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Historical Criticism as Secular Allegorism
The Case of Spinoza

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Introduction

Biblical scholarship at the beginning of the twenty-first century includes an incredibly diverse array of methodologies under its ever-broadening canopy. A whole host of postmodern, feminist, liberationist, postcolonial, and many other adjectival neologisms modify the hermeneutics of biblical scholarship in the academy.[1] Notwithstanding such a disparate panoply of interpretive frameworks, historical biblical criticism continues its hegemony in modern biblical studies.[2] As with the modern academic discipline of history, modern biblical scholarship in general tends to operate under the false assumption that the methods used are comparable to the Baconian laboratory methodology of the hard sciences like chemistry and physics. *L'esprit géométrique* [the spirit of geometry] has won the day. Geometric reason and the discipline of mathematics, with its language of "proof," remains the paradigmatic example of rationality to many Bible scholars, Catholic or otherwise.

With the advent of the university in the medieval period, Scripture was studied and taught as Sacred Doctrine—theological by its very nature. Explicitly theological interpretation continues to exist in the academy, but it does so as a minority

1 A brief sample of the titles of program units represented at the 2012 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) illustrates this hermeneutical breadth: "African Biblical Hermeneutics"; "African-American Biblical Hermeneutics"; "Asian and Asian-American Hermeneutics"; "Ecological Hermeneutics"; "Feminist Hermeneutics of the Bible"; "Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible"; "Islands, Islanders, and Scriptures"; "Latino/a and Latin American Biblical Interpretation"; "LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual]/Queer Hermeneutics"; and "Postcolonial Studies and Biblical Studies." A sample of the titles of papers presented at this meeting likewise displays a diversity unthinkable a century ago: "Adam as Alpha Male: Genesis 1–3, Christian Domestic Discipline, and the Erotics of Wife Spanking"; "'Dude Looks Like a Lady': Queering Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9"; "Isaiah the Tree-Hugger: Prophetic Protests of Deforestation and Visions of Ecological Restoration (Then and Now)"; "Translation Matters: A 'Womanist-Postcolonial' Reading of John 4:29–42"; "'When She Goes to Serve Her House': Pre-Coital Vaginal Examination in Palestinian and Babylonian Rabbinic Law"; "The 'Witch' of Endor and Postcolonial Magic Theory"; and "Why is Xena Naked or Veiled? The Gender Logic of Female Drag in the Ancient Near East." I use the example of the SBL because it represents the world's largest scholarly association for the study of the Bible.

2 See, for example, the 1987 Presidential Address at the SBL, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988): 3–17.

among a cacophony of voices.[3] By and large Catholic biblical scholarship follows this same trend. Although examples of feminist and liberationist hermeneutics can be found, Catholic biblical scholarship remains heavily historical-critical.[4] By the phrases historical-critical, historical biblical criticism, historical critical method, and the like, I do not mean simply any historical method, but rather the various methods termed source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. These are more properly labeled *literary* methods than *historical* methods, as they rely more upon hypothetical literary theories of compositional origin and editorial activity than they do upon archaeology, philology, and comparative ancient historiography.

In an article on allegorical interpretation, Robert Louis Wilken recaps the odium modern Bible scholars have had for figurative and spiritual exegesis, including a personal anecdote from his student days. He aptly sums up the situation when he writes: "For generations now, biblical interpreters have scorned allegory, anagogy, tropology, and all their works. Only the literal or historical sense, presented to us by the tools of historical criticism, can claim the allegiance of modern exegetes."[5]

Attention to the literal-historical sense is the only sense that matters for historical-critical exegesis.[6] This overemphasis on the literal sense by the canons of modern biblical criticism stands in stark contrast to the official guidelines of Catholic biblical interpretation as set forth in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In the *Catechism*, traditional senses of Scripture—literal and spiritual, with the subdivisions of the spiritual into allegorical/typological, moral/tropological, and anagogical—ensure the wealth of spiritual riches to be gained from exegesis.[7]

3 Thus, the SBL includes units like "Christian Theology and the Bible" and "Theological Interpretation of Scripture." Of course many of the other units, including those cited above, are also theological, but they are almost always representative of a secularized theology inextricably bound to non-theological methodological frameworks like Marxist philosophy, etc.

