

THE
Collected Works
OF
SPINOZA



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Theological-Political Treatise

SEVERAL DISCUSSIONS
SHOWING THAT THE REPUBLIC CAN GRANT
FREEDOM OF PHILOSOPHIZING
WITHOUT HARMING ITS PEACE OR PIETY,
AND CANNOT DENY IT
WITHOUT DESTROYING ITS PEACE AND PIETY

By this we know that we remain in God and that God
remains in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

1 John 4:13¹

Hamburg
Henry Künraht²
1670

Preface

[1] If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, no one would be in the grip of superstition. But often they are in such a tight spot that they cannot decide
5 on any plan. Then they usually vacillate wretchedly between hope and fear, desiring immoderately the uncertain goods of fortune, and ready

1. Spinoza will cite this passage again in xiii, 22; xiv, 17; and Letter 76. The preceding verse reads: "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us." He will call attention to this context in xiii, 11. See also the discussion of "the spirit of God" in i, 25–40. Spinoza normally quotes the New Testament from the translation by Immanuel Tremellius (c. 1510–1580), an Italian Jewish convert to Christianity who translated the Bible into Latin from Hebrew and Syriac. In the sixteenth century some New Testament scholars believed that the Syriac version of the New Testament was older than the Greek texts on which Jerome had based his translation. See Austin 2007, 126–29. Spinoza thinks the Syriac text may be the original and not a translation. See ADN. XXVI at xi, 3, and Gebhardt V, 1.

2. Both the publisher and the place of publication are fictitious. In fact, the TTP was published in Amsterdam by Jan Rieuwertsz.

to believe anything whatever. While the mind is in doubt, it's easily driven this way or that³—and all the more easily when, shaken by hope and fear, it comes to a standstill. At other times, it's over-confident, boastful and presumptuous.

10 [2] Everyone, I think, knows this, though most people, I believe, do not know themselves. For no one who has lived among men has failed to see that when they are prospering, even if they are quite inexperienced, they are generally so full of their own wisdom that they think themselves wronged if anyone wants to give them advice—whereas in
15 one. They hear no advice so foolish, so absurd or groundless, that they do not follow it. Now they hope for better things; now they fear worse, all for the slightest reasons. [3] If, while fear makes them turn this way and that, they see something happen which reminds them of some past good or evil, they think it portends either a fortunate or an
20 unfortunate outcome; they call it a favorable or unfavorable omen, even though it may deceive them a hundred times. Again, if, in amazement, they witness something strange, they believe it to be a portent which indicates the anger of the gods or of the supreme divinity. Subject to superstition and contrary to religion, they consider it a sacrilege not to avert the disaster by sacrifices and prayers.⁴ In this way they invent
countless things and interpret nature in amazing ways, as if the whole of nature were as crazy as they are.

25 [4] Because this is so, we see that the men most thoroughly enslaved to every kind of superstition are those who immoderately desire uncertain things, and that they all invoke divine aid with prayers and unmanly tears, especially when they are in danger and cannot help themselves. Because reason cannot show a certain way to the hollow
30 things they desire, they call it blind, and human wisdom vain. The delusions of the imagination, on the other hand, dreams and childish follies, they believe to be divine answers. Indeed, they believe God rejects the wise, and writes his decrees, not in the mind, but in the

3. Leopold 1902 noted many allusions in Spinoza's writings to the plays of Terence, which Van den Enden used as a means of teaching his students Latin (Meinsma 1983, ch. 5). Here the allusion is to *Andria* 266. For an analysis of the rhetorical structure of the Preface, see Akkerman 1985.

4. Here the allusion is to Terence's *Heautontimorumenos* 946. The theme recurs in the *Ethics*: III P17S, III P50S, and Def. Aff. 1Exp. (ALM).

