies to revelations that took the form of images; the visions were of oxen and cows and the like if the prophet was a countryman, of captains and armies in the case of a soldier, of a royal throne and suchlike if he was a courtier. Finally, prophecy varied with the different beliefs of the prophets....God has no particular style of speech, but in accordance with the learning and capacity of the prophet the style was cultured, compressed, stern, unrefined, prolix or obscure.<sup>39</sup>

If we persist in applying the word "atheism" to denote Spinoza's concept of God, as Strauss does, we should remember two things. The first is Spinoza's own vigorous defense against Velthuysen's critique of the TTP in a letter Spinoza wrote to Jacob Ostens around 1671, where he says:

he says 'it is of no importance to know of what nationality I am, or what manner of life I pursue'. But surely if he had known this, he would not have been so readily convinced that I teach atheism. For atheists are usually inordinately fond of honours and riches, which I have always despised, as is known to all who are acquainted with me...

---

<sup>39</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 76-77.

He then continues, 'to avoid the accusation of superstitions, I think he has renounced all religion'. What he understands by religion and what by superstition, I do not know. Does that man, pray, renounce all religion, who declares that God must be acknowledged as the highest good, and that he must be loved as such in free spirit? And that in this alone does our supreme happiness and our highest freedom consists?<sup>40</sup>

The notion that his TTP is considered an atheistic work and that he is seen as an atheist is rejected adamantly here by Spinoza. Velthuysen's may have used the word "atheism" for vituperative and polemic purposes, but our usage of it today cannot ignore the fact that Spinoza saw himself as proclaiming God to be "the highest good," and loving God from our own volition to be "our supreme happiness and our highest freedom." Also, we cannot use this term without realizing, as Buckley points out, that atheism in modern sense denotes "a judgment, a statement about the nature of things,"<sup>41</sup> which implies a coherently argued case, while Spinoza is "either too far removed from the discussions in natural philosophy or too intrinsically ambiguous" to have influenced modern definition of atheism.<sup>42</sup>

The second thing we should remember is Errol Harris's argument against atheism in a chapter entitled "The Absurdity of Atheism" in his *Salvation from Despair*, where he argues for a complete rejection of this term if it is defined as "a denial of the existence of any God,"<sup>43</sup> saying Spinoza cannot be accused of atheism "with any vestige of plausibility." His point is that "the existence of God is for Spinoza not only absolutely indubitable, but is the sole, indispensable and universal ground of everything, so that

---

<sup>40</sup> Spinoza, *Letters*, p. 237-238.

<sup>41</sup> Buckley, *At the Origin of Modern Atheism*, p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Buckley, *At the Origin of Modern Atheism*, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 34.

nothing in his philosophy can be properly understood without reference to God and the idea of God.”<sup>44</sup>

Those who still consider Spinoza to be an atheist as defined strictly according to the modern definition, i.e., a person with an unbelief in a god, will have to resort to another term to state their case as some modern scholars, like Jonathan Bennett and Yirmiyahu Yovel, have done. They avoid the whole problem by identifying Spinoza with pantheism. For if we call Spinoza a pantheist, we arrive at the notion that he is an atheist, since a pantheist in the “usual sense,” as defined by Harris, is at heart an atheist since he/she does not believe in any God who stands independently of the physical universe. To a pantheist, the impersonal, physical universe that has no “being” would be his/her God, i.e., a God that is no God at all in the traditional definition of the term. Yet, is Spinoza a pantheist?

---

<sup>44</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 34.

## ii. German Romantic Reaction to Spinoza

Soon after Spinoza's death, the word "pantheism" was used to describe Spinoza's concept of God. This term which is still used by various scholars today was first hinted at by V. L. von Seckendorff who wrote in his *Christen-Stat.* in 1686, that Spinoza maintains "the ancient heathen belief that all creation arose by necessity, or that matter or nature, and God are one and the same."<sup>45</sup> According to Bell, what von Seckendorff introduced here is "[a] logical development of the charge that Spinoza confused God and the world in a gross pantheistic, almost pagan fashion."<sup>46</sup> Spinoza's contemporaries, however, did not readily accept this identification of Spinoza with pantheism. They preferred the term "atheism," and it would take another hundred years and the German Romantic movement before this latter term became synonymous with Spinozism.

When the German Romantic philosophers began examining and exploring Spinoza's works, the *pantheismusstreit* (the "pantheism controversy") was stirred up in 1785 with the publication of Jacobi's correspondence with Moses Mendelssohn regarding Spinoza, in which Jacobi charges Lessing with being a Spinozist, saying:

When people talk with one another for entire days, and of so many very different things, the detail is bound to escape one. Add to this that, once I knew quite decisively that *Lessing did not believe in a cause of things distinct from the world, or that Lessing was a Spinozist*, what he said afterwards on the subject, in this way or that, did not make deeper impression on me than other things. It did not occur to me to want to preserve his words; and that Lessing was a Spinozist appeared to me quite understandable. Had he asserted the contrary, which is what I anxiously

---

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Bell. *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 6; Seckendorff. *Christen-Stat in Drey Bucher abgetheilet* (Leipzig, 1686), p. 140.

<sup>46</sup> Bell. *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, p. 5.

wanted to hear, then I would very [45] likely still be able to give an account of every significant word.<sup>47</sup>

The end result of this controversy was that Spinoza's concept of God was seen not to be atheistic but pantheistic. Also, the rejection of the word "atheism" brought about a shift in attitude towards Spinoza. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel shows this change when he writes:

Spinozism is said to be atheism. This is correct in one respect at any rate, since Spinoza does not distinguish God from the world or from nature. He says that God is all actuality, but all actuality insofar as the idea of God explicates itself in particular fashion, for instance, in the existence of the human spirit. So it can be said that it is atheism, and that is said insofar as Spinoza does not distinguish God from the finite, from the world, from nature....But if one wants to call Spinozism atheism, for the sole reason that it does not distinguish God from the world, this is a misuse of the term; it could better be called acosmism, because all natural things are only modifications...The reproach that Spinoza does not distinguish God from the finite is therefore of no account, since Spinoza casts all this [finite being] into the abyss of One Identity. According to him, finite actuality (the cosmos) has no truth; what is, is God and God alone. Thus Spinozism is far removed from being atheism in the ordinary sense, although his system could be termed atheism in the sense that God is not grasped as spirit.<sup>48</sup>

Hegel's argument against the use of the term "atheism" here starts with some sensitivity to its use, but he directs his argument towards a rejection of this term by saying "Spinozism is far removed from being atheism in the ordinary sense." Instead of "atheism" he uses the term "acosmism," saying that in Spinozism "all natural things are modifications" and that "the world has no genuine actuality" since the world is "only a form of God and is nothing in and for itself."<sup>49</sup> In short, Hegel is basing his argument here

---

<sup>47</sup> F. H. Jacobi, "Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza (1785)" in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), p. 200

<sup>48</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, ed. Peter Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, Peter Hodgson and J. M. Stewart, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 162-63.

<sup>49</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 162.

on Spinoza's views that are expressed in the *Ethics* rather than in the TTP. Yet, the word Hegel made synonymous with Spinozism now is not "acosmism," but "pantheism" in the sense that all things are collapsed into "One Identity," i.e., God. In his 1827 *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he writes:

Spinozism itself as such, and Oriental pantheism, too, comprise the view that the divine in all things is only the universal aspect of their content, the *essence* of things, but in such a way that it is also represented as the *determinate* essence of things...

The usual representation of pantheism derives from the practice of focusing on the abstract unity rather than the spiritual unity, and from entirely forgetting that—in a religious representation in which only the substance or the One has the value of genuine actuality—individual things, in this very contrast with the One, have disappeared and no actuality is ascribed to them. Instead One retains the actuality of individual things.<sup>50</sup>

Another who identified Spinozism with pantheism is Schelling. He thought at first that Spinoza was "great" for the sublime simplicity of his thoughts and his way of writing. He considered Spinoza's writing to be distanced from all scholasticism, and from "all false embellishment or ostentation of language."<sup>51</sup> But he saw a problem with Spinoza's system. He thought it reduced God to nothing more than "substance." Hence he writes, "even *things* can relate to Him as to substance" rather than as cause,<sup>52</sup> and calls Spinozism pantheism in a pejorative sense.<sup>53</sup>

Schelling's negative views on Spinozism, however, were an exception rather than the norm. Many of his contemporaries embraced Spinoza for his identification of God with "Nature" rather than attacking him. Some, like Schleiermacher, went so far as to

---

<sup>50</sup> Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, ed. Peter Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, Peter Hodgson and J. M. Stewart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 375-76.

<sup>51</sup> F. W. J. von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 66.

<sup>52</sup> F. W. J. von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 66.

<sup>53</sup> F. W. J. von Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, p. 71-75.



consider Spinoza in the highest esteem for being “full of religion and full of holy spirit.” and criticized his attackers as ignorant despisers in his *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, in 1799:

Respectfully offer up with me a lock of hair to the manes of the holy rejected Spinoza. The high world spirit permeated him, the infinite was his beginning and end, the universe his only and eternal love; in holy innocence and deep humility he was reflected in the eternal world and saw how he too was its most lovable mirror; he was full of religion and full of holy spirit; for this reason, he also stands there alone and unequaled, master in his art but elevated above the profane guild, without disciples and without rights of citizenship.<sup>54</sup>

Fichte also joined in the praise of Spinoza, saying “It is easy enough to see what impelled him to his system, namely the necessary endeavor to bring about the highest unity in human cognition.”<sup>55</sup> He continues,

I further observe, that if we go beyond the *I am*, we necessarily arrive at Spinozism (that, when fully thought out, the system of Leibniz is nothing other than Spinozism...); and that there are only two completely consistent systems: the *critical*, which recognizes the boundary, and the *Spinozistic*, which oversteps it.<sup>56</sup>

This type of praises by a number of people made Hegel’s identification of Spinozism with pantheism the word of choice among the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century readers of Spinoza’s works. This ready acceptance of “pantheism” for Spinozism by Jacobi and his contemporaries results from their preference for his philosophical system in the *Ethics* rather than his views on religion and politics in the TTP. In his *Concerning the Doctrines of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*, Jacobi

---

<sup>54</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 104. This translation is based on the first edition of 1799.

<sup>55</sup> J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p. 101.

<sup>56</sup> Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, p. 102.

intimates this fact when he writes to Mendelssohn about Spinoza's doctrine. He talks about Spinoza's views mainly in relation to the *Ethics*.<sup>57</sup>

This identification of Spinozism with pantheism, which Hegel and his contemporaries introduced, persisted well into the twentieth century. In his *A History of Western Philosophy*, which was published in 1948, Bertrand Russell uses the term "pantheist" to describe Spinoza.<sup>58</sup> Even today, some, like Jonathan Bennett<sup>59</sup> and Yirmiyahu Yovel,<sup>60</sup> have no problem identifying Spinoza's concept of God with pantheism. Yet, is the term "pantheism" a fair term to apply to Spinoza's concept of God?

No matter what the German Romantics meant by this term, according to the modern definition of the word, calling Spinoza a pantheist is no better than reiterating what Strauss has called Spinoza at heart—an atheist. For to state that Spinoza identifies God as Nature is really saying that he does not believe in a "God" at all—at least, not a personal God—since by Nature we no longer mean a world that is endowed with divine powers, but an impersonal, objective and inanimate universe. This is why Bennett and Yovel are able to write, respectively,

Spinoza was a pantheist, in that he identified God with the whole of reality. Thus he agreed with atheists that reality cannot be divided into a portion which is God and one which is not. Although atheist and pantheist may seem to be poles apart, with one saying that everything is God and the other that nothing is, in the absence of an effective contrast between God and not-God we should not be quickly confident that there is any substantive disagreement at all.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1998), p. 216-232.

<sup>58</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 554.

<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), p. 32-35.

<sup>60</sup> Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: Marrano of Reason*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 143.

<sup>61</sup> Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 32.

Spinoza was not just a reformer of revealed religion but its adamant enemy; his philosophy of immanence (or so-called pantheism) did not merely oppose the established religions but all other philosophies of reason that affirmed the transcendent status of God and the duality between God and his world.<sup>62</sup>

Spinoza's concept of Nature, however, is much more complex than a pantheistic expression of God. For there are two sides to what Spinoza means by Nature. The first is *Natura naturans*, and the second is *Natura naturata*. In Part I of the *Ethics*, Spinoza defines these terms thus:

by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, *or* such attributes of substance as express an essential and infinite essence, that is (by P14C1 and P17C2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, *or* from any of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God. (P29S)

Exactly what Spinoza means by these definitions is still debated among scholars. Some, like Bennett, interpret them by saying the former definition implies "naturing Nature" and the latter "natured Nature."<sup>63</sup> As Bennett sees it, these definitions "partition the feature of reality not along the line between God from above and God from below, but along the line with the attributes on one side and the modes on the other."<sup>64</sup> For Bennett Spinoza expresses here nothing more than what the physical universe is in itself (in its attributes) and how it appears to us (in its modes).

Others, like Curley, echo Bennett's reading by saying that what Spinoza presents here are an active and passive view of Nature,<sup>65</sup> where *Natura naturans* is God who

---

<sup>62</sup> Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: Marrano of Reason*, vol. 1, p. 143.

<sup>63</sup> Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 118.

<sup>64</sup> Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 118.

<sup>65</sup> Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometric Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 36-37.