4 One need only read through any number of examples of such postmodern approaches to exegesis to see the underlying assumptions that take for granted modern historical critical (for example, source critical) assumptions about the real history behind the texts. See, for example, the groundbreaking work of feminist biblical criticism by Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 30–48, where she adopts classical source critical distinctions between Genesis 1 as a Priestly text and Genesis 2–3 as a Yahwistic text.

5 Robert Louis Wilken, "In Defense of Allegory," *Modern Theology* 14 (1998): 197–212, at 197.

6 In this discussion, I am indebted to Michael C. Legaspi, "The Literal Sense According to Historical Criticism" (Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, November 17, 2012), where he notes the difficulty of finding explicit mention of the literal sense among early modern and Enlightenment exegetes because a literal sense only makes sense in comparison to other senses, which such exegetes reject.

7 See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997 [1994]), no. 115–117. See also the comments in William S. Kurz, S. J., "Patristic Interpretation of Scripture within God's Story of Creation and Redemption," *Letter & Spirit* 7 (2011): 35–50, at 36–38; William M. Wright IV, "Patristic Biblical Hermeneutics in Joseph Ratzinger's *Jesus of Nazareth*," *Letter & Spirit* 7 (2011): 191–207, at 204–205; and Michael Maria Waldstein, "*Analogia Verbi*: The Truth of Scripture in Rudolf Bultmann and Raymond Brown," *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 93–140, at 126–135.

With regard to the spiritual sense of applying the text's meaning to our lives, Pope Benedict XVI explains, "The seriousness of the historical quest is in no way diminished by this: on the contrary, it is enhanced."[8]

Despite pretenses to exclusive reliance upon the literal-historical sense—and thus to the quest for objective truth, as modern interpreters maintain—historical criticism at times results in exegesis that appears more like allegory on steroids than the plain sense of the text. Indeed, precisely by denying the plain meaning of the text in search of a more authentic history behind the text as we have it, historical criticism often results in fanciful reconstructions, more allegorical than literal, that would make Origen blush.[9] Historical criticism, especially in its source critical and form critical attire, often begins with a hermeneutic of suspicion, is guided by a hermeneutic of discontinuity, and results in a reconstruction of the imaginary history behind the text. This historical reconfiguration envisions distinct compositional histories of the biblical texts, histories that conflict with received tradition and are only discernable to scholarly eyes devoid of theological commitment. Such methods were forged especially in the wake of seventeenth century theo-political conflicts which engulfed Europe, were honed in the Enlightenment, and perfected in the nineteenth century.

It should not come as a surprise that these hypothetical literary theories were grounded in the politics of the time. The result is that the very theological diversity that confronts critics across confessional boundaries in the modern world is imposed on the text. This takes place by the allegation that such theological (and political) diversity represents the true history-behind-the-texts; that is, we are led to believe that the presence of both positive and negative elements of particular biblical figures (for example, David), or stylistic diversity of any kind, are positive evidence of different theo-political communities within ancient Israel. These communities wrote different conflicting versions of their history, portions of which were later spliced together by teams of editors, for the purpose of supporting the

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8 Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. Philip J. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012), xi. The context is Pope Benedict's opinion on what he believes to be the two key stages of biblical exegesis: "I am convinced that good exegesis involves two stages. Firstly one has to ask what the respective authors intended to convey through their text in their own day—the historical component of exegesis. But it is not sufficient to leave the text in the past and thus relegate it to history. The second question posed by good exegesis must be: is what I read here true? Does it concern me? If so, how? With a text like the Bible, whose ultimate and fundamental author, according to our faith, is God himself, the question regarding the here and now of things past is undeniably included in the task of exegesis. The seriousness of the historical quest is in no way diminished by this: on the contrary, it is enhanced."

9 Origen of Alexandria is typically associated with allegorical exegesis, and for good reason. He also engaged in literal exegesis, which is often forgotten. See, for example, Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012), especially 63–67; Peter W. Martens, "Origen Against History? Reconsidering the Critique of Allegory," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 635–656; and Hermann J. Vogt, "Origen of Alexandria (185–253), in *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 536–574, at 546–547.

theological politics of the editors. This sort of theory assumes that these ancient texts were composed and redacted by rival communities and thus that such competing politics was at the root of Scripture. Communities were responsible for composing and redacting what were essentially theo-political texts, which became our Scripture.