5. Spinoza's language recalls Tacitus' description of the Jews' response to prodigies before the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (*Histories* V, xiii). Tacitus criticizes the Jews for not performing appropriate religious rituals, because of a superstitious belief that it would be impious to do so (ALM). Jer. 10:2 instructs the Jews not to follow the heathen in being dismayed at signs in the heavens.

entrails of animals; they think fools, madmen and birds predict his decrees by divine inspiration and prompting. That's how crazy fear makes men.⁶

III/6 [5] The reason, then, why superstition arises, lasts, and increases, is fear.⁷ If anyone wants particular examples of this, beyond those already mentioned, let him consider Alexander, who began to use seers from genuine superstition⁸ only when he first learned to fear fortune at the
5 Susidan Gates.⁹ But after he defeated Darius, he stopped consulting soothsayers and seers until an unfavorable turn of events¹⁰ once again terrified him. Because the Bactrians had defected, the Scythians were threatening battle, and he himself was rendered inactive by a wound,

10 . . . he lapsed again into superstition, that mocker of men's minds, and ordered Aristander, to whom he had surrendered his credulity, to inquire into the outcome of things through sacrifices.¹¹

[6] We could give a great many examples like this which would show most clearly that men are tormented by superstition only so long as they are afraid; that all the things they have ever worshipped in illusory religion have been nothing but apparitions, the delusions of a sad and fearful mind; and finally, that it is when states have been in the greatest
15 difficulties, that seers have had the greatest control over ordinary people, and been most dangerous¹² to their Kings. But I think everyone knows these things well enough; so I'll say no more about them.

6. Spinoza's rhetoric here—*Tantum timor homines insanire facit*—echoes a famous line in Lucretius I, 101: *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*, how great the evils religion could persuade men to (ALM).

7. Cf. Hobbes' analysis of the natural causes of religion in *Leviathan* xii, 1–11. Hobbes acknowledges no substantive difference between religion and superstition (cf. *Leviathan* vi, 36 with xi, 26). For the origins in Epicurean thought, see Strauss 1965, ch. 1.

8. The phrase *superstitio animi* comes from Quintus Curtius V, iv, 1. I believe the intended contrast is between a superstitious belief sincerely held and the manipulative use of the people's superstitious beliefs, by leaders who do not share them. Cf. Quintus Curtius IV, x, 1–8, cited below at III/6/30. ALM note that Curtius acquired a reputation as a "libertine" historian because of his skepticism concerning prodigies. Next to Tacitus, Curtius is the ancient historian Spinoza cites most frequently (Gebhardt V, 7).

9. *See Quintus Curtius V, iv, [1].* "Susidan Gates" was the name the Persians gave to a mountain pass through which Alexander tried to march with his army, suffering his first serious defeat. See Quintus Curtius V, iii, 16–23.

10. *temporis iniquitate*, an allusion to Quintus Curtius VII, vii, 6.

11. *As Curtius himself says, Bk. VII, §7.* (LCL reads *ludibrium* where Spinoza has *ludibria*.) The influence of fortune, both good and bad, on Alexander's character is a major theme in Curtius, who attributes Alexander's virtues to his nature, and his vices either to his fortune or to his youth. Cf. X, v, 26–36. Among the vices: his aspiration to divine honors and his trust in oracles.

12. *maximeque formidolosos*, alluding to Tacitus, *Agricola* 39 (ALM). That the power of kings is often precarious will be an important theme in the *Political Treatise*. Cf. TP vii, 14, 20.

[7] Some say that superstition arises from the fact that all mortals have a certain confused idea of divinity.¹³ My account of the cause of superstition clearly entails, first, that all men by nature are subject to superstition; second, that like all mockeries of the mind and impulses of frenzy, it is necessarily very fluctuating and inconstant; and finally, that it is protected only by hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most powerful affects.

[8] As easy, then, as it is to take men in with any superstition whatever, it's still just as difficult to make them persist in one and the same superstition. The common people always remain equally wretched, so they are never satisfied for long. What pleases them most is what is new, and has not yet deceived them. This inconstancy has been the cause of many uprisings and bloody wars. As is evident from what we have just said, and as Curtius aptly noted, "Nothing governs the multitude more effectively than superstition" (Quintus Curtius, IV, x, 7). That's why they are easily led, under the pretext of religion, now to worship their Kings as Gods, now to curse and loathe them as the common plague of the human race.