“produces and acts on things other than God,” and *Natura naturata* are things that follow from the laws of God.<sup>66</sup> But Curley goes one step further than Bennett by not only saying “God, or Nature” should be seen as an identification of God with *Natura naturans*,<sup>67</sup> but also by admitting the ambiguity that exists in Spinoza’s identification of God with Nature, stating it is not certain if Spinoza means by God the whole of Nature. For Curley, this uncertainty as to what Spinoza means by identifying God with Nature “is a serious gap in our interpretation of Spinoza.”<sup>68</sup>

In modern scholarship, this gap has contributed greatly to the controversy surrounding Spinoza’s concept of God. It has not only allowed people like Bennett and Yovel to continue identifying Spinozism with pantheism, but also enabled other scholars, who no longer see the term “pantheism,” and thus “atheism” as representative of Spinoza’s views, to challenge openly the pantheistic interpretation, and to try to shift the discussion away from framing Spinoza’s concept of God as pantheistic. According to Spinoza’s own words in his *Letters*, however, there is no misunderstanding about his views on Nature. He adamantly denies that by Nature he means the physical universe, saying,

I entertain an opinion on God and Nature far different from that which modern Christians are wont to uphold. For I maintain that God is the immanent cause, as the phrase is, of all things, and not the transitive cause. All things, I say, are in God and move in God, and this I affirm together with Paul and perhaps together with all ancient philosophers, though expressed in a different way, and I should even venture to say, together with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as may be conjectured from certain traditions, though these have suffered much corruption. However, as to the view of certain people that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* rests on

---

<sup>66</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometric Method*, p. 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometric Method*, p. 37.

<sup>68</sup> Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 43.

the identification of God with Nature (by the latter of which they understand a kind of mass or corporeal matter) they are quite mistaken.<sup>69</sup>

One person who reads Spinoza without preconceived ideas about Spinoza's atheistic and/or pantheistic tendencies is Nietzsche, who saw Spinoza beyond the framework of atheism and pantheism long before others. His admiration of Spinoza stems not from thinking that Spinoza's philosophical system is the most illuminating pantheism, as some German Romantics thought, but from having found someone who is a precursor to his own way of thinking. In a postcard that he sent to Overbeck he writes:

I am utterly amazed, utterly enchanted! I have a *precursor*, and what a precursor! I hardly knew Spinoza: that I should have turned to him just *now*, was inspired by "instinct." Not only is his over-all tendency like mine--namely to make knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] the *most powerful* affect--but in five main points of his doctrine I recognize myself; this most unusual and loneliest thinker is closest to me precisely in *these* matters: he denies the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world-order, the unegoistic, and evil. Even though the divergencies are admittedly tremendous, they are due more to the difference in time, culture, and science. *In summa*: my lonesomeness [*Einsamkeit*]...is now at least twosomeness [*Zweisamkeit*].<sup>70</sup>

Nietzsche's attraction to Spinoza's ideas is based on the notion that he saw in Spinoza a like-minded thinker who tried to show the world that human life is not just about doing good and/or evil, but about rising "beyond good and evil."

---

<sup>69</sup> Spinoza, *Letters*, p. 332.

<sup>70</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 139-140.

### iii. Twentieth-century Views on Spinoza

The problems associated with the distinction between what Spinoza means by “God, or Nature” have made many modern scholars fall back on or improvise on some of the terms that were used to describe Spinoza’s concept of God since the late seventeenth century. One of those terms that was used once and is now in use again is “materialism.”<sup>1</sup> Curley holds that it better represents Spinoza’s philosophical ideas than the two oversimplified categories of atheism and pantheism.<sup>2</sup> In his view, Spinoza is a philosopher who not only is in a constant dialogue with Descartes’ philosophical views, but also rejects Descartes’ notion that there is a separation between the mind and the body. Instead Spinoza proposes that the mind must be identified with the body.<sup>3</sup>

According to Alan Donagan, Spinoza “naturalizes God” enough that he can be accused of atheism in a modern sense if God is seen from the traditional Jewish and Christian perspectives.<sup>4</sup> He writes, “If God is conceived as traditionally minded Jews and Christians conceive him, Spinoza denies his existence, and can legitimately be accused of atheism.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Donagan does not see Spinoza’s naturalization of God as a step towards polytheistic paganism. In his view, Spinoza “does not offer to his ‘God’ the sort of worship that pagan polytheists offered to theirs.”<sup>6</sup> Spinoza’s God is “more like the Jewish and Christian one” because “the intellectual love” that Spinoza thinks due to his

---

<sup>1</sup> See Curley’s *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup> See Curley’s *Spinoza’s Metaphysics* and *Behind the Geometrical Method*.

<sup>3</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 74-78.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Donagan, “Spinoza’s Theology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 355.

<sup>5</sup> Donagan, “Spinoza’s Theology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, p. 357.

<sup>6</sup> Donagan, “Spinoza’s Theology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, p. 357.

God has some analogy to “monotheistic worship.”” The term Donagan uses to denote these aspects of Spinoza’s thoughts on God is “panentheism.” This word plays on the term “pantheism,” showing that Spinoza’s God is in all things on the one hand, but noting that the physical universe itself is not necessarily the object of worship on the other.”<sup>8</sup>

Even though it is debatable as to which term best describes Spinoza’s concept of God, Curley’s and Donagan’s attempt at shifting the discussion away from the categories of atheism and pantheism stems from their desire to avoid using the terms “atheism” and “pantheism” in their examination of Spinoza. They do not accept the traditional interpretation of the famous phrase “*Deus sive natura*” (“God or Nature”) as meaning God and Nature are synonymous, where by “Nature” it is understood to mean the physical universe. In their view, Spinoza’s identification of God with Nature implies much more than a simple postulation of God as the physical universe when God and Nature are considered in the context of what Spinoza means by words like “substance,” “essence” and “attribute.””<sup>9</sup>

Today, most scholars acknowledge the difficulties involved in defining the terms that are mentioned above according to the manner in which Spinoza uses them; and with this understanding of the difficulty in the meaning came refutations of the older views, like atheism, and a new definition of older terms, like “pantheism.” One who has undertaken this task is Errol Harris, who not only refutes the charge of atheism, but also argues that Spinoza’s identification of God as Nature is “pantheism,” provided it is taken literally to

---

<sup>77</sup> Donagan. “Spinoza’s Theology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. p. 357.

<sup>78</sup> Donagan. *Spinoza* (Toronto: Harvester, 1988), p. 90-91.

<sup>79</sup> See Donagan’s “Substance, Essence and Attribute in Spinoza, *Ethics* I,” in *God and Nature: Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1991), p. 1-19, and Curley’s discussion on God in *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 3 ff.

mean, as the Greek word  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\nu$  suggests, “the belief that God is the whole of reality.”<sup>80</sup> For Harris, the term pantheism in the usual sense cannot be applied to Spinoza’s philosophy if we mean by a pantheist a person “who deifies phenomenal nature, the world as we experience it.”<sup>81</sup> One reason is that “Spinoza regarded phenomenal nature, what appears of the world to us through sense-perception, as for the most part the product of illusion and error.”<sup>82</sup> Another reason is that the scope of “[c]reative and regulative laws of Nature” which Spinoza recognized as divine laws “is not...restricted to the material world as we know it empirically.”<sup>83</sup> According to Harris, “Spinoza would not have identified phenomenal nature with God or have deified it in its phenomenal form”<sup>84</sup> since “‘Nature’ is a term used by Spinoza to cover the totality of the real, which is far more than the physical world that we experience through the senses.”<sup>85</sup> He thus concludes that Spinoza’s identification of Nature with God, which incorporates “the whole of reality, physical, mental, and whatever other forms there may be,” cannot be called pantheism as this term is “usually understood.”<sup>86</sup>

In spite of Harris’ call for a new definition of “pantheism,” which is applicable to Spinoza, the word “pantheism” in the usual sense, persists, as well as other terms, like “dualism,” “monism,” “materialism,” “parallelism,” “determinism” and “fatalism,” to hint at the possibility that there is a pantheistic tendency in Spinoza or to avoid the controversy entirely. Scholars are able to use these words in their readings of Spinoza because

---

<sup>80</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 35.

<sup>81</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 34.

<sup>82</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 34.

<sup>83</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> Harris, *Salvation from Despair*, p. 35.



Spinoza's concept of God as understood today is based primarily on the reading of the *Ethics*. For the concept of God as outlined in the *Ethics* allows us to interpret Spinoza's concept of God as we best see fit.

Spinoza's own comments in the TTP concerning religion and philosophy do not help us to break away from our reliance on the *Ethics* to understand his concept of God. In the TTP he not only undermines the authorship of the books in the Bible, and rejects miracles and the divine authorship of prophetic revelation, but also advocates the separation of philosophy and religion, saying "Scripture does not in any way inhibit reason and has nothing to do with philosophy, each standing on its own footing."<sup>87</sup> Moreover, at the end of chapter 14 in the TTP, he even hints that philosophy has better standards by which we can judge who the faithful and the irreligious are:

between faith and theology on the one side and philosophy on the other there is no relation and no affinity...The aim of philosophy is, quite simply, truth, while the aim of faith...is nothing other than obedience and piety. Again, philosophy rests on the basis of universally valid axioms, and must be constructed by studying Nature alone, whereas faith is based on history and language, and must be derived only from Scripture and revelation...So faith allows every man the utmost freedom to philosophise, and he may hold whatever opinion he pleases on any subject whatsoever without imputation of evil. It condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who teach such beliefs as promote obstinacy, hatred, strife and anger, while it regards as the faithful only those who promote justice and charity to the best of their intellectual powers and capacity.<sup>88</sup>

In spite of these remarks which directs us towards relying on the *Ethics* for a comprehensive view concerning Spinoza's concept of God, Alan Donagan introduces an alternative way of reading Spinoza in his essay, "Spinoza's Theology," by suggesting that we should consider the *Ethics* and the TTP together. Even though his suggestion is an

---

<sup>87</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 54.

<sup>88</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 226.

important contribution to Spinoza scholarship, he does not make the connection between the God of the *Ethics* and the God of the TTP.<sup>89</sup> His treatment of Spinoza's concept of God is still informed by his reading of the *Ethics*, as most of the scholarly readings have been since Spinoza's death in 1677.

This oversight on the part of scholars for three hundred years regarding Spinoza's remarks on God in the TTP shows the extent to which our understanding of Spinoza has relied on the *Ethics*. In comparison to the philosophical system present in the *Ethics*, which seems to crystallize Spinoza's views on God, humanity and Nature, the TTP, where Spinoza expounds on his theories about religion rather than on God, does not appear to be as important as the *Ethics*. Yet, a careful reading of the TTP will reveal, as I will show later, that this text is integral to understanding better not only Spinoza's concept of God as it is outlined in the *Ethics*, but also the foundation on which he constructs his concept of God.

---

<sup>89</sup> See Donagan's "Spinoza's Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, p. 343-82.

## II. God of the *Ethics*

Spinoza's concept of God as expressed in Part I of his *Ethics* has provoked and elicited conflicting critical responses for over the last three hundred years. While his contemporary critics inferred his concept of God from the anti-religious stance he took in the TTP against certain aspects of institutionalized religions, namely Judaism and Christianity, and considered him an atheist, the majority of the critics who come after the posthumous publication of Spinoza's works have based their interpretation of Spinoza's views on God as expressed in the *Ethics*. Even in the most recent study on Spinoza's concept of God, Richard Mason makes it explicitly clear that his *The God of Spinoza* is a book "about the God of Spinoza's *Ethics*."<sup>90</sup> But there is one major problem with this reliance on the *Ethics* to understand Spinoza's views on God. This is the fact that the book leaves us with more questions than answers.

In Part I, Proposition 11, Spinoza states that God or "a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence," necessarily exists. He then writes, "If you deny this, conceive, if you can, that God does not exist." In his view, since the essence of a thing does not involve existence if a thing can be conceived as not existing (A7), it is absurd for us to think that God does not exist. Hence he concludes that God necessarily exists (IP11d).

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza's concept of God is based on the premise that God necessarily exists. Yet nowhere in the book does he try to prove that God necessarily exists. He does not present an ontological argument as Descartes does, nor does he rely

---

<sup>90</sup> Richard Mason. *The God of Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 17.

on any kind of philosophical argument. Instead, he infers a seemingly laconic point about God necessarily existing because if God does not exist then the essence of all things in Nature would not involve existence. Nevertheless, his lack of a proof raises some immediate questions. Why does he not put forward a proof of God's existence? That is, why would a man who is so involved in demonstrating his concept of God base his whole idea on as simple a statement as "conceive, if you can, that God does not exist"? Why does he think Nature cannot exist without God existing necessarily? And exactly what does he mean by "God" who is a "substance consisting of infinite attributes"?

When we examine Spinoza's concept of God as expressed in the *Ethics*, Spinoza has an answer to each of these questions. In fact, the problems we face in understanding his concept of God does not lie in the logic of his propositions. What he postulates as a semblance of a proof of God's existence appears to be philosophically problematic, but the real problem lies in our interpretation of the language that he uses. Compared to the terminology he uses, the concept of God as he lays it out for us in his own words is comparatively simple.

## i. Spinoza's Concept of God in *Ethics* Part I

In the Appendix to Part I of *Ethics*, Spinoza summarizes his concept of God thus:

With these [demonstrations] I have explained God's nature and properties: that he exists necessarily; that he is unique; that he is and acts from the necessity alone of his nature; that (and how) he is the free cause of all things; that all things are in God and so depend on him that without him they can neither be nor be conceived; and finally, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from the freedom of the will *or* absolute good pleasure, but from God's absolute nature, *or* infinite power.<sup>91</sup>

For Spinoza, God is an absolutely infinite being who not only necessarily must exist, but also is "a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence" (IP11). In his view, God is unique in the sense that there is only one substance in *natura* (Nature) that is absolutely infinite (IP14C1). As he sees it, we cannot assume that two substances with exactly the same attribute exist: that is, we cannot think that "if there were any substance other than God, it would have to be explained through some attribute of God" (IP14). Because God necessarily exists and is one "of whom no attribute which expresses an essence of substance can be denied" (IP14), it would be absurd to entertain the notion that there can be two substances that have the same attribute. For Spinoza, God is "the efficient cause of all things which can fall under an infinite intellect," "a cause through himself and not an accidental cause," and "absolutely the first cause" (IP16C1, C2, and C3). That is, the God Spinoza has in mind "is not only the cause of things' beginning to exist, but also of their persevering in existing, *or* (to use a Scholastic term) God is the cause of the being of things" (IP24C). Hence he asserts that

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ethics* in *A Spinoza Reader*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p. 109. Italics are the translator's own. Henceforth, all quotes taken from this translation will be given in

all things exist in God, and that God is “the immanent, not the transitive cause of all things” (IP18).