As an example of this kind of compositional theory, which becomes what I will refer to as a "secular allegory," I have selected the work of Baruch Spinoza, who stands out as a key figure involved in these early debates about the quest for an objective method of biblical interpretation. Spinoza is one of the earliest figures to attempt to articulate a "scientific" method of biblical exegesis.[10] Jonathan Israel explains Spinoza's significance within the broader Enlightenment project as a whole:

10 Richard E. Averbeck, "Pentateuchal Criticism and the Priestly Torah," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, eds. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 151–180, at 152–153; Dominique Barthélemy, "The History of Old Testament Textual Criticism from Its Origins to J. D. Michaelis," in *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project: English Translation of the Introductions to Volumes 1, 2, and 3 Critique textuelle de l'ancien testament*, by Dominique Barthélemy, trans. Stephen Pisano and Peter A. Pettit for vol. 1, Joan E. Cook and Sarah Lind for vol. 2, and Sarah Lind for vol. 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), 2–81, at 30, 52–54, and 64; Pierre Gibert, *L'invention critique de la Bible: XVe–XVIIIe siècle* [*The Invention of Criticism of the Bible: 15th–18th Century*] (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2010), 10, 148–175, 178–179, 184, 186, 197–198, 265–268, 292, 297, 302, and 304; Nicolai Sinai, "Spinoza and Beyond: Some Reflections on Historical-Critical Method," in *Kritische Religionsphilosophie: Eine Gedenkschrift für Friedrich Niewöhner* [*Critical Philosophy of Religion: A Festschrift for Friedrich Niewöhner*], eds. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann and Georges Tamer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 193–213; Jean-Louis Ska, *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), XV–XVI, 257–259; Magne Sæbø, "From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment—Aspects of the Cultural and Ideological Framework of Scriptural Interpretation," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation Volume II: From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 21–45, at 41–42; Niels Peter Lemche, *The Old Testament between Theology and History: A Critical Survey* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 259; V. Philips Long, "Historiography of the Old Testament," in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, eds. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 145–175, at 148; Gerhard Maier, "Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit im Geschichtsverständnis des Alten Testaments" ["Truth and Reality in the Historical Understanding of the Old Testament"], in *Israel in Geschichte und Gegenwart* [*Israel in History and the Present*], ed. Gerhard Maier (Basel: Brunnen, 1996), 9–23, at 10–11; Paolo Sacchi, "Le pentateuque, le deutéronomiste et Spinoza" ["The Pentateuch, the Deuteronomist and Spinoza"], in *Congress Volume: Paris 1992*, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 275–288, at 278; L. Alonso Schökel, "Arte narrative en Josue-Jueces-Samuel-Reyes" ["Narrative Art in Joshua-Judges-Samuel-Kings"], *Estudios Bíblicos* 48 (1990): 145–169, at 149; Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, "Bible et judaïsm" ["Bible and Judaism"], in *Le Grand Siècle et la Bible* [*The Great Century and the Bible*], ed. Jean-Robert Armogathe (Paris: Beauchesne, 1989), 33–38; John H. Hayes, "The History of the Study of Israelite and Judaean History," in *Israelite and Judaean History*, eds. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (London: SCM Press, 1977), 33–69, at 45; and Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments* [*A History of the Historical-Critical Study of the Old Testament*], 2nd rev. ed. (Neukirchen: Vluyn, 1969 [1956]), 64.