[9] To avoid this evil [of inconstancy], immense zeal is brought to bear to embellish religion—whether the religion is true or illusory—with ceremony and pomp, so that it will be thought to have greater weight than any other influence, and so that everyone will always worship it with the utmost deference. The Turks have succeeded so well at this that they consider it a sacrilege even to debate religion; they fill everyone's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no room in the mind for sound reason, nor even for doubting.¹⁴

[10] The greatest secret of monarchic rule,¹⁵ and its main interest, is to keep men deceived, and to cloak in the specious name of Religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for their survival,¹⁶ and will think it not shameful, but a most honorable achievement, to give their life and blood that one

13. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* I, iii–iv. Calvin cites Cicero's *De natura deorum* I, xvi, 43, in support of his claim that God has implanted in all men some understanding of divinity. But he thinks most actual religious practice—both pagan and Roman Catholic—is a superstitious corruption of this knowledge, arising from either ignorance or malice.

14. Cf. Spinoza's comments on Islam in Letter 76, at IV/322/7–12. Pufendorf wrote in a letter to Thomasius that Spinoza owned a copy of the Quran which he had bound with the New Testament, suggesting a certain equivalence between these works in his mind. See Freudenthal/Walther 2006.

15. The expression Spinoza uses here, *regiminis Monarchici . . . arcanum*, echoes a phrase in Tacitus, *arcana imperii* (e.g., in *Annales* II, 36), as noted by ALM, 698. This language was also used in the title of a book by Clapmarius which Spinoza possessed. Gebhardt V, 4, reproduces Clapmarius's definition.

16. *salus*. RT has *vrijheid*, *freedom*, a possible translation of *salus*.

man may have a ground for boasting.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in a free republic nothing more unfortunate can be thought of or attempted. For it is completely contrary to the general freedom to fill the free judgment of each man with prejudices, or to restrain it in any way.

[11] As for the rebellions which people stir up under the pretext of religion, they surely arise only because laws are made about speculative matters, opinions are considered crimes and condemned as wicked, and their defenders and followers are sacrificed, not to the public well-being, but only to the hatred and cruelty of their opponents.¹⁸ But if, by the legislation of the state, only *deeds were condemned and words went unpunished*,¹⁹ such rebellions could not be clothed in any pretext of right, nor controversies turned into rebellions.

[12] Since, then, we happen to have that rare good fortune²⁰—that we live in a Republic in which everyone is granted complete freedom of judgment, and is permitted to worship God according to his mentality, and in which nothing is thought to be dearer or sweeter than freedom—I believed I would be doing something neither unwelcome, nor useless, if I showed not only that this freedom can be granted without harm to piety and the peace of the Republic, but also that it cannot be abolished unless piety and the Peace of the Republic are abolished with it.

[13] That's the main thing I resolved to demonstrate in this treatise. To do this it was necessary to indicate the main prejudices regarding religion, i.e., the traces of our ancient bondage, and then also the prejudices regarding the right of the supreme powers.²¹ Many, with the most shameless license, are eager to take away the greater part of

17. An allusion to Quintus Curtius IV, x, 3 (ALM).

18. ALM suggest an allusion to Tacitus, *Annals* XV, xlv, which attributes the persecution of the Christians under Nero to Nero's cruelty rather than to any concern for the public good.

19. An allusion to Tacitus, *Annals* I, lxxii, where the issue is Tiberius' revival of the law of treason, which had originally applied to official misconduct damaging to the state (such as betrayal of an army), but came to be applied to speech critical of the emperor (ALM).