While stating that God is the cause from whom all things came, Spinoza also asserts God to be omnipotent since “infinitely many things in infinitely many modes, that is all things, have necessarily flowed” from God’s supreme power, “or infinite nature” (IP17S1). His assumption is that God has to be all powerful because God’s intellect is “the cause of things, the only cause” and God is “prior in causality to all things.” He does not see how anyone can say God cannot be omnipotent when God is the source from which all things came.

Yet, Spinoza does not presume that God has the absolute power to act freely, with total disregard of “the laws of [God’s] nature.” His assumption is that “neither intellect nor will pertain to God’s nature” (IP17S2). As he sees God, God is the immanent cause of all things; and God’s actions stem “from the laws of his nature alone, and is compelled by no one” (IP17). He writes,

All things, I say, are in God, and all things that happen, happen only through the laws of God’s infinite nature and follows from the necessity of his essence. So it cannot be said in any way that God is acted on by another, or that extended substance is unworthy of the divine nature, even if it is supposed to be divisible, so long as it is granted to be eternal and infinite. (IP15S6)

Spinoza’s view of God is that God is eternal, and thus “all God’s attributes are eternal.” Accordingly he writes that “Eternity pertains to the nature of substance” (IP19d), and that “God’s attributes are what expresses an essence of the divine substance, that is, what pertains to substance” (IP19d). His remarks—that “*God’s existence and his essence*

---

parentheses with the respective number of the Part, followed by Definitions (D), Axioms (A), Propositions (P), Demonstrations (d), Scholium (S) and Correlative (C), and the number that Spinoza has designated.

*are one and the same*” (IP20) and “God’s existence, like his essence, is an eternal truth” and “God, *or* all of God’s attributes, are immutable” (IP20C1 and C2)—stems from this notion. He writes:

Since God and all of his attributes are eternal, that is, each of his attributes expresses existence (by D8), the same attributes of God which explain God’s eternal essence at the same time explains his eternal existence: that is, that itself which constitutes God’s essence at the same time constitutes his existence. (IP20d)

As a whole, the idea behind Spinoza’s remarks on God in Part I is not difficult to fathom. When he writes that God is omnipotent because God is the free cause from which all things come, and that God acts from the necessity of God’s “absolute nature, or infinite power,” his ideas are conventional. Many thinkers ranging from Aristotle to Spinoza’s contemporaries have asserted similar views. Also, the reason he tells us to imagine if we can that God does not exist stems from rather an ordinary attempt at asserting the notion that without God existing necessarily, nothing in Nature can be said to exist.

The problems we have with Spinoza’s concept of God are of our own making. When we try to interpret his definitions of the technical terms—like “God,” “substance,” “essence,” “existence,” and “attributes”—we consider only what Spinoza himself says about them in a philosophical sense. We do not extend our analyses to incorporate Spinoza’s cultural and religious backgrounds to see if his use of these terms is influenced by what he learnt before he was exposed to philosophy. We dismiss his Jewish education and training too readily thinking his excommunication divorced him from his roots, and his philosophical reading of Descartes brought about a sudden enlightenment. But this is far from the case. His most fundamental ideas about God are not based only on philosophy,

even though modern readings on Spinoza's concept of God is grounded solely on philosophical examination of the terms he uses in the *Ethics*.



## ii. Modern Readings of *Ethics*

The difficulty we have created for ourselves with technical terms Spinoza uses is shown in the differing interpretations Jonathan Bennett, Edwin Curley and Alan Donagan offer. In his *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, Bennett defines the words “substance” as a “thing” that has “logical independence which is supposed to belong to what lies on the thing side of the thing/property divide,” and “attributes” as “[t]he absolutely basic and irreducible properties—the ones corresponding to the categories in the dualist metaphysics” or “a *basic way of being*.”<sup>92</sup> The main point of this seemingly convoluted definition Bennett offers is that Spinoza’s “substance” or “God” is a thing or *ens* that exists independently as the physical universe, and that the attributes are an “extension” of that physical universe. Hence his view that Spinoza is a pantheist who “identified God with the whole of reality.” Curley, however, defines “substance” and “attributes” rather differently than Bennett.

In his *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Curley writes that substance for Spinoza is “the attributes themselves.”<sup>93</sup> As he sees it, “because Spinoza does not distinguish attribute from substance,” Spinoza allows that “his attributes possess the defining characteristics of substance.” This is why Curley states, “In Spinoza’s scheme of things, each attribute exists in itself and is conceived through itself.”<sup>94</sup> For Curley, understanding Spinoza’s concept of God lies in understanding what Spinoza means by not substance and attributes, but

---

<sup>92</sup> Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, p. 60-61. The italic is his.

<sup>93</sup> Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, p. 17.

<sup>94</sup> Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, p. 18

substance and “modes” or “particular things.”<sup>95</sup> His assumption is that Spinoza’s concern is to show “how the whole of nature can be conceived as one individual, “whose parts, that is all bodies, differ in infinite ways without any change in the whole individual” (II, L7S).” As pantheistic as this assumption sounds, Curley does not accept the idea that Spinoza is expressing pantheistic views here.

One of the problems Curley has with equating Spinoza with pantheism is the fact that Spinoza writes in *Treatise on the Correction of the Intellect* that Nature ought to be divided into *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*. In his view, the passages in this work that talk of this division “seem to be in favor of saying that “substance” denotes, not the whole of Nature, but only its active part, its primary elements.”<sup>96</sup> Also, he assumes that “if this is correct, then before we can evaluate the ontological argument, or the concept of substance, or any other aspect of Spinoza’s metaphysics, we must ask what in Nature might answer to this description.”<sup>97</sup> Hence Curley proposes a radically different view regarding Spinoza’s identification of God with Nature than pantheism: namely, that Spinoza sees God not as “the totality of things” but as “the most general principles of order exemplified by things,”<sup>98</sup> or the “most general principles of order described by the fundamental laws of nature.”<sup>99</sup> Curley calls this identification of God Spinoza makes with Nature “a kind of materialism.”<sup>100</sup>

Another person who does not accept the definition of “substance” as a totality of things is Donagan. His view is that “since finite modes are not self-caused, their totality

---

<sup>95</sup> Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, p. 20.

<sup>96</sup> Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, p. 42.

<sup>97</sup> Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics*, p. 42–43.

<sup>98</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometric Method*, p. 42.

<sup>99</sup> Curley, *A Spinoza Reader*, p. xxv.

cannot be self-caused either.”<sup>101</sup> He thus writes that “Spinoza is not a pantheist.”<sup>102</sup> Yet, Donagan is not entirely satisfied with Spinoza’s definition of “substance.” The problem that he sees in Spinoza’s God-Nature-substance identification, is the lack of distinction between God and things: “if everything that is not God is in God, there is no gulf between anything and God.”<sup>103</sup> For Donagan, the proof that Spinoza offers to show that a substance cannot be produced by anything else is not only superfluous, but also invalid in that “he cannot directly infer from his definition of substance that substances must be causes of themselves.”<sup>104</sup> According to Donagan, Spinoza has not made it explicitly clear that “what is not produced by anything must have a cause” to assert such a notion.<sup>105</sup> The only thing that Spinoza has managed to do in his definition of “substance” is to introduce “all the elements of a naturalized theology,”<sup>106</sup> which leads to “panentheism.”

The most recent addition to the debate regarding Spinoza’s concept of God is Richard Mason’s view. What he proposes in his *The God of Spinoza* is the idea that Spinoza has been inaccurately described as a monist (in the sense one postulates that there is only one thing) since Spinoza “does not try to show that there is *one* substance,”<sup>107</sup> but rather that “there could not be *one sort of thing* that God or Nature is, because it could not form a category of things that could be counted at all.”<sup>108</sup> Mason’s assumption is that “Spinoza’s God is...hardly a ‘thing’, even in a wide logical sense.”<sup>109</sup> The God Mason sees

---

<sup>101</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometric Method*, p. xiv.

<sup>101</sup> Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 90.

<sup>102</sup> Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 90.

<sup>103</sup> Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 90.

<sup>104</sup> Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 71.

<sup>105</sup> Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 72.

<sup>106</sup> Donagan, *Spinoza*, p. 72.

<sup>107</sup> Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, p. 39.

<sup>108</sup> Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, p. 40.

<sup>109</sup> Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, p. 41.

in Spinoza's *Ethics* is rather a being who is founded on the concept of infinity, a concept that views the whole of nature in the definition of God as finite rather than infinite.<sup>110</sup>

One of the main differences Bennett, Curley, Donagan and Mason have about Spinoza's concept of God arises from their interpretation of technical words. The words "God," "substance" and "Nature," to mention only a few, pose a difficulty they cannot resolve if they hope to arrive at a comprehensive definition of these words by relying on philosophical concepts alone. The internal consistency of what Spinoza says becomes lost when we try to pin down exactly what we think Spinoza means by them in a philosophical sense. For example, when Spinoza defines "God" to be a substance consisting of infinite attributes, and at the same time states that it is synonymous with "Nature," our interpretation of the word "substance" becomes confused in places that are central to our understanding of his idea, as in this sentence: "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself." If we interpret Spinoza's words here as saying that Nature, like God, is in itself and is conceived through itself, then exactly what is Nature that it can produce itself through itself?

Our difficulty with comprehensive definition of the terms Spinoza uses is compounded by the fact that the sources various scholars mention as having shaped Spinoza's early thoughts and his philosophical vocabulary are not always assessed correctly. One example is Yovel's remarks in his *Spinoza and Other Heretics: Marrano of Reason*, where he writes that Uriel Da Costa, Juan de Prado and Isaac La Peyrere, who were all considered heretics by the Jewish community in Amsterdam, would have

---

<sup>110</sup> Mason, *The God of Spinoza*, p. 38.

influenced in some way Spinoza's earlier stage of intellectual development.<sup>111</sup> When Uriel Da Costa shot himself in 1640, Spinoza was eight years old. Even though Yovel does say that there is no direct link between Da Costa and Spinoza, he still thinks Spinoza could have found "ample food for thought not only in the man's personal fate but in his theories as well."<sup>112</sup> Just how much a man who is shunned by the whole community could have intellectually influenced Spinoza, however, is anybody's guess. As for Prado, the most recent research done by Nadler into Spinoza's life seems to indicate that it was Spinoza, with his interest and readings in philosophy and his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible in its original language, who influenced Prado rather than vice versa.<sup>113</sup> Even La Peyrere who appears to have shaped Spinoza's views on matters concerning the authorship of the Bible, since Spinoza owned a copy of his work, is not as sure a source as he is made out to be. Even though Spinoza may have known about La Peyrere's work, *Prae-Adamitae*, under the tutelage of Menasseh, Spinoza's teacher who wrote a refutation of the book in 1656, Spinoza seems to have already thought that the Bible has internal problems of the authorship by the time of his excommunication (*cherem*) in 1656.<sup>114</sup> Whether Spinoza thought there is a problem with authorship of the Bible as a direct result of learning about La Peyrere's ideas or not is conjectural at best, since Spinoza could have come to this conclusion by himself before ever reading La Peyrere. Also, we do not know if Spinoza's concept of God is in any way directly affected by La Peyrere's work.

Still, there is one key figure who had a significant impact on Spinoza and his concept of God, Descartes. He stands as one of the most important sources to our

---

<sup>111</sup> Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, vol. 1, p. 7-8.

<sup>112</sup> Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, vol. 1, p. 50.

<sup>113</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza*, p. 146.

understanding of Spinoza's philosophical ideas concerning God. His ideas on God not only initiated Spinoza to write *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, but also showed him the method with which he can explain his own views concerning God, the world and humanity.

Of equal significance as Descartes is Maimonides, whom I shall discuss in the third chapter. Even though Spinoza attacks him in the TTP for his unsound "method" of interpreting the Bible, he does not say much against him in matters concerning God. Considering the fact that Maimonides is one of the most influential Jewish thinkers on the issue concerning God, why Spinoza does not discuss Maimonides' views on God leaves us with a question that cries out to be answered: did Spinoza share Maimonides' views on God or did he reject them?

Even though Spinoza is not always in agreement with Descartes' and Maimonides' views, the fact that he borrows their philosophical vocabulary and ideas, as well as the fact that he expresses his dissatisfaction with certain areas of their thinking, show their importance to our understanding of Spinoza's concept of God. For it is in Spinoza's reaction to their views that we get a sense of how advanced his own concept of God may have been by the time he encountered their works to critique their ideas.

---

<sup>114</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, p. 134.

### iii. Descartes and Spinoza

Descartes, for Spinoza, represents one of the greatest philosophical thinkers. His high regard for Descartes resulted in his publication of a book entitled *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* in 1663. In it he summarizes Descartes' philosophical principles of skepticism, ontological proof for the existence of God, and his views on God. Another compliment Spinoza pays Descartes is in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza reiterates many of the points Descartes makes in his *Principles of Philosophy*<sup>115</sup> (henceforth PP) and *Meditations on First Philosophy*<sup>116</sup> (henceforth M). Even though Spinoza does not share Descartes' proof of the existence of God, he borrows much from his predecessor. The titles of the second and third *Meditations* that Spinoza copies in the first and the second part of *Ethics* are in what Piet Steenbakkers calls "a defiantly reversed order."<sup>117</sup> Also, philosophical terms—like "substance," "attributes," "essence," "modes" and "infinity"—and ideas that Descartes uses in his work to express his own views on God, the world and humanity, are used as Descartes uses them.

Some of the main points Descartes makes regarding God in PP and M, which Spinoza incorporates into his *Ethics* are slightly different in wording, but the main ideas are still retained. In the table below are listed some of Descartes' points that Spinoza reiterates in the *Ethics*. Even though there is a lot more we can compare, the table is

---

<sup>115</sup> The text of Descartes's PP is from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>116</sup> The text of Descartes's M is from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>117</sup> Piet Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica: From Manuscript to Print* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994), p. 33.

limited to only some of the comments concerning God and key philosophical terms that are useful to us in understanding Spinoza's concept of God.