> … it is impossible to name another philosopher whose impact on the entire range of intellectual debates of the Enlightenment was deeper or more far-reaching than Spinoza's or whose Bible criticism and theory of religion was more widely or obsessively wrestled with, philosophically, throughout Europe during the century after his death. If the great *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert allocates twenty-two columns of text to Spinoza, the longest entry for any modern philosopher, in its entry about him, as against the remarkably low figure of only four to Locke and three to Malebranche, in their corresponding entries, this was assuredly not because the editors of the *Encyclopédie* were so utterly unaware of what was relevant to their Enlightenment that they got their editorial priorities stupendously wrong or owing to some wholly inexplicable aberration that historians can in no way account for. The simple fact is—however much this runs counter to certain commonplace notions—that Spinoza was deemed by them to be of greater relevance to the core issues of the *Encyclopédie* not just than Locke and Malebrance but also Hobbes or Leibniz.[11]

Thus, in this article I begin by situating Spinoza within his theo-political context. I then proceed to examine Spinoza's treatment of priesthood as an example of his exegesis. Finally, I conclude with a few comments about the need for a more faithful hermeneutic. Pope Benedict XVI has shown how, "From a purely scientific point of view, the legitimacy of an interpretation depends on its power to explain things."[12] That is, the better model (on scientific grounds) will have more explanatory power. The traditional theological explanation has better explanatory power than Spinoza's.[13] In the end, we need a liturgical or sacramental hermeneutic which

11 Jonathan Israel, "The Early Dutch and German Reaction to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*: Foreshadowing the Enlightenment's More General Spinoza Reception?" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, eds. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 72–100, at 72–73. Elsewhere Israel claims that, "… Spinoza and Spinozism were in fact the intellectual backbone of the European Radical Enlightenment everywhere, not only in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Italy, and Scandinavia but also Britain and Iceland." See Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), vi. In his sequel, he continues this sustained argument, contending that, "it was … the freethinkers, *esprits forts*, and *matérialistes*, particularly adherents of something called 'Spinozism' (which was not quite the same thing as Spinoza's philosophy), who set the pace and framed the agenda of scholarly and intellectual discussion not only during the Early Enlightenment but throughout the Enlightenment era." See Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 40.

12 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology*, trans. by Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986 [1984]), 44.

13 In context, Ratzinger explains that, "the less it [an interpretation] needs to interfere with the

leads to mystagogical exegesis. What is needed is a method which is historical, theological, canonical, following the rule of faith, making sense of the whole of dogma and of Scripture, and follows the guide of the Magisterium so that we can read the Bible from the heart of the Church in light of the sacred mystery of Scripture's dual authorship. Such a method should allow for and facilitate use of the full senses of Scripture, and should lead mystagogically from the signs to the deeper and hidden divine realities they signify. The study of Scripture, after all, is ordered to sanctity. The Bible's purpose, its *raison d'être*, is that those who read from its pages or who attend to its proclamation become saints.

In contrast to all of this, much of what passes as historical in modern biblical criticism is not so much literal exegesis as it is *secular allegory*. It does not result so much from careful attention to the final form of the text, or even to textual variants in the manuscript tradition, the only forms in which we know for certain the texts ever existed; but results rather from elaborate hypothetical literary theories guided by specific theological and philosophical assumptions (which were shaped by the Enlightenment) that predetermine the conclusions. The greatest example of this concerns the prevailing Enlightenment assumptions about priesthood, cult, temple, and sacrifice. As the Enlightenment version of the pristine history of Israel gradually comes into focus, it curiously resembles the theo-political ideals of liberal nineteenth century German Protestants, inherited from the Reformation via Europe's secular Enlightenments. It is my contention that, in this form, historical criticism amounts to secular allegorism.

A Method Forged in the Fires of Theo-Political Conflict: Spinoza in His 17th Century Context

Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) was born to Marrano parents in Amsterdam. As Marranos, his parents had converted to Catholicism in Portugal, and these Marranos in Amsterdam were newly returning to their Jewish roots. The violence of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) was still being waged during the first sixteen years of his life. This context of dismay and calamity is important to keep in mind. The acknowledged disorder and hostility of this time contrasts with the older view that the seventeenth century Enlightenment was due to the greater objectivity of more "enlightened" intellectuals, on account of their greater prosperity and security than before.[14] Indeed, the carnage and terror of the so-called "wars of

sources, the more it respects the corpus as given and is able to show it to be intelligible from within, by its own logic, the more apposite such an interpretation is. Conversely, the more it interferes with the sources, the more it feels obliged to excise and throw doubt on things found there, the more alien to the subject it is. To that extent, its explanatory power is also its ability to maintain the inner unity of the corpus in question. It involves the ability to unify, to achieve a synthesis, which is the reverse of superficial harmonization. Indeed, only faith's hermeneutic is sufficient to measure up to these criteria" (*Behold the Pierced One*, 45).