20. *Rara foelicitas*. An allusion to a passage in Tacitus (*Historiae* I, i, 4: "in that rare good fortune of the times when it is permitted to think what you like and to say what you think"), which Spinoza will refer to again in §32, in the title of Ch. xx, and in xx, 46. Hume used the same line from Tacitus as the motto for his *Treatise*, a work from which he excised his own treatment of miracles in the hope of winning the approval of Bishop Butler. See Mossner 1980, 112.

In Letter 14 Oldenburg had made a similar claim about the freedom of the Dutch Republic. That Spinoza's praise of the Republic is ironic seems clear from Letter 30, explaining his reasons for writing the TTP, from the fact that he felt obliged to conceal his own identity and that of his publisher on his title page, and from §17 of this Preface. Cf. also the comments on xx, 40, and Israel 1995, 675–76, 789–90. I've discussed these matters in Curley 2015c.

21. On the meaning of the single quote mark before "powers" see the Glossary entry: POWER, 'POWER.

that right, and under the pretext of religion to turn the heart of the multitude (who are still at the mercy of pagan superstition) away from the supreme powers, so that everything may collapse again into slavery.²² I'll indicate briefly in what order I show these things; but first I must [III/8] say what reasons have impelled me to write.

[14] I've often wondered that men who boast that they profess the Christian religion—i.e., love, gladness, peace, restraint, and good faith toward all—would contend so unfairly against one another, and indulge daily in the bitterest hatred toward one another, so that each man's faith is known more easily from his hatred and contentiousness than from his
5 love, gladness, etc. Long ago things reached the point where you can hardly know what anyone is, whether Christian, Turk, Jew, or Pagan, except by the external dress and adornment of his body, or because he frequents this or that Place of Worship, or because he's attached to this or that opinion, or because he's accustomed to swear by the words of some master.²³ They all lead the same kind of life.

[15] What's the cause of this evil? Doubtless that religion has commonly consisted in regarding the ministries of the Church as positions conferring status, its offices as sources of income, and its clergy as deserving the highest honor. For as soon as this abuse began in the Church, the worst men immediately acquired a great desire to administer the sacred offices; the love of propagating divine religion degenerated
15 into sordid greed and ambition; and the temple itself became a Theater, where one hears, not learned ecclesiastics, but orators, each possessed by a longing, not to teach the people, but to carry them away with admiration for himself, to censure publicly those who disagree, and to teach only those new and unfamiliar doctrines which the common
20 people most wonder at. This had to lead to great dissension, envy, and hatred, whose violence no passage of time could lessen.

[16] It's no wonder, then, that nothing has remained of the old Religion but its external ceremony, by which the common people seem more to flatter God than to worship him. No wonder faith is nothing now but credulity and prejudices. And what prejudices! They turn
25 men from rational beings into beasts, since they completely prevent everyone from freely using his judgment and from distinguishing the true from the false, and seem deliberately designed to put out the light of the intellect entirely. [17] Piety—Oh immortal God!—and Religion consist in absurd mysteries, and those who disdain reason completely,
30 and reject and shun the intellect as corrupt by nature—this is what's

22. An allusion to Tacitus, *Annals* i, 7, repeated at TP vii, 2 (ALM).

23. An allusion to Horace's *Epistles* I, 1, v. 14 (ALM). Cf. xii, 7.

most unfair—they are the ones who are thought to have the divine light.²⁴ Of course, if they had even the least spark of divine light, they would not rave so proudly, but would learn to worship God more wisely, and would surpass others in love, not, as now, in hate. If they really feared for the salvation of those who disagree with them, and not for their own position, they would not persecute them in a hostile
[III/9] spirit, but pity them.

[18] Moreover, if they had any Divine light, it would at least be manifest from their teaching. I grant that they could never have wondered sufficiently at the most profound mysteries of Scripture. But I don't see that they have taught anything but Aristotelian and Platonic speculations. Not to seem to constantly follow Pagans, they have accom-
5 modated Scripture to these speculations.²⁵ [19] It wasn't enough for them to be insane with the Greeks, they wanted the Prophets to rave with them. This clearly shows, of course, that they don't see the divinity of Scripture, not even in a dream. The more extravagantly they wonder at these mysteries, the more they show that they don't so much believe Scripture as give lip service to it.