Descartes	Spinoza
<p>By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, &lt;eternal, immutable,&gt; independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else...that exists. (M45)</p>	<p>By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence. (ID6) God is the cause of the being of things. (P24C)</p>
<p>By substance we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for existence. And there is only one substance which can be understood to depend on no other thing whatsoever, namely God. (PPI51)</p>	<p>By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed. (ID4) Except for God, there neither is, nor can be conceived, any substance (by P14), that is (by D3), thing that is in itself and is conceived through itself. (IP15d)</p>
<p>By mode...we understand exactly the same as what is elsewhere meant by attribute or quality. But we employ the term mode when we are thinking of a substance as being affected or modified...when we are simply thinking in more general way of what is a substance, we use the term attribute. (PPI56)</p>	<p>By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is conceived (ID5) By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence (ID4)</p>
<p>If nature is considered in its general aspect, then I understand by the term nothing other than God himself, or the ordered system of created things established by God. (M80)</p>	<p>The power by which singular things (and consequently, [any] man) preserve their being is the power itself of God, or Nature (by IP24C). (IVP4d)</p>
<p>The idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, &lt;immutable,&gt; omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances. (M40)</p>	<p>Nothing in nature is clearer than that each being must be conceived under some attribute, and the more reality, or being it has, the more it has attributes which express necessity, <i>or</i> eternity, and infinity. And consequently there is also nothing clearer than that a being absolutely infinite must be defined (as we taught in D6) as a being that consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses a certain eternal and infinite essence. (IP10S)</p>
<p>I cannot understand how there could be two or more Gods. (M68)</p>	<p>In Nature there cannot be two substances of the same attribute. (IP6)</p>



In the table above, the extent to which Descartes influenced Spinoza is much deeper than a simple borrowing of terms and methods of philosophical discourse. Spinoza not only borrowed the wordings of some of the concepts, but also assimilated and made them his in the *Ethics*. His definitions of “God,” “substance,” “mode” and “attributes” are nearly the same as Descartes’ own. Even his notion that God is identifiable with Nature is almost identical to Descartes’ in that Descartes says “if nature is considered in its general aspect, then I understand by the term nothing other than God himself, or the ordered system of created things established by God.” (M80)

Curley’s comments on the similarities in Spinoza’s and Descartes’ views by saying that even though it is tempting to understand through Descartes’ writing, since Spinoza does to some extent appear to have held some of Descartes’ views, it does little to help us understand the relation between substance and mode in Spinoza’s writings.<sup>118</sup> The problem he sees is that while Spinoza talks about infinite modes, there is none in Descartes.<sup>119</sup> Curley argues that this absence of any comment about infinite modes in Descartes makes it difficult for us to comprehend Spinoza’s notion of substance and attributes in that we are left wondering how a subject can cause itself to have the properties it has, and how the relation of inherence which a property has to its subject can be anything like the relation an effect has to its cause.<sup>120</sup> The “radical suggestion” Curley proposes to this problem of the relation between substance and attributes in Spinoza is,

God, considered as a free cause (P17C2) (= all of the attributes of substance, by P29S), produces and acts on things other than God (= the

---

<sup>118</sup> Curley. *Behind the Geometrical Method*. p. 33.

<sup>119</sup> Curley. *Behind the Geometrical Method*. p. 35.

<sup>120</sup> Curley. *Behind the Geometrical Method*. p. 36.

modes, both finite and infinite) in virtue of the laws of his own nature (= the laws of the attributes which constitute his nature, by D4), and that those things other than God must be understood to follow from those laws. One of the attributes which constitute the nature of substance is extension. So we must think of extension as involving certain laws—to borrow a rare Spinozistic metaphor from the *Treatise on the Intellect* (101) we must think of the attributes as having laws “inscribed in them, as in their true codes”—and we must think of the infinite modes of extension, and of particular finite bodies, as following from those laws.<sup>121</sup>

Even though Curley’s suggestion here is valuable to our understanding of the relation between substance and mode, there is one basic difference between Spinoza and Descartes, which makes it necessary for us to understand Spinoza without reading Descartes into Spinoza’s works. This difference is their concept of God at the most primary level.

For Descartes, a proof of God’s necessary existence must precede all else as the starting point from which we can know anything. His assumption is that without proving God exists necessarily, we will lack the knowledge of a perfect creator, and thus we cannot move from isolated subjective awareness of “I am” to the knowledge of everything that is external to us. If God does not exist, we are in danger of being deceived about all that we think we know about ourselves and the world around us. He writes:

I see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him. But now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge of countless matters, both concerning God and other intellectual natures, and also concerning the whole corporeal nature...<sup>122</sup>

For Spinoza, however, the existence of God is absolutely necessary, but proving God’s existence is not an issue. His assumption is that God’s existence is not something

---

<sup>121</sup> Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, p. 38-39.

that needs to be proved, but simply accepted. His cryptic remark, “conceive, if you can, that God does not exist,” stems from this view. For Spinoza thinks Descartes’ proof is flawed. In his *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* (henceforth PCP), Spinoza comments on this flaw by saying “It is not as long as we do not know of God’s existence...but as long as we do not have a clear and distinct idea of God, that we cannot be certain of anything.”<sup>123</sup> His view here is that our certainty of things is contingent not upon our knowledge of God’s existence, as Descartes presumes, but upon us having a clear and distinct idea of God.

The point Spinoza is driving at in his critique of Descartes is that Descartes’ emphasis on our knowledge of God’s existence prior to our knowledge of anything else is that we cannot arrive at this “knowledge of God” from ourselves. If we were able to do so, Spinoza thinks it would be the same as supposing “[we] could reduce [our] entire essence to nothing and create an infinite substance anew.”<sup>124</sup> He thus writes,

Because there is not to be found in God anything of perfection that is not from God..., things of themselves will not have any essence that can be the cause of God’s knowledge. On the contrary, because God has created all things wholly, not generating them from something else..., and because the act of creation acknowledges no other cause but the efficient cause (for this is how I define ‘creation’), which is God, it follows that before their creation things were nothing at all, and therefore God was also the cause of their existence.<sup>125</sup>

Spinoza’s criticism of Descartes’ proof of God’s existence in PP anticipates Kant’s eventual refutation of ontological, cosmological and physico-theological proofs of God’s

---

<sup>122</sup> Rene Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, vol. 2. trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 49.

<sup>123</sup> Spinoza. *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), p. 14.

<sup>124</sup> Spinoza. *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, p. 29.

<sup>125</sup> Spinoza. *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, p. 35.

existence. For like Spinoza, Kant also comments on the ontological proof, as well as on the cosmological and the physico-theological proofs of God's existence, as erroneous by saying that all transcendental proofs argue for the existence of God by employing one or a combination of three methods. One of them is that they begin from determinate experience within the world of senses and conclude with the necessary existence of God. Another is that they start from purely indeterminate experience (i.e., from experience of existence) and end with the existence of a necessary being. In the third, they abstract from all experience and argue for the existence of God completely *a priori*.<sup>126</sup> The main reason Kant finds all these proofs fallacious is because they all arrive at the existence of an unconditioned completeness (like the concept of *ens realissimum*) or an unconditionally necessary being (like God) from our conditioned world of experience. In essence, the reasons Kant offers in his refutation of the three proofs of God's existence is similar to Spinoza's own.

Spinoza's rejection of Descartes' proof of God's existence, however, is not due to any hostile reasons. Unlike Kant, who sees the transcendental proofs of God's existence as erroneous, and thus must be refuted, Spinoza points out the flaws in Descartes' reasoning not because it is logically unsound to do so, but because he does not think God's necessary existence needs to be proved. He presumes that all he has to do is accept God's existence *a priori* as the starting point from which we can deduce our subjective reality (who we are and what we are like) and the objective reality (the physical world and all things in it) that is around us. For without God already existing *a priori*, Spinoza does not think we can arrive at any knowledge about anything.

---

<sup>126</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans., Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge:

This seemingly quiescent postulation of God's necessary existence and the rejection of Descartes' attempt at proving the existence of God, when Spinoza himself takes such pains to philosophize about God, raises the question: how far advanced is Spinoza's own concept of God by the time he not only started writing the *Ethics*, but also wrote the PCP? His rejection of Descartes' proof for the existence of God and his assertion of the idea in the PCP that God must exist *a priori* without needing a proof both show that he must have formulated his own ideas about God well before 1663. It even goes as far back as 1661, two years before he published the PCP. To answer how far advanced Spinoza's own concept of God and to understand Spinoza's motive for starting his philosophizing with the *a priori* existence of God, we must turn to Maimonides and the TTP.

### III. God of the TTP and God of the *Ethics*

Today, Spinoza's concept of God is discussed independently of the TTP. While the *Ethics* is seen as the crux of Spinoza's philosophical system that ranges from God to ethical conduct, the TTP is viewed as a critique of or an attack against established religions<sup>127</sup> or as a commentary on the political system Spinoza envisioned.<sup>128</sup> But the date of composition of the two works and their contents do not allow us to read the two works independently of each other. From his letters we know that Spinoza started writing the TTP about four years after he began the first part of the *Ethics*, and published it in 1670, five years before the *Ethics* was completed in its final form. We also know from his biography and his critique of Maimonides that Spinoza most likely, if not definitely, knew before his excommunication in 1656 the philosophical and the theological significance of the Tetragrammaton as expressed by Maimonides. For he not only knew the Scripture and major commentaries on the Scriptures well, seeing that his own copy of the Hebrew Bible included Rashi's commentary, but also studied major Jewish philosophers, including Maimonides, under the guidance of his teacher Mortera and Menasseh ben Israel before 1656.<sup>129</sup>

The implications of knowing that Spinoza knew what Maimonides says about the meaning of the Tetragrammaton from so early a date are enormous. First, Spinoza's concept of God could have been shaped by Maimonides' comments about the Tetragrammaton in one form or another. Second, it could be inferred that the God of the

---

<sup>127</sup> See Strauss's *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, and Yovel's *Spinoza and Heretics*, vol. 1.

<sup>128</sup> See Steven B. Smith's *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

*Ethics* is most likely his philosophical explication of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton. And third, the gap that Curley notes in our understanding of Spinoza's concept of God, which gave rise to conflicting interpretations, can now be filled by examining what Spinoza means when he uses the word *Jehova* in the TTP.

Even though some will argue that the notion that Spinoza's God is derived from *Jehova* is inappropriate since Spinoza writes in many places that the Scripture is a compilation of faulty, corrupted and mutilated books, Spinoza's own confession about the Scripture shows that he does not view the Scripture in an entirely negative light, nor does he reject the God of the Bible. In spite of the fact that Spinoza says the differences in the books of the prophets regarding God are a corruption which resulted from the prophets' own personal and active imagination, he states that the meaning of the Scripture has not been corrupted. In his view, the meaning of the Scripture has been transmitted to us as God meant it. He writes,

its meaning—and only in respect of meaning can any utterance be called divine—has reached us uncorrupted, even if it be supposed that the words by which it was originally expressed have undergone many changes. Such alterations...take nothing away from the divinity of Scripture; for Scripture would be just as divine even if it had been written in different words or in a different language. Therefore there can be no doubt that the Divine Law has come down to us in this respect uncorrupted. For from the Scripture itself we learn that its message, unclouded by any doubt or ambiguity, is in essence this, to love God above all, and one's neighbour as oneself. There can be no adulteration here, nor can it have been written by a hasty and errant pen; for if doctrine differing from this is to be found anywhere in Scripture, all the rest of its teaching must also be different. For this is the basis of the whole structure of religion; if it is removed, the entire fabric crashes to the ground, and then such a Scripture would not be the sort of thing we are now discussing, but a quite different book.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, p. 93.

<sup>130</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 211-212.

By itself, Spinoza's admission to the authenticity of the meaning of the Scripture as having come from God does not prove that the God he believes in is *Jehova*. But what the biographical information and his comment above show is that his God is to be found not outside the Scriptures, but in it; and this is where his remarks on *Jehova* in the TTP becomes significant:

it should be observed that in Scripture no word but Jehovah is to be found to indicate the absolute essence of God, as unrelated to created things. That is why the Hebrews contend that this is, strictly speaking, God's only name, the others names being forms of address; and it is a fact that the other names of God, whether substantive or adjectival, are attributes belonging to God in so far as he is considered as related to created things, or manifested through them.<sup>131</sup>

Spinoza reveals here, albeit unintentionally, that his concept of God is based not just on philosophical definition of what God is, but also on Maimonides' commentary on what the Tetragrammaton reveals about God and on what the Tetragrammaton signified to Spinoza himself.

---

<sup>131</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 216.



## **i. Maimonides and the God of the TTP**

When we read the TTP, Maimonides' influence on Spinoza is not immediately apparent. Whenever Spinoza mentions him, his attitude towards Maimonides is openly critical and hostile. One example is Spinoza stating that Maimonides and others who share his views "are concerned only to extort from Scripture some Aristotelian nonsense and some fabrications of their own," and then concluding, "this I regard as the height of absurdity,"<sup>132</sup> Another example is his remark on Maimonides' comment which states that the apparition of an angel in the Bible occurred in dreams. He simply calls it "mere rubbish."<sup>133</sup> In another place, he comments on Maimonides' notion that the Law of God is meant only for "the sons of Noah" by saying "I think that any attentive reader will be convinced that these are mere figments of imagination, unsupported by rational agreement or Scriptural authority. To state this view is sufficient to refute it."<sup>134</sup> But none is as severe as his rejection of Maimonides' method of interpreting the Scripture. Spinoza not only says "this method of Maimonides is plainly of no value," but also states, "we can dismiss Maimonides' views as harmful, unprofitable and absurd."<sup>135</sup> Richard Mason comments on this hostility of Spinoza by saying it explains why so many people reacted with hostility toward him:

His attitude towards Maimonides, though carefully argued—most notably, in Chapter VII of the *Theological-Political Treatise*—shows a frank brutality which may explain how he managed to antagonise so many people so violently.<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 63.

<sup>133</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 63.

<sup>134</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 123.

<sup>135</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 158-159.

<sup>136</sup> Mason, p. 2.