14 See, for example, the comments in Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 16–18.

religion," which engulfed Europe in the sixteenth and into about the first half of the seventeenth centuries, is difficult for us to comprehend, since the warfare was not conducted with as devastating an arsenal as that of our own age.[15]

These wars were of grave concern for Spinoza as he formed his political philosophy, which included his biblical hermeneutics. Indeed, the goal (at least ostensibly) of Spinoza's theo-political work was to create a biblical method that would bring peace to Europe.[16] William Cavanaugh explicitly mentions Spinoza as a key figure in the nascent development of the mythology of the wars of religion. Cavanaugh notes that, "Benedict de Spinoza's political writings were motivated largely by the divisions and wars that had plagued Spinoza's native Netherlands and the rest of Europe throughout his lifetime. … The preface to his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* sets up religious violence as the problem to be solved by the rest of the treatise."[17] In Spinoza's own words we read:

> … fear is the root from which superstition is born, maintained and nourished. … Since dread is the cause of superstition, it plainly follows that everyone is naturally prone to it….It also follows that superstition must be just as variable and unstable as all absurd leaps of the mind and powerful emotions are, and can only be sustained by hope and hatred, anger and deception. This is because such instability does not spring from reason but from passion alone, in fact from the most powerful of the passions. Therefore it is easy for people to be captivated by a superstition. … because common people everywhere live in the same wretched state, they never adhere to the same superstition for very long. … Such instability of mind has been the cause of many riots and ferocious wars. … It may indeed be the highest secret of monarchical government and utterly essential to it, to keep men

15 See the graphic description in Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008), 129–130. For calling the allegedly religious motivations of these wars into question, see the important studies, William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123–180, especially 142–178; and William T. Cavanaugh, "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995): 397–420.

16 Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Early Modern Political Context to Spinoza's Bible Criticism," *Revista de Filosofía* 66 (2010): 7–24, at 10, 20, 23; Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Bible in Captivity: Hobbes, Spinoza, and the Politics of Defining Religion," *Pro Ecclesia* 19 (2010): 285–299, at 298; Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University, 2009), 18–19; Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 108, 113, 118, 131, and 137; Daniel J. Elazar, "Spinoza and the Bible," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 7 (1995): 5–19, at 7; and Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 94–96 and 117.

17 Cavanaugh, *Myth of Religious Violence*, 124.

> deceived, and to disguise the fear that sways them with the specious name of religion, so that they will fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance and will not think it humiliating but supremely glorious to spill their blood and sacrifice their lives for the glorification of a single man.[18]

Spinoza is quick to criticize what Enlightenment thinkers will denounce as priestcraft,[19] the subtle manipulation of the laity by Machiavellian priestly rulers and clerical aristocracy.[20] Reminiscent of Machiavelli, Spinoza identifies one of the chief problems when he writes:

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18 Spinoza, *TTP*, Preface, no. 4–5 and 7; Israel, 4–6; Akkerman, 58–63; and Gebhardt, 6–7. All citations from Spinoza's *Tractatus Theological Politicus* will be cited as follows. The first citation will be abbreviated as it is in this footnote, and will be to the chapter followed by the paragraph numbers used in Akkerman's edition of the *TTP*. The second citation will be to the English edition, from which all English translation in this article will be taken, Benedict de Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. by Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007). The third citation will be to the pages of the current critical Latin edition established by Fokke Akkerman and the corresponding French translation as found in Spinoza, *Œuvres III: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus/Traité théologico-politique*, 2nd ed., ed. Pierre-François Moreau, text established by Fokke Akkerman, trans. and notes by Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012), the first edition of which was originally published in 1999. This volume is the most thorough and up-to-date critical edition of the *TTP*, with opposing pages of the Latin text with French translation. The fourth citation will be to the pages of the older 3rd volume of Carl Gebhardt, ed., *Spinoza Opera* (Heidelberg: C. Winters, 1925), since, although now obsolete, that remains the most accessible critical edition of the Latin text, a full text of which is available open access online. Silverthorne's and Israel's translation was chosen over, for example, R. H. M. Elwes' 1883 translation or Samuel Shirley's 1989 translation because of some problems with their translations including omissions of text, and their reliance on the only critical edition of the text then available, that of Carl Gebhardt from 1925. Silverthorne's and Israel's translation is taken from Akkerman's critical edition of *TTP*, and follows the paragraph divisions in Akkerman, which are less cumbersome than Spinoza's original paragraph divisions.