[20] This is also evident from the fact that most of them presuppose, as a foundation for understanding Scripture and unearthing its true meaning, that it is everywhere true and divine. So what we ought to establish by understanding Scripture, and subjecting it to a strict examination, and what we would be far better taught by Scripture itself, which needs no human inventions, they maintain at the outset as a rule for the
15 interpretation of Scripture.²⁶

[20] When I weighed these matters in my mind—when I considered that the natural light is not only disdained, but condemned by many as a source of impiety, that human inventions are treated as divine teachings, that credulity is valued as faith, that the controversies of the Philosophers are debated with the utmost passion in the Church and in the State, and that in consequence the most savage hatreds and
20 disagreements arise, by which men are easily turned to rebellions—when

24. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* II, ii, 18–21. Cf. below §23 and xv, 10.

25. Cf. below, i, 19; xiii, 5; and Curley 2002.

26. Cf. Manasseh 1842/1972, I, ix: "The Bible being in the highest degree true, it cannot contain any text really contradictory of another." Calvin also seems committed to the consistency of Scripture, taking "the beautiful agreement of all the parts with one another" to provide confirmation of the divine origin of its doctrine, from which its truth and consistency would seem to follow. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, I, viii, 1. See also his references to the prophets as taking 'dictation' from the Holy Spirit (e.g., in *Institutes* IV, viii, 6) and to the apostles as "sure and genuine scribes of the Holy Spirit" (*Institutes* IV, viii, 9). But Calvin's position on this issue is a matter of dispute among those who study him. See McNeill 1959, and Dowey 1994.

I considered these and a great many other things, which it would take too long to tell here, I resolved earnestly to examine Scripture afresh, with an unprejudiced and free spirit, to affirm nothing about it, and to admit nothing as its teaching, which it did not very clearly teach me.²⁷

25 [21] With this precaution I constructed a Method of interpreting the Sacred books, and equipped with this, I began by asking, first of all [in Ch. 1]: what was Prophecy? and in what way did God reveal himself to the Prophets? why were these men accepted by God? was it because they had lofty thoughts about God and nature, or only because of their piety? Once I knew the answers to these questions, I
30 was easily able to determine [in Ch. 2, III/42/26ff.] that the authority of the Prophets has weight only in those matters which bear on the practice of life and on true virtue, but that their opinions²⁸ are of little concern to us.

[22] Knowing this, I next asked [in Ch. 3] why the Hebrews were called God's chosen people? When I saw that this was only because God had chosen a certain land for them, where they could live securely and
[III/10] comfortably, from that I learned that the Laws God revealed to Moses were nothing but the legislation of the particular state of the Hebrews, and that no one else was obliged to accept them, indeed that even the Hebrews were bound by them only so long as their state lasted.

[23] Next, to know whether Scripture implies that the human intellect
5 is corrupt by nature, I wanted to ask [in Chs. 4 and 5] whether universal Religion, or the divine law revealed to the whole human race through the Prophets and Apostles, was anything other than what the natural light also teaches? [and in Ch. 6] whether miracles happen contrary to the order of nature? and whether they teach God's existence and providence any more certainly and clearly than do things we understand
10 clearly and distinctly through their first causes?

[24] But since I found nothing in what Scripture expressly teaches which did not agree with the intellect, or which would contradict it, and moreover, since I saw that the Prophets taught only very simple things, which everyone could easily perceive, and that they embellished these things in that style, and confirmed them with those reasons, by
15 which they could most readily move the mind of the multitude to devotion toward God, I was fully persuaded that Scripture leaves reason absolutely free, and that it has nothing in common with Philosophy, but that each rests on its own foundation.

27. The project, then, is fundamentally an extension of Cartesian method into an area where Descartes himself had not dared to tread. I've discussed this in Curley 1994.