Even though this open hostility against Maimonides intimates Spinoza's rejection of Maimonides and his views, Spinoza is not always so vocal against him. In fact, he remains strangely silent when it comes to the most important aspects of Maimonides' thinking: namely, his definitions of philosophical terms and his concept of God. One of the possible reasons for this silence is present in Harry Wolfson's observation in *The Philosophy of Spinoza*:

The mediaeval discussion about attributes is sometimes summed up in a distinction drawn between the name Jehovah and the other names of God. Says Judah ha-Levi: "All names of God, save the Tetragrammaton, are predicates and attributive descriptions, derived from the way His creatures are affected by His decrees and measures. Says also Maimonides: "It is well known that all the names of God occurring in Scripture are derived from his actions, except one, namely, the Tetragrammaton, which consists of the letters, *yod, he, waw, he*. This name is the *nomen proprium* of God and is on that account called *Shem ha-Meforash*, that is to say, the name which indicates the essence of God in a manner which excludes the implication of it having anything in common with the essence of other beings. All other glorious names are common appellatives, inasmuch as they are derived from actions to which some of our own are similar...."

In Spinoza we find this view of the mediaevalists restated in almost their own words....Now Spinoza has adopted the traditional term "attribute," and makes use of it as a description of the manner in which substance, unknowable in itself, manifests itself to the human mind.<sup>137</sup>

As Wolfson notes, Spinoza does adopt the medieval definition of "attribute" as "summed up" in their distinction between the Tetragrammaton and other names of God. The person from whom he adopts this distinction more than anyone else is none other than Maimonides whom he attacks repeatedly in the TTP. Whether Spinoza did not want to acknowledge the influence of a man he so harshly criticizes is not clear, but his adoption of his distinction between the Tetragrammaton and other names of God explains why he is

---

<sup>137</sup> Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934), p. 144.

not vocal against Maimonides on the latter's concept of God. For Spinoza concurs with some of Maimonides' key ideas about God:

Maimonides	Spinoza
<p><i>I am that I am.</i> This is a name deriving from the verb <i>to be</i> [<i>hayah</i>], which signifies existence. (I, p. 154)</p>	<p>[God] is a Being who has always existed, exists, and will always exist...the name <i>Jehova</i>...in Hebrew expresses these three tenses of the verb 'to be'. (TTP, p. 81)</p>
<p>All the names of God...that are to be found in any of the books derive from actions....The only exception is one name: namely, <i>Yod. He. Vah. He</i>....There can be no doubt about the fact that this great name...is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between God...and what is other than He. [This name is] indicative of the essence of Him...in such a way that none of the created things is associated with Him... (I, p. 147-148)</p>	<p>In Scripture no word but <i>Jehova</i> is to be found to indicate the absolute essence of God, as unrelated to created things. That is why the Hebrews contend that this is, strictly speaking, God's only name, the other names being forms of address... (TTP, p. 216)</p>
<p>As for other names, all of them, because of their being derived, indicate attributes; that is, not an essence alone, but an essence possessing attributes....It is known that the derived names are to be understood either with reference to the relation of a certain action to Him or with reference to directing the mind towards His perfection. (I, p. 148)</p>	<p>The other names of God, whether substantive or adjectival, are attributes belonging to God in so far as he is considered as related to created things, or manifested through them. (TTP, p. 216)</p>

In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides' concept of God is based on the same premise as Spinoza's: that is, God necessarily exists. Also, like Spinoza, Maimonides does not trouble himself with proving God's existence. Instead, he explains his concept of God based on the supposition that God necessarily exists. He writes:

As for that which has no cause for its existence, there is only God...who is like that. For this is the meaning of our saying about Him...that His existence is necessary. Accordingly, His existence is identical with His essence and His true reality and His essence is His existence. Thus, his essence does not have an accident attaching to it when it exists, in which

case its existence would be a notion that is superadded to it. For His existence is necessary always; it is not something that may come suddenly to Him nor an accident that may attain Him.<sup>138</sup>

According to Maimonides, God exists necessarily because there is no cause for God's existence. The source from which Maimonides draws this point is the Bible, where God reveals the Tetragrammaton as God's name to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Maimonides translates it as "*I am that I am*," and comments:

This is a name deriving from the verb to be [*hayah*], which signifies existence, for *hayah* indicates the notion: he was. And in Hebrew, there is no difference between your saying: he was, and he existed. The whole secret consists in the repetition in a predicative position of the very word indicative of existence. For the word *that* [in the phrase "I am that I am"] requires the mention of an attribute immediately connected with it. For it is a deficient word requiring a connection with something else; it has the same meaning as *alladhi* and *allati*, the male and female relative pronouns in Arabic. Accordingly, the first word is *I am* considered as a term to which a predicate is attached; the second word that is predicated of the first is also *I am*, that is, identical with the first. Accordingly, the Scripture makes, as it were, a clear statement that the subject is identical with the predicate. This makes it clear that He is existent not through existence. This notion may be summarized and interpreted in the following way: the existent that is the existent, or the necessarily existent. This demonstration necessarily leads to: namely, to the view that there is necessarily existent thing that has never been, or ever will be, nonexistent.<sup>139</sup>

For Maimonides, the Tetragrammaton is the only name of God that is of any significance. All other names that the Bible ascribes to God are nothing more than words that have been derived from God's actions, or "attributes:"

All the names of God...that are to be found in any of the books derive from his actions. There is nothing secret in this matter. The only exception is one name: namely, *Yod, He, Vav, He*. This is the name of God...that has been originated without any derivation, and for this reason it is called the *articulated name*. This means that this name gives a clear unequivocal indication of His essence....On the other hand, all the other great names

---

<sup>138</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 2 vols., trans. Shlomo Pines, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 57, p. 132.

<sup>139</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vol. 1, 63, p. 154-155.

give their indication in an equivocal way, being derived from terms signifying actions the like of which...exist as our own actions....

As for the other names, all of them, because of their being derived, indicate attributes; that is, not an essence alone, but an essence possessing attributes.<sup>140</sup>

Even though Spinoza does not admit directly the effect Maimonides' comment here had on his formulation of his own concept of God, Maimonides' influence is acknowledged in the subtlest manner possible. He shares Maimonides' views. In the TTP he writes, "in Scripture no word but Jehovah is to be found to indicate the absolute essence of God, as unrelated to created things" and that "the other names of God, whether substantive or adjectival, are attributes belonging to God in so far as he is considered as related to created things, or manifested through them."<sup>141</sup>

Some may dismiss this similarity as insignificant. Wolfson who saw this connection between Maimonides and Spinoza misses its importance when he focuses on the difference between the Medievalists' definition of what an attribute is and Spinoza's definition of an "attribute" in the *Ethics*. Also, Leo Strauss who writes on both Maimonides and Spinoza fails to mention this important similarity. For us to understand Spinoza's views on God judiciously, however, we need to take Maimonides' remarks into account while examining Spinoza's concept of God as expressed in the *Ethics* and the statements that Spinoza makes above regarding God in his TTP. For *Jehova* of TTP and God of the *Ethics* are not only one and the same, but the former explains many of the difficulties we face in comprehending the God of the *Ethics* since the remarks and views he expresses

---

<sup>140</sup> Maimonides. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vol. 1, 61, p. 147-148. Even though Wolfson quotes the same passage in his remark, it is quoted again from Shlomo Pines' recent translation.

<sup>141</sup> Spinoza. TTP, p. 216.

concerning God in the first part of the *Ethics* are really a philosophical discourse on the God he identifies as *Jehova*.

## ii. *Jehova* and the God of the *Ethics*

The suggestion that Spinoza's short remark on *Jehova* in the TTP shows his acceptance of Maimonides' commentary on the Tetragrammaton and that it is most likely a well thought out ground upon which Spinoza bases his ideas about God in the *Ethics* is a radical departure from traditional reading of Spinoza's works. It even appears to go against Spinoza's own views. For he himself not only attacks Maimonides throughout the TTP but also writes that the Scripture does not offer us a definition of God and that not everyone needs to know about the attributes of God, which are not stated in the Scripture, saying that "the intellectual or exact knowledge of God is not a gift shared by all the faithful,"<sup>142</sup> but a gift which is "granted only to certain of [the] faithful."<sup>143</sup> But Spinoza's own words that tell us that the Scripture does not offer us a definition of God is misleading. For the name of God as revealed to Moses does hint at a definition of God.

According to Spinoza, the Tetragrammaton is the only name of God, which can be defined as "the absolute essence of God, as unrelated to created things." Even though Spinoza does not discuss the meaning of the Tetragrammaton directly for an unknown reason, his knowledge of the Hebrew language and Maimonides' commentary on the Tetragrammaton lead us to conjecture that Spinoza's views concerning God as expressed in the TTP are influenced in some way by the fact that he renders *Jehova* and thus the meaning of the Tetragrammaton as "the absolute essence" that owes its existence to nothing other than God's own self. For his definition of God as the absolute essence that stands unrelated to the things of the physical world makes it highly plausible that he not

---

<sup>142</sup> TTP, p. 215.

only knew that the Tetragrammaton is translated as “I am that I am,” but also applied this knowledge to his concept of God as expressed in the *Ethics*, where he leaves the religious form of discourse of the TTP behind, and articulates what the name *Jehova* means to him in philosophical terms to suggest that God’s existence is contingent not upon the things of the physical world, but upon God’s own self, and to assert that there can be only one substance, namely, God.

The significance of inferring Spinoza’s knowledge of the meaning of the Tetragrammaton to his remarks on God in the *Ethics* is that his comments on God in the TTP can be seen as his attempt at expressing his own religious views on God, and the ones in the *Ethics* as his attempt at expressing these views in philosophical terms. One instance where we see Spinoza’s concept of God expressed in religious language occurs in chapter 14 of the TTP. In it, he provides us with a blueprint of his views on God. In spite of the length, his words are quoted in full:

I can now venture to enumerate the dogmas of universal faith, the basic teachings which Scripture as a whole intends to convey. These must all be directed...to this one end: that there is a Supreme Being who loves justice and charity, whom all must obey in order to be saved, and must worship by practicing justice and charity to their neighbour. From this, all the tenets of faith can readily be determined, and they are simply as follows—

1. God, that is, a Supreme Being exists, supremely just and merciful, the exemplar of true life. He who knows not, or does not believe, that God exists, cannot obey him or know him as judge.

2. God is one alone. No one can doubt that this belief is essential for complete devotion, reverence and love towards God; for devotion, reverence and love spring only from the pre-eminence of one above all others.

3. God is omnipresent, and all things are open to him. If it were believed that things could be concealed from God, or if it were not realised that he sees everything, one might doubt, or be unaware of, the uniformity of the justice wherewith he directs everything.

---

<sup>143</sup> TTP, p. 216.



4. God has supreme right and dominion over all things. He is under no compulsion, but acts by his absolute decree and singular grace. All are required to obey him absolutely, while he obeys none.

5. Worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity, or love towards one's neighbour.

6. All who obey God by following this way of life, and only those, are saved; others, who live at pleasure's behest, are lost. If men did not firmly believe this, there is no reason why they should obey God rather than their desires.

7. God forgives repentant sinners. There is no one who does not sin, so that without this belief all would despair of salvation, and there would be no reason to believe that God is merciful. He who firmly believes that God forgives men's sins from the mercy and grace whereby he directs all things, and whose heart is thereby the most inspired by love of God, that man verily knows Christ according to the spirit, and Christ is in him.<sup>144</sup>

What Spinoza states here represents the dogmas of the universal faith he has derived from the Scriptures. Even though Spinoza writes in the TTP that theology has no relation and no affinity to philosophy—saying faith and theology are “based on history and language, and must be derived only from Scripture and revelation,” while philosophy “rests on the basis of universally valid axioms and must be constructed by studying Nature alone,”<sup>145</sup>—the first four points that Spinoza sees as universal to all religions and peoples in the TTP (that God exists, that God is “unique” that God is omnipresent, and that God has the supreme right and dominion over all things) are mirrored in the *Ethics*:

I have explained God's nature and properties: that he exists necessarily; that he is unique; that he is and acts from the necessity alone of his nature; that (and how) he is the free cause of all things; that all things are in God and so depend on him that without him they can neither be nor be conceived; and finally, that all things have been predetermined by God, not from the freedom of the will *or* absolute good pleasure, but from God's absolute nature, *or* infinite power.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 224-225.

<sup>145</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 226.

<sup>146</sup> Spinoza. *Ethics* in *A Spinoza Reader*. p. 109.