19 Diego Lucci, *Scripture and Deism: The Biblical Criticism of the Eighteenth-Century British Deists* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), especially 41, 55, and 127; Diego Lucci, "Judaism and the Jews in the British Deists' Attacks on Revealed Religion," *Hebrew Political Studies* 3 (2008): 177–214, at 182, 187, and 197; S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2003), 45–67; S. J. Barnett, *Idol Temples and Crafty Priests: The Origins of Enlightenment Anticlericalism* (London: Macmillan, 1999); and J. A. I. Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992).

20 In this context, with regard to Machiavelli, Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker explain that, "The gap between the appearance of holiness and the underlying reality of corruption in the Curia became, for Machiavelli, the paradigmatic form of princely deception. … Machiavelli inferred that the same gap exists in the Biblical text itself. His discovery of the 'key' to the underlying motives of biblical figures created a new mode of exegesis, and Machiavelli therefore can rightly be considered as one of the earliest, and certainly the most influential, sources of the hermeneutics of suspicion." See Scott W. Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture 1300–1700* (New York: Crossroad, Herder, 2013), 144.

> In searching out the reason for this deplorable situation, I never doubted that it arose because, in the religion of the common people, serving the church has been regarded as a worldly career, what should be its unpretentious offices being seen as lucrative positions and its pastors considered great dignitaries. As soon as this abuse began in the church, the worst kind of people came forward to fill the sacred offices and the impulse to spread God's religion degenerated into sordid greed and ambition.[21]

Spinoza's personal and educational background had him positioned in the right place to make a contribution to the development of modern biblical criticism within the seventeenth century.[22] Although never having been a convert to Christianity himself, Spinoza was raised among Marrano returnees to Judaism who were relearning how to live as Jews in the Dutch Republic which granted them a great deal of relative autonomy. Marrano patterns of thought and cultural habits almost certainly shaped Spinoza's thought as he grew up.[23] In 1656, four months before his 24th birthday, Spinoza was formally excommunicated from the Jewish community in Amsterdam.[24] The actual cause of his excommunication is

21 Spinoza, *TTP*, Preface, no. 9; Israel, 7; Akkerman, 64–65; and Gebhardt, 8.

22 Two of the most accessible, insightful, and brief biographies of Spinoza are Richard H. Popkin, *Spinoza* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004); and Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999). To my mind, the best treatments of Spinoza's biblical criticism are Scott W. Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, "Chapter 9: Spinoza and the Beginning of the Radical Enlightenment," in *Politicizing the Bible*, by Hahn and Wiker, 339–393; and David Laird Dungan, "Baruch Spinoza and the Political Agenda of Modern Historical-Critical Interpretation," in *A History of the Synoptic Problem: The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels*, by David Laird Dungan (New Haven: Yale University, 1999), 198–260. It should be noted, however, that Dungan's chapter is fraught with a number of historical problems, including that the over-confident case he makes for the relationship between Spinoza and Jan De Witt overreaches the actual evidence. I am guilty of this same mistake regarding De Witt in my earlier, "Early Modern," 20.

23 Wiep van Bunge, *Spinoza Past and Present: Essays on Spinoza, Spinozism, and Spinoza Scholarship* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–15; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The Other Within: The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2009), entire book, especially 334–336 which deals specifically with Spinoza; Popkin, *Spinoza*, 5–16; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I: The Marrano of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1989), entire book; and Gabriel Albiac, *La sinagoga vacía: un estudio de las fuentes marranas del espinosismo* [*The Empty Synagoguge: A Study of the Marrano Sources of Spinozism*] (Madrid: Hiperión, 1987), whole book. It should be noted that Albiac's otherwise fine and incredibly thorough book includes a vast array of uneven sources, and suffers in some places from the same problems as Dungan's chapter, especially regarding Spinoza's relationship with De Witt. It should be noted too that van Bunge's contribution to this discussion minimizes the Marrano background to understanding Spinoza. For a further critique of locating Spinoza in a Marrano context, see Travis L. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 18–22, which provides ample sources to consult.