28. That is, their speculations about God and nature. Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* viii, 26.

[25] To demonstrate these things conclusively,²⁹ and to settle the whole matter, I show [in Ch. 7] how Scripture is to be interpreted, and that our whole knowledge of it and of spiritual matters must be sought
20 from Scripture alone, and not from those things we know by the natural light. From this I pass to showing [in Chs. 8–11] what prejudices have arisen from the fact that the common people, enslaved to superstition and loving the remnants of time more than eternity itself, worship the books of Scripture rather than the Word of God itself.

25 [26] After this, I show [Chs. 12 and 13] that the revealed Word of God is not some certain number of books, but a simple concept of the divine mind revealed to the Prophets: to obey God wholeheartedly, by practicing justice and loving-kindness. And I show that this is what Scripture teaches, according to the power of understanding and opinions of those to whom the Prophets and Apostles were accustomed to preach this Word of God. They did this so that men would embrace
30 the Word of God without any conflict and with their whole heart.

[27] Having shown the fundamentals of faith [in Ch. 14], I conclude finally that revealed knowledge has no object but obedience, and indeed that it is entirely distinct from natural knowledge, both in its object and in its foundation and means. Revealed knowledge has nothing in common with natural knowledge, but each is in charge of its own
[III/11] domain, without any conflict with the other. [In Chapter 15 I show that] neither ought to be the handmaid of the other.³⁰

[28] Next, because men vary greatly in their mentality, because one is content with these opinions, another with those, and because what moves one person to religion moves another to laughter, from these considerations, together with what has been said above, I conclude that
5 each person must be allowed freedom of judgment and the power to interpret the foundations of faith according to his own mentality. We must judge the piety of each person's faith from his works alone. In this way everyone will be able to obey God with an unprejudiced and free spirit, and everyone will prize only justice and loving-kindness.

[29] After showing the freedom the revealed divine law grants everyone, I proceed to the second part of the question: [to show] that this

29. Note that Spinoza presents the argument of the first six chapters as leading (non-demonstratively) to one of the principal conclusions of his work: that philosophy and theology are independent of one another (cf. Ch. xiv). But up to this point he has not explained the new method for interpreting Scripture (mentioned in §21) which equipped him to reach this conclusion. In Ch. vii he will explain the method, and then begin re-arguing the conclusion. His claim is that the revised argument is demonstrative.

30. ALM cite various medieval theologians who had held that philosophy should be subservient to (the handmaid of) theology, most notably Aquinas ST (I, qu. 1, art. 5) and Albertus Magnus (*Summa theologiae* Bk. I, Part I, Tractatus I, qu. 6). Cf. below §34.

10 same freedom not only can be granted without harm to the peace of the republic and the right of the supreme powers, but also that it must be granted, and cannot be taken away without great danger to the peace and great harm to the whole Republic.

To demonstrate these conclusions, I begin [in Ch. 16] with the natural right of each person, which extends as far as each person's desire and power extend. By the right of nature no one is bound to live according to another person's mentality, but each one is the defender of his own freedom. [30] Moreover, I show that no one really gives up this right unless he transfers his power to defend himself to someone else, and that the person³¹ who must necessarily retain this natural right absolutely is the one to whom everyone has transferred, together with his power to defend himself, his right to live according to his own mentality.

From this I show that those who have the sovereignty have the right to do whatever they can do, that they alone are the defenders of right and freedom, and that everyone else ought always to act according to their decree alone. [31] But no one can so deprive himself³² of his power to defend himself that he ceases to be a man. From this I infer [in Ch. 17] that no one can be absolutely deprived of his natural right, but that subjects retain, as by a right of nature, certain things which cannot be taken from them without great danger to the state. If these things are not expressly agreed on with those who have the sovereignty, they are tacitly granted to the subjects.