What is surprising about these four statements which are expressed here in the *Ethics* is that they are strikingly similar to the first four tenets expressed in the TTP. This similarity, however, is deceiving. What appears in translation to be a reiteration of the points expressed in the TTP are not a repetition at all in Latin, but a reformulation. For Spinoza uses one form of discourse in the TTP and another in the *Ethics*. Some of the differences between the TTP and the *Ethics* can be seen in the choice of Latin words Spinoza uses in his discussion:

TTP	<i>Ethics</i>
<p>I. Deum, hoc est ens supremum, summe justum, &amp; misericordem, sive verae vitae exemplar existere; qui enim nescit, vel non credit, ipsum existere, ei obedire nequit, neque eum Judicem noscere. II. eum esse unicum: Hoc enim etiam ad supremam devotionem, admirationem, &amp; amorem erga Deum absolute requiri nemo dubitare potest. Devotio namque, admiratio, &amp; amor, ex sola excellentia unius supra reliquos orientur. III. eum ubique esse praesentem, vel omnia ipsi patere: Si res ipsum latere crederentur, vel ipsum omnia videre ignoraretur. IV. Ipsum in omnia supremum habere jus, &amp; dominium, nec aliquid jure coactum, sed ex absoluto beneplacito, &amp; singulari gratia facere: Omnes enim ipsi absolute obedire tenentur, ipse autem nemini.<sup>147</sup></p>	<p>Dei naturam, ejusque proprietates explicui, ut, quod necessario existit; quod ex sola suae naturae necessitate sit, &amp; agat; quod sit omnium rerum causa libera, &amp; quomodo; quod omnia in Deo sint, &amp; ab ipso ita pendeant, ut sine ipso nec esse, nec concipi possint; &amp; denique quod omnia a Deo fuerint praedeterminata, non quidem ex libertate voluntatis, sive absolute beneplacito, sed ex absoluta Dei natura, sive infinita potentia.<sup>148</sup></p>

In the TTP, Spinoza uses words that express a relation between God, humans and the things of the world. When he writes, “*Deum, hoc est ens supremum, summe justum, & misericordem, sive verae vitae exemplar existere*” (“God, that is, a Supreme Being exists,

<sup>147</sup> Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. Gebhardt, vol. 3, p. 163-1164.

supremely just and merciful, the exemplar of true life”), God is shown not to be independent of us, but rather in a close relationship with us. For as a merciful and just God, who is “the exemplar of true life” to us all, God stands as our merciful lord and as our judge, and God’s existence is intricately linked with our own existence. Likewise, in the second tenet of his universal faith, where he writes, “*eum esse unicum*” (“[God] is unique”), Spinoza’s description of God as “*unicum*” places the emphasis on God being unique in relation to other things, and not separate from them. There is no hint here of God being alone and independent of other things. Similarly, in his third point which comments on God’s omnipresence, “*eum...esse praesentem, vel omnia ipsi patere*” (“God is omnipresent, and all things are open to him”), we again find Spinoza showing a relation between God and the created things through his assertion that “all things are open to [God].” For he presents God here as all embracing and accessible to all. This God who embraces all does not invoke an image of separate and transcendent being, but rather a being who is in direct relationship with the things of the world. Even the notion that “*ipsum in omnia supremum habere jus, & dominium*” (“God has supreme right and dominion over all things”), as expressed in the fourth article of Spinoza’s universal faith, show Spinoza choosing words that depict God to be not independent of the things, but in a relationship with them. This idea of God in a relationship with the things of the world is present in Spinoza’s remark, that God has supreme right and dominion over all things. As the ruler of everything in the world, God does not stand apart from God’s subjects, but stands in relation to them; and Spinoza’s use of words that show this kind of relationship

---

<sup>148</sup> Spinoza. *Opera*, ed. Gebhardt, vol. 2, p. 77.

between God and the things of the world can be called his use of “the language of relation,” which he derives from a religious or theological form of discourse.

In the passage from the *Ethics*, however, he does not use the language of relation. Instead, he uses words that reveal God as independent from all things. This independence is established from the first point he makes: “[Deus] necessario existit” (“[God] necessarily exists”). Rather than presenting God as related to us humans, he speaks of God here as one who exists necessarily and independently of us. In the second point, the emphasis he places on the necessary existence of God is shifted to showing solitariness of God. By reformulating the idea of God being unique as “*Dei...ex sola*” (“[God] is one alone”), he presents God as the sole cause of God’s own being, that is, without any relation to other things, and thus completely independent of them.<sup>149</sup> In the third point, there is again a shift from speaking of God as alone to showing God as the independent cause from which all things came: “*omnia in Deo sint, & ab ipso ita pendeant, ut sine ipso nec esse, nec concipi possint*” (“all things are in God and so depend on him that without him they can neither be nor be conceived”). In this passage, Spinoza presents God as the only one in the whole world who can stand alone. Hence his remark that nothing can exist, nor be thought, without God (“*ab ipso ita pendeant, ut sine ipso nec esse, nec concipi possint*”). Without God, nothing in the universe can be conceived at all. Similar point is also made in the fourth article, that “*quod ex sola suae naturae necessaritate sit, & agat*” (“[God] is and acts from the necessity alone of his nature”) and that “*omnia a Deo fuerint praedeterminata, non quidem ex libertate voluntatis, sive absolute beneplacito, sed ex absoluta Dei natura, sive infinita potentia*” (“all things have been predetermined by God,

not from the freedom of the will *or* absolute good pleasure, but from God's absolute nature, *or* infinite power"). Spinoza speaks of God as the source from which all things came, since God has predetermined all things according to God's own infinite power, and thus emphasizes God's necessary existence and aloneness. In short, rather than using the language of relation, Spinoza uses "the language of causation," or a philosophical form of discourse in the *Ethics* to explicate his concept of God in philosophical terms.

Spinoza's use of the language of relation in the TTP and the language of causation in the *Ethics* in the section where he lays down his four points of universal theology appears to be due to Spinoza feeling that the religious form of discourse is inadequate in expressing the meaning of the Tetragrammaton. In a letter to Willem Van Blyenbergh in 1665, he hints at this inadequacy saying, "High speculative thought, in my view, has nothing to do with Scripture. For my part, I have never learned, nor could I have learned, any of God's eternal attributes from Holy Scripture."<sup>150</sup> In the TTP, he reiterates this point when he writes, "what God is...Scripture does not teach formally, and as eternal doctrine."<sup>151</sup> For Spinoza, the language of relation, as well as the religious form of discourse, is too limiting for him to discuss God adequately.

Spinoza's solution to this problem of talking about God in a religious form of discourse is restating the meaning of the Tetragrammaton through his use of the language of causation, or to be more specific, the philosophical form of discourse. Since *Jehova* indicates the "absolute essence" of God, while the other names of God signify attributes belonging to God, the meaning of the name *Jehova* allows him to arrive at the

---

<sup>149</sup> I have reversed Shirley's choice of words here since uniqueness of God is what is being expressed with the word "*unicum*" and solitariness of God is being emphasized with the word "*sola*."

<sup>150</sup> Spinoza, *Letters*, p. 258.

demonstration for Proposition 15 in Part I of the *Ethics*, where he states, “Except for God, there neither is, nor can be conceived, any substance, that is, thing that is in itself and is conceived through itself.” For Spinoza, the idea that God exists necessarily, that God is “one alone,” that nothing in the universe can be conceived at all without God, and that God has predetermined all things from God’s infinite power stems from his identification of God as *Jehova*, and expressing what this name means to him in philosophical terms. Without this identification of God as *Jehova*, the problem he would encounter is the one that Descartes fails to overcome: namely, trying to prove the existence of God. Without *Jehova* at its roots, his definition of God as a “substance” in the *Ethics* would become a rhetorical attempt at positing God on shaky grounds.

The importance of the Tetragrammaton to Spinoza’s concept of God in the *Ethics* is apparent in his assertion of the notion that God necessarily exists and that God is “one alone.” Even though it is possible to arrive at this postulation through philosophy, as Medieval Scholastics philosophers show, Spinoza does not rely on philosophy *per se* in the *Ethics*. Spinoza expresses his views on God using a philosophical form of discourse in the book, but they are not something that Spinoza deduces through philosophical reasoning alone. The idea that God necessarily exists is one that Spinoza has already posited in the *Ethics*, based on the idea that the Tetragrammaton expresses the absolute essence of God, which is unrelated to created things. Hence he asks us to imagine if we can that God does not exist.

The central place Spinoza’s remark on *Jehova* occupies in Spinoza’s concept of God as expressed in the *Ethics* can be seen in his definition of an “attribute.” When he

---

<sup>151</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 145.

writes “By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence” (ID4), Spinoza is essentially elaborating on the idea that the other names of God are attributes that explain God when God is considered by us as related to created things or is thought to be manifested through them. That is, Spinoza’s definition of an attribute in the *Ethics* is essentially a philosophical expression of the idea that attributes are what we humans perceive as manifestations of the essence of God, or extended substance of God. Hence his notion that attributes are what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence and that God is a substance of infinite attributes.

Another term that reveals the importance of Spinoza’s brief comment in the TTP on *Jehova* in our understanding of his concept of God is “substance,” which Spinoza defines in the *Ethics* as that which is “in itself and is conceived through itself,” and “whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.” Since the word *Jehova* indicates an absolute essence that stands unrelated to created things, the term “substance” Spinoza explains in the *Ethics* as the substance that is in itself and is conceived through itself, without relying on another thing for its existence, is not limited to something that is substantial, namely, the physical universe or *natura naturata*. The term “Nature,” in fact, signifies the transcendent cause of all things, i.e., God or *natura naturans*, which gives rise to *natura naturata*. Spinoza himself makes this distinction when he writes in the *Ethics*, IP29S:

Before I proceed further, I wish to explain here—or rather advise [the reader]—what we must understand by *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. For from the preceding I think it is already established that by *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, that is (by P14C1 and P17C2), God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, *or* from any of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God.<sup>152</sup>

For Spinoza his famous phrase, "*Deus sive natura*," is not an ambiguous concept. It is grounded on the idea that while the physical universe and God are distinct in terms of contingency—the former is caused by God, but God's existence is not contingent upon the latter—they are also one in terms of unity in that the physical universe and everything in it belongs in God. In other words, God is not the physical universe, nor is the physical universe God. God is, in fact, both God, who stands independently of the physical universe, and the physical universe, which is dependent on God for its existence. For Spinoza's concept of God is neither pantheistic, as many of the German Romantic philosophers and modern scholars have suggested, nor panentheistic, as Gueroult and Alan Donagan have asserted in our own time, in the sense that God is in everything. God is not everything; and everything is not God. Also, God is not in everything. Everything is instead in God. As the free cause from which all things come, God who stands unrelated to created things is a transcendent being, in whom all things are immanent. Hence Spinoza's notion that *Jehova* indicates "the absolute essence of God, as unrelated to created things," and his statement, "by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, *or* from any of God's attributes, that is, all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God." If there is a phrase that best expresses the fact that all things are in God and that God is not equivalent with all things, even if God is immanent to all things, it is "transcendental panentheism" or "transcendental immanence."

---

<sup>152</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics* in *A Spinoza Reader*, p. 104-105.



### iii. Religion and Philosophy

To many, this identification of Spinoza's God as *Jehova* may appear to go against Spinoza's differentiation of theology<sup>153</sup> and philosophy since he writes in the TTP that philosophy and theology stand apart from each other.<sup>154</sup> But his call for a separation between philosophy and theology is misleading. Even though Spinoza says "we may maintain as incontrovertible that neither is theology required to be subordinated to reason nor reason to theology" and states "each has its own domain,"<sup>155</sup> he does not mean a complete divorce between the two. What he purports instead is an autonomy for theologians to explicate the true meaning of the Scripture and complete freedom for philosophers to check the claims theologians are making. He writes:

as long as we are simply concerned with the meaning of the text and the prophets' intention, Scripture should be explained through Scripture; but having extracted the true meaning, we must necessarily resort to judgment and reason before we can assent thereto.<sup>156</sup>

Spinoza's notion that we should resort to reason and judgment before assenting to what the theologians claim to be the "true meaning" of the Scripture does not mean, however, that he considers theology to be subordinate to philosophy. As he sees it, philosophy cannot demonstrate the truth or falsity of some of the answers to metaphysical questions theology teaches because they are beyond the bounds of philosophy. His view is that "[the] fundamental principle underlying all theology and Scripture cannot be

---

<sup>153</sup> By theology, Spinoza means "the Word of God" or "revelation in so far as it manifests Scripture's objective....that is, the way of achieving obedience, or the dogmas of true piety and faith." (TTP, p. 232).

<sup>154</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 226.

<sup>155</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 232.

<sup>156</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 229.

demonstrated with mathematical exactitude.”<sup>157</sup> One example he offers as a demonstration of the theological claim philosophy cannot judge is the notion that we can achieve blessedness through obedience. He says, “the power of reason...does not extend so far as to enable us to conclude that men can achieve blessedness simply through obedience without understanding...”<sup>158</sup> Another example he offers is salvation through obedience:

...since reason cannot demonstrate the truth or falsity of this fundamental principle, that men may be saved simply by obedience, we may also be asked why it is that we believe it. If we accept this principle without reason, blindly, then we too are acting foolishly without judgment; if on the other hand we assert that this fundamental principle can be proved by reason, then theology becomes a part of philosophy, and inseparable from it. To this I reply that I maintain absolutely that this fundamental dogma of theology cannot be investigated by the natural light of reason, or at least that nobody has been successful in proving it...<sup>159</sup>

In short, he considers the sixth and the seventh points in his universal theology to be out of bounds for philosophy: namely,

6. All who obey God by following this way of life, and only those, are saved; others, who live at pleasure’s behest, are lost. If men did not firmly believe this, there is no reason why they should obey God rather than their desires.

7. God forgives repentant sinners. There is no one who does not sin, so that without this belief all would despair of salvation, and there would be no reason to believe that God is merciful. He who firmly believes that God forgives men’s sins from the mercy and grace whereby he directs all things, and whose heart is thereby the most inspired by love of God, that man verily knows Christ according to the spirit, and Christ is in him.<sup>160</sup>

In spite of the fact that Spinoza acknowledges this inability of philosophy to judge this type of theological claim and concludes that “it was essential that there should be revelation,” he does not subject philosophy under theology either. On the contrary, he

---

<sup>157</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 234.

<sup>158</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 232.

<sup>159</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 233.

<sup>160</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 224-225.

makes it explicitly clear in the TTP that neither must be made to conform to the other, saying: “We must...conclude without reservation that neither must Scripture be made to conform with reason, nor reason with Scripture.”<sup>161</sup> His warning to those who think otherwise is,

he who seeks to make Scripture conform with philosophy is sure to ascribe to the prophets many ideas which they never dreamed of, and will quite distort their meaning. On the other hand, he who makes reason and philosophy ancillary to theology has to accept as divinely inspired utterances the prejudices of a common people of long ago, which will gain a hold on his understanding and darken it. Thus they will both go wildly astray, the one spurning reason, the other siding with reason.<sup>162</sup>

For Spinoza, theology and philosophy are distinct from each other because the former concerns itself with certain metaphysical issues that the latter cannot judge, while philosophy claims truths that are “derived from investigation of Nature in general.”<sup>163</sup> He thus writes that theology which concerns itself with divine revelation should be examined in accordance with what the Scripture teaches.<sup>164</sup>

On the surface, this comment which stresses our need to examine theology according to the Scripture appears to grant theologians complete freedom to theologize. But what Spinoza is proposing here is not complete freedom, but freedom in areas of metaphysics, especially in the area of soteriology. Insofar as theologians commenting on God, Nature and the way it operates, they are not immune from the severest philosophical scrutiny. Spinoza’s critique of prophets and his rejection of their accounts of revelation in the TTP on the basis that the inconsistencies in their description of their experience of

---

<sup>161</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 233.