24 Odette Vlessing, "The Excommunication of Baruch Spinoza: The Birth of a Philosopher," in *Dutch Jewry: Its History and Secular Culture (1500–2000)*, eds. Jonathan Israel and Reinier

uncertain, but whatever the cause, Jon Levenson is correct to state that after the ban, "… Spinoza turned against the Jewish tradition and even against the Jews themselves with fury."[25]

Heir to an Intellectual Heritage

Spinoza had a number of important influences on his thought and on his main theo-political work dealing with biblical exegesis, his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [*Theological-Political Tractate*] (*TTP*). One of the most significant influences on Spinoza was his English contemporary Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), whose *De Cive* belonged to his personal library. Although not certain, it is likely that Spinoza utilized the 1668 Latin translation of Hobbes' theo-political work *Leviathan* of 1651 in the final revisions of his 1670 *TTP*.[26] Hobbes' *Leviathan*, completed during

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Salverda (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 141–172; Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 1–15; Nadler, *Spinoza*, 116–154; Odette Vlessing, "The Excommunication of Baruch Spinoza: A Conflict Between Jewish and Dutch Law," *Studia Spinozana* 13 (1997): 15–47; Odette Vlessing, "The Jewish Community in Transition: From Acceptance to Emancipation," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 30 (1996): 195–211; Asa Kasher and Shlomo Biderman, "Why Was Baruch de Spinoza Excommunicated," in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, eds. David S. Katz and Jonathan I. Israel (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 98–141; Lewis S. Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Brunswick: Transaction, 1987 [1958]), 1–16; and Israel S. Révah, "Aux origines de la rupture Spinozienne: nouveaux documents sur l'incroyance dans la communauté judéo-portugaise a Amsterdam a l'époque de l'excommunication de Spinoza" ["The Origins of the Spinozist Rupture: New Documents about Unbelief in the Jewish Portuguese Community in Amsterdam in the Epoque of the Excommunication of Spinoza"], *Revue des études juives* [*Review of Jewish Studies*] 123 (1964): 359–431. The actual core of the text used in the excommunication of Spinoza came from Venice in 1618 in Spanish translation. On this core text, see H. P. Salomon, "Le vrai excommunication de Spinoza" ["The Real Excommunication of Spinoza"], in *Forum Literarum* [*Literary Forum*], eds. H. Bots and M. Kerkhof (Amsterdam: Maarsen, 1984), 181–199.

25 Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 91.

26 Jeffrey L. Morrow, "*Leviathan* and the Swallowing of Scripture: The Politics behind Thomas Hobbes' Early Modern Biblical Criticism," *Christianity & Literature* 61 (2011): 33–54, at 34 and 49; Edwin Curley, "Spinoza's Exchange with Albert Burgh," in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, eds. Melamed and Rosenthal, 11–28, at 13 n. 6; Warren Zev Harvey, "Spinoza on Ibn Ezra's 'Secret of the Twelve,'" in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, eds. Melamed and Rosenthal, 41–55, at 54; Menachem Lorberbaum, "Spinoza's Theological-Political Problem," in *Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought*, eds. Gordon Schochet, Fania Oz-Salzberger, and Meirav Jones (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2008), 167–188, at 170, 172–173, 178–179, 183 n. 11, and 184 n. 28; Jon Parkin, "The Reception of Hobbes's *Leviathan*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes's Leviathan*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007), 441–459, at 450–451; Theo Verbeek, *Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise: Exploring the "Will of God"* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), especially 8–10; Malcolm, "Hobbes," 390–392; Theo Verbeek, "Spinoza on Theocracy and Democracy," in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin: Essays in His Honor*, eds. James E. Force and David S. Katz (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 326–338, at 336; Edwin Curley, "'I Durst Not Write So Boldly' or How to Read Hobbes' Theologico-Political Treatise," in *Hobbes e Spinoza: Scienza e politica* [*Hobbes and Spinoza: Science and Politics*], ed. Daniela Bostrenghi (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1992), 497–593; Richard H. Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1991),34–35; Karl Schumann, "Methodenfragen bei Spinoza und Hobbes: Zum Problem des

his self-imposed French exile to avoid the carnage of the English Civil War, helped pave the way for modern biblical criticism through its critique of the traditionally held Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and naturalization of spiritual realities in Scripture.