From these considerations, I pass to the Republic of the Hebrews [Chs. 17 and 18], which I describe at sufficient length to show how, and by whose³³ decree, Religion began to have the force of law; in passing I also show other things which seemed worth knowing. [32] Then I show [Ch. 19] that those who have sovereignty are the defenders and interpreters, not only of civil law, but also of sacred law, and that they alone have the right to decide what is just, what is unjust, what is pious and what impious. And finally [Ch. 20], I conclude that the sovereign powers retain this right best, and can preserve their rule safely, only if everyone is allowed to think what he will, and to say what he thinks.³⁴

31. "The person" translates a personal pronoun which, as Bennett notes, might refer to either an individual or a collective agent.

32. The first edition has *privare*. Most editors (e.g., Gebhardt, Akkerman, et al.) emend to *se privare*; V-L (1914) emended to *privari*. Cf. xvii, 1, III/201/14-15.

33. Spinoza uses a plural pronoun here, implying that it was by human decree that religion began to have the force of law.

34. A recurrence of the allusion to Tacitus in §12, which also appears at III/239 and III/247.

[33] These, Philosophical reader,³⁵ are the things I here give you to examine. I trust that the importance and utility of the argument, both in the work as a whole and in each chapter, will make it welcome. I might add several more things about this, but I don't want this preface to grow into a book, particularly since I believe the main points³⁶ are more than adequately known to Philosophers. As for those who are not philosophers, I am not eager to commend this treatise to them. There's nothing in it which I might hope could please them in any way. I know how stubbornly the mind retains those prejudices the heart has embraced under the guise of piety. I know also that it's as impossible to save the common people from superstition as it is from fear. And I know, finally, that what the common people call constancy is obstinacy. It's not governed by reason, but carried away by an impulse to praise or to blame.

[34] I don't ask the common people to read these things, nor anyone else who is struggling with the same affects as the common people. Indeed, I would prefer them to neglect this book entirely,³⁷ rather than make trouble by interpreting it perversely, as they usually do with everything. They will do themselves no good, but will harm others who would philosophize more freely if they weren't prevented by this one thought: that reason ought to be the handmaid of theology. For [those who need only to be set free of that prejudice], I'm confident that this work will be extremely useful.

[35] But since many will have neither the leisure nor perhaps the disposition to read through everything I've written, I'm constrained to warn here also, as I do at the end of this Treatise, that I write nothing which I do not most willingly submit to the examination and judgment

35. A critical passage for the interpretation of the TTP. Who are the intended audience for Spinoza's work? For conflicting views, see Strauss 1988, 162-63; Harris 1978, 3; Donagan 1988, 14-15; and Smith 1997, 38-54. I take it that Spinoza is, as he appears to be, addressing the philosophical reader. But this does not necessarily mean that he is addressing only fully formed philosophers. I believe he particularly wants to address those would-be philosophers whose thinking is hampered by a prejudice about the authority of Scripture (see the end of §34, and cf. my comment on his correspondence with Van Blijenbergh, *Collected Works*, I, 350). I believe that exchange persuaded him that to secure a sympathetic hearing for his own work, he would have to show that in cases of conflict, the teachings of Scripture regarding speculative matters are not to be preferred to the demonstrations of philosophers. Cf. Letter 21 (IV/126) and Letter 23 (IV/145).

36. It would be highly paradoxical to write a book whose main points you took to be already known by its intended audience. But this sentence need not mean (as some have thought) that the main points of the book are already well-known to philosophers, only that the main points Spinoza would make if he extended the Preface are already well-known to philosophers. The best candidate for a philosopher who grasped the main points of the book is Hobbes, but he was unusual for his time both in his critical approach to Scripture and in the secular basis he provided for political theory. On the relation between Hobbes and Spinoza, see Curley 1992, 1994, and 1996.

37. Hence he discouraged translation of this work into Dutch. See Letter 44.

THE THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL TREATISE

of the supreme Powers of my Country. For if they judge that any of the things I say are in conflict with the laws of my country, or harmful to the general welfare, I wish to withdraw it. I know that I am a man
25 and may have erred.³⁸ Still, I have taken great care not to err, and taken care especially that whatever I might write would be entirely consistent with the laws of my country, with piety and with morals.