<sup>162</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 228.

<sup>163</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 232.

<sup>164</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 229.

God, the anthropomorphic qualities they attribute to God, the miracles they relate, and the message they claim to have received from God attest to this fact.

According to Spinoza, the inconsistencies we see in the prophets' account of revelation are due to the fact that God revealed only what each prophet was capable of receiving "according to his temperament, the nature of imagination, and the beliefs he had previously held."<sup>165</sup> As Spinoza sees it, the inconsistencies in the prophets' narratives show that "the gift of prophecy did not render the prophets more learned, but left them with beliefs they had previously held, and therefore we are in no way bound to believe them in matters of purely philosophic speculation."<sup>166</sup> In his view, the Scripture is concerned with the authority of the prophets pertaining only to the matters concerning morality and true virtue. Everything else they say as words of God are irrelevant to him:

when I saw that the disputes of philosophers are raging with violent passion in Church and Court and are breeding bitter hatred and faction which readily turn men to sedition, together with other ills too numerous to recount here, I deliberately resolved to examine Scripture afresh, conscientiously and freely, and to admit nothing as its teaching which I did not most clearly derive from it. With this precaution I formulated a method of interpreting the Bible, and thus equipped I began first of all to seek answers to these questions:--What is prophecy? In what way did God reveal himself to the prophets? Why were these men acceptable to God? Was it because they attained rare heights in their understanding of God and Nature? Or was it only because of their piety? With the answers to these questions I had no difficulty in deciding that the authority of the prophets carries weight only in matters concerning morality and true virtue, and that in other matters their beliefs are irrelevant to us.<sup>167</sup>

Yet, in his examination of prophets' description of their experience of God, like hearing the voice of God or seeing an image of God, Spinoza does not appear to follow the principle he has stated in the TTP: namely, to examine the Scripture according to what

---

<sup>165</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 76.

<sup>166</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 78.

the Scripture teaches. Instead, he rejects prophets' account of their encounter with God, saying it is "alien to reason." He says he does not see how these prophets could have had any kind of corporeal encounter with God since God is supposed to be unrelated to created things. He writes:

It seems quite alien to reason to assert that a created thing, dependent on God in the same way as other created things, should be able to express or display, factually or verbally, through its own individuality, God's essence or existence, declaring in the first person, "I am the Lord your God, etc."<sup>168</sup>

His disbelief in the direct corporeal encounter between God and the prophets leads Spinoza to repudiate prophets' physical description of God, saying that even though the Scripture indicates in many places that "God has a form," these accounts cannot be accepted as actual events since "God can communicate with man without mediation, for he communicates his essence to our minds without employing corporeal means."<sup>169</sup>

One person who finds fault with Spinoza's rejection of the authority of the prophets is Leo Strauss. In his *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, Strauss decries Spinoza's critique of the prophets, saying "The question, Is it fitting for God to adapt his revelation to the false opinions of men, and, if it is indeed fitting, within what limits is He to adapt that revelation? must be decided by the light of reason, before the matter can be argued on the basis of Scripture."<sup>170</sup> Strauss' charge is that Spinoza has turned to reason prior to applying the principle of examining the Scripture according to what the Scripture teaches in his discussion of the inconsistencies in the prophets' account of revelation. The

---

<sup>167</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 53-54.

<sup>168</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 62.

<sup>169</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 64.

<sup>170</sup> Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1965; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 122.

problem Strauss sees with Spinoza's reliance on reason is that while "the critique based on Scripture leads of itself to the finding that what is common to the *whole* of the Scripture is rational morality,"<sup>171</sup> Spinoza's assertion that there are self-contradictions in the Scripture prevents "[a] free pursuit of philosophical investigation"<sup>172</sup> since it is akin to saying "theology cannot extract from Scripture any unambiguous answer:"<sup>173</sup> that is, if there are contradictions in the Scripture, there cannot be any clear theological proposition for us to examine through philosophical methods to test its validity.

Yet, what Strauss misses in his observation is the fact that Spinoza's critique of the prophets does not rely on philosophy *per se*, as Spinoza defines the term in the TTP. If Spinoza's rejection of the authority of the prophets were based on philosophical reasons, it would consist of critiquing the inconsistencies in their narratives on the basis of what he considers to be the philosophical method, which is applying the law of Nature, or the laws of the physical universe. When Spinoza disparages prophets' account of God and God's message to them, he does not turn to Natural laws. Instead, he bases his rejection on what he considers to be two constants in the Bible: namely, that the God of the Bible is none other than *Jehova* ("a Being who has always existed, exists, and will always exist" or "the absolute essence...that is unrelated to created things"), and that the uncorrupted essential message of the Bible is to promote love of God and love of fellow human beings. This is why he says the prophets' account of revelation has the same essential message, even though their depiction of God in anthropomorphic terms is alien to reason.

---

<sup>171</sup> Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, p. 117.

<sup>172</sup> Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, p. 121.

<sup>173</sup> Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, p. 122.

The place where Spinoza turns to the laws of Nature in his critique of the prophets is in his discussion of miracles. But even here, his rejection of the historicity of these miracles is based on his concept of God. While writing about passages in the Bible where Scripture shows Nature observing “a fixed and immutable order,” Spinoza says:

All these passages clearly convey the teaching that Nature observes a fixed and immutable order, that God has been the same throughout all ages that are known or unknown to us, that the laws of Nature are so perfect and fruitful that nothing can added or taken away from them, and that miracles seem something strange only because of man’s ignorance.<sup>174</sup>

For Spinoza, God’s constancy and the perfection of Natural laws that God has established render miracles meaningless. He does not see how God can allow “things contrary to Nature” when miracles would suggest a flaw in the perfection of the laws that God has set, and thus would imply a flaw in God’s being—i.e., in God’s perfection. He thus concludes,

miracles were natural occurrences, and therefore they should be explained in such a way that they seem to be neither ‘new’ things...nor things contrary to Nature, but things approximating as closely to natural occurrences as the facts allowed.<sup>175</sup>

Spinoza’s rejection of the authority of the prophets and the miracles they narrate are grounded on the idea that *Jehova*, as God, is “a Being who has always existed, exists, and will always exist,” “an absolute essence” which is “unrelated to created things.” He does not accept the idea that God who was, is and will always be, and God who is not related to any thing in the physical world, can be attributed with anthropomorphic qualities. Also, he does not accept the notion that God who is perfect and who has established immutable laws of Nature can allow miracles that would undermine God’s

---

<sup>174</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 138.

<sup>175</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 139.

perfection to take place. Accordingly, he discounts prophets' account of revelation in areas where God is depicted in anthropomorphic terms and where miracles supposedly occurred, and critiques some of the central dogmas he saw in Judaism and Christianity as hindrance to understanding God properly. For even though he identifies who God is according to the Scripture, and what this God has revealed, the main thrust of his arguments against the historicity of prophetic accounts of revelation and miracles are grounded upon his philosophical rendering of the Tetragrammaton as God who is unrelated to the physical things of the physical universe.

Still, Spinoza does not say theology and philosophy are completely independent of each other, or "mutually contradictory."<sup>176</sup> Even though he urges the readers of the TTP to consider theological issues in accordance to the teachings of the Scripture and philosophical issues in relation to the laws of Nature ("the rules governing the nature of every individual thing"<sup>177</sup>), he considers the fifth point in his universal theology, "Worship of God and obedience to him consists solely in justice and charity, or love towards one's neighbour,"<sup>178</sup> to be the common thread that binds theology and philosophy. For he writes in the TTP that "[the prophets'] moral teaching is in full agreement with reason, for it is no accident that the Word of God proclaimed by the prophets agrees in all respects with the Word of God that speaks in our hearts."<sup>179</sup> As Spinoza sees it, this ethical imperative that is in full agreement with reason allows us to test the validity of theological dogmas and judge them rationally by seeing if those dogmas facilitate love of God and fellow

---

<sup>176</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 235.

<sup>177</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 237.

<sup>178</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 224.

<sup>179</sup> Spinoza, TTP, p. 234.



human beings before we accept them.<sup>180</sup> His statement in the TTP, that “faith allows to every man the utmost freedom to philosophise, and he may hold whatever opinions he pleases on any subject whatsoever without imputation of evil,”<sup>181</sup> is based on this supposition.

For Spinoza, there is no paradox when he says theology and philosophy should remain separate in their own domain, but non-metaphysical theological dogmas should be tested according to the essential meaning of the Scripture through the use of reason. In his view, the basis on which the structure of religion is built differs from the foundation on which philosophy is grounded. But the essential message of the Scripture that has come down to us uncorrupted, without any doubt or ambiguity—i.e., the command to love God and to love one’s neighbours—is not a metaphysical issue to him. This is why he says on the one hand that if this maxim upon which the whole religion is built were to be removed, “the entire fabric crashes to the ground, and then such a Scripture would not be the sort of thing we are now discussing, but a quite different book,”<sup>182</sup> while pointing out on the other that this will not happen, saying when we examine the essential message of the Scripture to see if it is genuinely from God, the only conclusion we can draw is that “no error capable of corrupting this meaning can have entered without it being immediately observed by all, nor could anyone have deliberately corrupted it without his evil intent being at once detected.”<sup>183</sup>

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza does not make it as explicitly clear as he does in the TTP that the essential meaning of the Scripture has come down uncorrupted and that this is the

---

<sup>180</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 224.

<sup>181</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 226.

<sup>182</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 211-212.

ethical duty of all human beings. Yet, when he writes in Part 3 of the *Ethics*, that “our greatest happiness, *or* blessedness” consists in “the knowledge of God alone, by which we are led to do only those things which love and morality advise,”<sup>184</sup> he is reiterating the same idea. In fact, the intellectual love of God he exhorts in the *Ethics* points to this essential message of loving God and loving our neighbours, which stems from his belief that there is God who related this message to us, and that this God is none other than the God of the Bible, namely, *Jehova*. Hence he points out in the *Ethics* that “our salvation, *or* blessedness, *or* freedom, consists, namely, in a constant and eternal love of God, *or* in God’s love for men. And this love, *or* blessedness, is called glory in the Sacred Scriptures—not without reason.”<sup>185</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> Spinoza. TTP, p. 212.

<sup>184</sup> Spinoza. *Ethics* in *A Spinoza Reader*, p. 151-152.

<sup>185</sup> Spinoza. *Ethics* in *A Spinoza Reader*, p. 260-261.

## Conclusion

As discussed in chapter 1, Spinoza has been viewed with hostility by his contemporaries, with hostility by numerous German Romantic philosophers, and with scholarly interest by many modern philosophers and thinkers. He has been called an atheist, a pantheist, a panentheist, a materialist, and a rationalist, to mention only some, by various people for over the past three hundred years for equating God with “Nature,” and critiquing religious dogmas concerning revelation, prophecy, miracles and God. Yet, he still eludes our attempts to categorize him. For his views on religion and philosophy are not easy to synthesize. If we place too much emphasis on his critique of religious dogmas in the TTP, and interpret his intention of writing the TTP as an attempt to free philosophy from religion, we cannot help but see him as a rationalist who is trying to undermine religion in favour of philosophy, and thus label him an atheist at heart. Yet if we overemphasize his expression of God as a philosophical attempt to naturalize God by discussing God within the framework of the physical universe and its laws, then we undermine the importance he places on identifying the Tetragrammaton as the only name of God, and his call for a separation of religion and philosophy in matters concerning metaphysical issues that are dealt with exclusively by religion(s), like soteriology.

One way in which we can overcome these problems of categorizing Spinoza with one pithy term is by reexamining Spinoza’s views on God as expressed in the TTP and his concept of God as expressed in the *Ethics*. As discussed in Chapter 2, his concept of God, which is expressed in the *Ethics* is relatively simple. Our difficulty with his concept occurs when we try to explain what God means to him within a philosophical framework.

The persisting conflicting interpretations among various scholars are due to this reason. Even though we can turn to people, like Descartes, who have influenced Spinoza, our examination of Spinoza's concept of God as strictly a philosophical exercise does not really help us grasp fully the significance of what Spinoza is asserting in the *Ethics* about God.

What we require in our examination of Spinoza's concept of God is a theologico-philosophical source with which Spinoza himself was familiar, like Maimonides. As discussed in Chapter 3, in spite of the fact that Spinoza is hostile towards Maimonides while critiquing the Scriptural inconsistencies in the TTP, he not only is silent when discussing meaning of the Tetragrammaton, but also reiterates some of Maimonides' comments regarding the Tetragrammaton and what this name implies. Even in the *Ethics*, we find that many of his central ideas about God are derived from his views concerning *Jehova*, as stated in the TTP, and that these ideas owe much to Maimonides' commentaries in his *The Guide for the Perplexed*.

The similarity between Spinoza's and Maimonides' explication of the Tetragrammaton does not mean, however, that Spinoza's views on religion are in any way orthodox. As discussed in the third part of chapter 3, Spinoza does not see religious language to be adequate in expressing his views on God. As he sees it, the religious form of discourse differs from a philosophical form in that the former is to be used to discuss and elaborate on metaphysical issues while the latter is to be used to examine everything in Nature in terms of the laws of the physical world. In a sense, what he is asserting by distinguishing the two forms of discourse can be construed as saying that, since religion cannot make claims about the workings of Nature without subjecting them to rigorous

scientific and philosophical inquiries, which base their examination on the laws of the physical universe, religion should give way to philosophy on matters pertaining to Nature. But this is not the case. What he wants is for all religions to reformulate their dogmas according to what the Tetragrammaton conveys about God and God's immutable laws that govern Nature. For, as his seven points of universal theology attest, he does not see religion and philosophy to be a handmaid to the other. Also, he does not view them as completely independent of each other. He considers religion and philosophy to converge on the point of the moral imperative, i.e., loving God and loving one's neighbours as oneself. This is because he postulates that the God who exists as the independent cause from which all things came and in whom all things exist has decreed through revelation and through natural law that we should love God for who God is, and love our neighbours as ourselves since we all belong in one God.

Spinoza's critique of religion and the religious leaders of Judaism and Christianity in the TTP stems from this moral imperative he considers to be the most sacred of all dogmas. Rather than being "esoteric" for fear of persecution, as Strauss uses the term, Spinoza attacks openly in the TTP what he considers to be lacking in Judaism and Christianity by undermining the authority of the prophets and the dogmas that arose from their accounts of revelation. This is the problem of ethical hypocrisy he saw in the religious leaders of his day. He writes,

I have often wondered that men who make a boast of professing the Christian religion, which is a religion of love, joy, peace, temperance and honest dealing with all men, should quarrel so fiercely and display the bitterest hatred towards one another day by day, so that these latter characteristics make known a man's creed more readily than the former. Matters have long reached such a pass that a Christian, Turk, Jew or heathen can generally be recognised as such only by his physical

appearance or dress, or by his attendance at a particular place of worship, or by his profession of a particular belief and his allegiance to some leader. But as for their way of life, it is the same for all.<sup>186</sup>

Spinoza's hostile attack of the hypocrisy of religious leaders in the TTP we see here is consistent with his remarks in the preface to the TTP, where he says religious leaders have distorted the true function of the Christian Church as well as Jewish and Islamic religions by transforming places of worship into a theatre where they attack their adversaries to attract admiration of the masses, and make the common people ignorant and superstitious. He writes:

Little wonder, then, that of the old religion nothing is left but the outward form—wherein the common people seem to engage in base flattery of God rather than his worship—and that faith has become identical with credulity and biased dogma. But what dogma!—degrading rational man to beast, completely inhibiting man's free judgment and his capacity to distinguish true from false, and apparently devised with the set purpose of utterly extinguishing the light of reason. Piety and religion—O everlasting God—take the form of ridiculous mysteries, and men who utterly despise reason, who reject and turn away from the intellect as naturally corrupt—these are the men (and this is of all things the most iniquitous) who are believed to possess the divine light! Surely, if they possessed but a spark of the divine light, they would not indulge in such arrogant ravings, but would study to worship God more wisely and to surpass their fellows in love, as they now do in hate. They would not persecute so bitterly those who do not share their views: rather would they show compassion, if their concern was for men's salvation, and not for their own standing.<sup>187</sup>

In Spinoza's view, Christian and Jewish "teachers" should be upholding and promoting their central doctrine of loving of God and fellow human beings rather than persecuting those who oppose them and keeping their followers as ignorant as animals on matters concerning the use of reason.

---

<sup>186</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 52.

<sup>187</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 52-53.

Even Spinoza's call for a democratic form of Government, which respects the rights of each individual, is for the reason of moral imperative as well. His solicitation for a political system that is founded on the principles of "natural right" that has been given to us by God stems from the idea that all of us are in God. Hence he remarks,

Nobody is bound by natural right to live as another pleases, each man being the guardian of his own freedom....[N]obody can really part with this right except by transferring his power of self-defence to another, and he to whom each man has transferred his right to live as he pleases together with his power of self-defence must necessarily retain absolute control over this natural right....However, since nobody can so deprive himself of the power of self-defence as to cease to be a human being...nobody can be absolutely deprived of his natural right, and that by quasi-natural right subjects do retain some rights which cannot be taken away from them without impelling the state, and which therefore are either tacitly conceded or explicitly agreed by the rulers.<sup>188</sup>

For Spinoza, no one can stand in place of God. Accordingly, he does not see how any one person can deprive another person of his/her natural right that God has given even when he/she concedes it to another in higher position than himself/herself. Thus he asserts that "nobody can be absolutely deprived of his natural right."

Spinoza's desire for a religion and a form of government that respect the divinely sanctioned moral imperative attests to the depth of the role his concept of God has played in shaping his religious, philosophical and political views. Whether this concept of God, which is based on his understanding of what the Tetragrammaton means, undermines religion or not is beyond the scope of this paper. Yet, there is one thing that we need to clarify. This is the fact that even though Spinoza bases his concept of God on the meaning of the Tetragrammaton, Spinoza's God is not the God of orthodox Judaism and Christianity. His God is not personal, nor historical. His God stands transcendent, yet

---

<sup>188</sup> Spinoza. TTP. p. 55-56.

remains related to every physical thing in the sense that God is the source from which all things spring, and in which all things exist. This is not a God to whom we pray and express our wishes and desires, but rather obey, as reason dictates, for no other reason than out of our sense of love for this God. For this God of Spinoza is the transcendent One in whom we all depend for our existence, and in whom we are all transcendentally immanent. Nevertheless, Spinoza's attempt at revising theology by basing his universal theology on his concept of God and the moral imperative he considers to have come down to us uncorrupted is something that needs to be considered in our own search for viable theological method. For Spinoza's identification of God as none other than the God of the Tetragrammaton, and his concept of God, which has been derived from the notion that *Jehova* indicates the absolute essence which stands unrelated to created things, conjoins God, Nature and we human beings in a difficult and rare articulation of theocentric universe, where everything operates not according to the laws of God for religion and the natural law for scientists, but according to one immutable law of God.



## Bibliography

### Spinoza

#### *Latin Texts*

Spinoza, Baruch. *Opera*. 4 vols. Ed. Carl Gebhardt. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925.

#### *English Translations*

Spinoza, Baruch. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. Vol. 1. Ed. and trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

-----, "A Critique of Traditional Religion" in *A Spinoza Reader*. Ed. and trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 6-48.

-----, *Ethics, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and Selected Letters*. Ed. Seymour Feldman. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Second edition. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.

-----, *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy with Metaphysical Thoughts*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998.

-----, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989.

#### *Letters*

*Correspondence of Spinoza*. Ed. and Trans. A. Wolf. London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1928.

*The Letters*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995.

### Secondary Sources

#### *I. Bibliographies*

Curley, Edwin M. "Bibliography" in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*. Ed. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman. LaSalle Illinois: Open Court, 1975, p. 267-316.

Garrett, Don. "Bibliography" in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. Ed. Don Garrett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 435-458.

Oko, Adolph S. *The Spinoza Bibliography*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1964.

Parkinson, G. H. R. "Recent Works on Spinoza" in *British Journal of History and Philosophy*. Spring 97, 5(2), p. 389-401.

Wetlesen, Jon. *A Spinoza Bibliography, 1940-1970*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971.

## ***II. Studies and Commentaries of Spinoza's works***

Althusser, Louis. "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part 1: Spinoza" in *The New Spinoza*. Trans. Ted Stolze. Ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 2-18.

Bayle, Pierre. *Historical and Critical Dictionary Selections*. Ed. and trans. Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965.

Beiser, Frederick. *The Fate of Reason*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Bell, David. *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*. London: Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London, 1984.

Bennett, Jonathan. *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984.

Boscherini, Emilia Giancotti. *Lexicon Spinozanum*. 2 Vols. Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.

Buckley, Michael J. *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

Bunge, Wiep van. "Van Velthuysen, Batelier and Brendenburg on Spinoza's Interpretation of the Scriptures" in *The Spinozistic Heresy*. Ed. Paolo Cristofolini. Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995, p. 49-65.

*The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. Ed. Don Garrett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Colie, Rosalie L. *Light and Enlightenment. A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Armenians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954.

- Collins, James. *Spinoza on Nature*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984.
- Cottingham, John. *A Descartes Dictionary*. The Blackwell Philosopher Series. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Curley, Edwin M. *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- "Bibliography" in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*. Ed. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman. LaSalle Illinois: Open Court, 1975, p. 267-316.
- *Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Delahunty, R. J. *Spinoza*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Della Rocca, Michael. *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Trans. Martin Joughin. New York: Zone Books, 1992.
- "Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics'" in *The New Spinoza*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 20-32.
- Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. 3 Vol.'s. Trans. John Cottingham et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1991.
- Disguised and Overt Spinozism Around 1700*. Ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Donagan, Alan. *Spinoza*. From Philosophers in Context Series. Toronto: Harvester, 1988.
- "Substance, Essence and Attribute in Spinoza, *Ethics* I" in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 1-21.
- Fichte, J. G. *The Science of Knowledge*. Ed. and trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982; Meredith Corporation, 1970.
- Funkenstein, Amos. *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

- Floistad, Guttorm. "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge and the Part-Whole Structure of Nature" in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*. Vol. 2. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Leiden: Brill, 1994, p. 37-47.
- Gaukroger, Stephen. *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Gersonides. *The Wars of the Lord*. Vol. 1. Trans. Seymour Feldman. Philadelphia: JPS, 1984. Vol. 2, 1987. Vol. 3, 1990.
- Giancotti, Emilia. "On the Problem of Infinite Modes" in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 97-118.
- God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991.
- Green, Kenneth Hart. *Jew and Philosopher*. Albany: SUNY, 1993.
- Gullan-Whur, Margaret. *Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1998.
- Hart, Alan. *Spinoza's Ethics Parts I and II: A Platonic Commentary*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Hegel: The Letters*. Trans. Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- , *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Vol. 3. Ed. Robert F. Brown. Trans. Robert F. Brown and J. M. Stewart. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- , *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* One-volume edition. Trans. Peter C. Hodgson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Irigaray, Luce. "The Envelope: A Reading of Spinoza, *Ethics*, 'Of God'" in *The New Spinoza*. Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gilian Gill. Ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 36-44.
- Israel, Jonathan. "The Banning of Spinoza's Works in the Dutch Republic (1670-1678)" in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism Around 1700*. Ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever. Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 3-14.
- Jacob, Alexander. *Henry More's Refutation of Spinoza*. New York: Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1991.

- Jacobi, Friedrich Heinrich. *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*. Trans. George di Giovanni. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Ed. and trans., Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Ed. and trans., Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Klever, Wim. *Verba et Sententiae Spinozae or Lambertus Van Velthuysen on Benedictus de Spinoza*. Amsterdam: Apa-Holland University Press, 1991.
- Lermond, Lucia. *The Form of Man: Human Essence in Spinoza's Ethics*. Leiden: Brill, 1988.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- *Spinoza and the Ethics*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Maimonides. *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Trans. Shlomo Pines. 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- Marion, Jean-Luc. "The Coherence of Spinoza's Definitions of God in *Ethics* I, Proposition 11" in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 61-77.
- Mason, Richard. *The God of Spinoza*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- "How Things Happen: Divine-Natural Law in Spinoza" in *Studia Leibniz*. 1996, 28 (1), p. 17-36.
- Matheron, Alexandre. "Essence, Existence and Power in *Ethics* I: The Foundation of Proposition 16" in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 23-34.
- Nadler, Steven. *Spinoza: A Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Negri, Antonio. *The Savage Anomaly*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

*The New Spinoza*. Ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

*The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*. Ed. A. Wolf. London: Kennikat Press, 1927.

*The Philosophy of Baruch Spinoza*. Ed. Richard Kennington. Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1980.

Pollock, Frederick. *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London: C. K. Paul, 1899.

Popkin, R. H. "The First Published Reactions to Spinoza's *Tractatus*" in *The Spinozistic Heresy: The Debate on the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, 1670-1677, and the Immediate Reception of Spinozism*. Amsterdam: Apa-Holland University Press, 1995, p. 6-12.

-----, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought*. Leiden: Brill, 1992

Powell, E. E. *Spinoza and Religion*. Boston: Chapman and Grimes, 1941.

Rorty, Richard. *Essays on Heidegger and Others*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Roth, Leon. *Spinoza, Descartes and Maimonides*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1924.

Russell, Bertrand. *A History of Western Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961.

Schelling, F. W. J. von. *On the History of Modern Philosophy*. Trans. Andrew Bowie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *On Religion*. Trans. Richard Crouter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Siebrand, H. J. *Spinoza and the Netherlands: An Inquiry into the Early Reception of His Philosophy of Religion*. Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Van Gorcum, 1988.

Silverman, R. M. *Baruch Spinoza: Outcast Jew, Universal Sage*. Symposium Press, 1995.

Simonutti, Luisa. "Spinoza and the English Thinkers" in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*. Ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever. Leiden: Brill, 1996, p. 191-211.

- Smith, Steven B. *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Speculum Spinozanum 1677-1977*. Ed. Siegfried Hessing. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.
- Spinoza: The Enduring Questions*. Ed. Graeme Hunter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.
- Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*. Eds. Maurice Mandelbaum and Eugene Freeman. LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1975.
- Spinoza: Issues and Directions*. Eds. Edwin Curley and Pierre-Francois Moreau. Leiden: Brill, 1990.
- Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*. Vol. 2. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Leiden: Brill, 1994.
- Spinoza's Philosophy of Man*. Ed. Jon Wetlesen. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1978.
- The Spinozistic Heresy: The Debate on the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, 1670-1677, and the Immediate Reception of Spinozism*. Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995.
- Steenbakkens, Piet. *Spinoza's Ethica From Manuscript to Print*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994.
- Strauss, Leo. "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Politicus Treatise*" in *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952, p. 142-201.
- *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*. Trans. E. M. Sinclair. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- De Vet, J. J. V. M. "Letter of a watchman on Zion's walls: the first reaction of Johannes Melchior to *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*" in *The Spinozistic Heresy*. Ed. Paolo Cristofolini. Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1995, p. 36-48.
- Wilson, Margaret D. "Spinoza's Causal Axiom (*Ethics* I, Axiom 4)" in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 133-160.
- Wolfson, H. A. *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of his Reasoning*. 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934.

Yakira, Elhanan. "Ideas of Nonexistent Modes: Ethics II Proposition 8, its Corollary and Scholium" in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*. Vol. 2. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Leiden: Brill, 1994, p. 159-169.

Yovel, Yirmiyahu. "The Infinite Mode and Natural Laws in Spinoza" in *God and Nature: Spinoza's Metaphysics*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel. Vol. 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 79-96.

-----, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

### **The Tetragrammaton**

van Beeck, Franz Joseph. *God Encountered*. Vol. 2. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994.

Brichto, Herbert. *The Names of God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Childs, Brevard S. *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974.

"God" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Vol. 7. New York: Macmillan, 1971, p. 641-685.

Marmorstein, A. *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*. Vol. 1. New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1927.

Parke-Taylor, G. H. *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible*. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1975.

Seow, C. L. "The Ineffable Name of Israel's God" in *Bible Review*. Dec. 1991, p. 49-50.