Another likely influence was the French Calvinist-turned-Catholic—perhaps of Marrano background—Isaac La Peyrère (c. 1596–1676).[27] La Peyrère's infamous work of biblical exegesis, *Pre-Adamites* (1655) was also on Spinoza's shelf, and a number of scholars, following the work of Richard Popkin, believe the two may have met each other when La Peyrère visited the Dutch Republic in 1655.[28] La Peyrère's work, which he completed by 1648,[29] represented a wholesale critique of Scripture, more thorough than that of Hobbes, although both subjugated

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Einflusses" ["Methodological Issues in Spinoza and Hobbes: On the Problem of Influence"], *Studia Spinozana* 3 (1987): 47–86; and William Sacksteder, "How Much of Hobbes Might Spinoza Have Read?" *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 11 (1980): 25–39.

27 Andreas Nikolaus Pietsch, *Isaac La Peyrère: Bibelkritik, Philosemitismus und Patronage in der Gelehrtenrepublik des 17. Jahrhunderts* [*Isaac La Peyrère: Biblical Criticism, Philosemitism and Patronage in the Republic of Letters of the 17th Century*] (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012), entire book for situating La Peyrère and his biblical exegesis in context; Jeffrey L. Morrow, "Pre–Adamites, Politics and Criticism: Isaac La Peyrère's Contribution to Modern Biblical Studies," *Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 4 (2011): 1–23, at 22; Jeffrey L. Morrow, "French Apocalyptic Messianism: Isaac La Peyrère and Political Biblical Criticism in the Seventeenth Century," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27 (2011): 203–214, especially 210; H. J. M. Nellen, "Growing Tension between Church Doctrines and Critical Exegesis of the Old Testament," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament II*, ed. Sæbø, 802–826, at 822–823; Noel Malcolm, "*Leviathan*, the Pentateuch, and the Origins of Modern Biblical Criticism," in *Leviathan After 350 Years*, eds. Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 241–264, at 242–243, 243 n. 4, 247–248; Malcolm, "Hobbes," 392–398; Popkin, *Third Force*, 34; Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 383–407, at 391; Albiac, *sinagoga vacía* [Empty Synagogue], 124–129; Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza's Earliest Philosophical Years, 1655–61," *Studia Spinozana* 4 (1988): 37–54; Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), especially, 26–59 and 80–93; Richard H. Popkin, "Some New Light on the Roots of Spinoza's Science of Bible Study," in *Spinoza and the Sciences*, eds. Marjorie Grene and Debra Nails (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1986), 171–188, at 171; and Richard H. Popkin, "Spinoza and La Peyrère," *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1977): 177–195.

28 La Peyrère's book created quite a stir just before Spinoza's excommunication. On the reception of his work in the Dutch Republic of 1655–1659, see Eric Jorink, "Reading the Book of Nature in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic," in *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, eds. Klaas van Berkel and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 45–68, at 63–65.

29 The final form of the text was published in 1655. La Peyrère apparently commenced drafting the text as early as 1635, the first portion of which was being circulated in unpublished form in 1643. Gabriel Naudé mentions the work in a 1642 letter. Drafts exist already from 1644. La Peyrère's *Pre-Adamites* was published bound together with his larger work *Theological System*. They were likely completed and bound together no later than 1648. Morrow, "Pre-Adamites," 5–6 and 5 n. 13–14; and Élisabeth Quennehen, "Lapeyrère, la Chine et la chronologie biblique" ["La Peyrère, China and Biblical Chronology"], *La Lettre clandestine* 9 (2000): 243–255, at 244.

Scripture for the purpose of redeploying it in their respective theo-political controversies: Hobbes in defense of the English monarchy and La Peyrère in defense of the political aspirations of his employer, the Prince of Condé.[30]

Spinoza's friend and in many ways disciple, Lodewijk Meyer (1629–1681), is another important figure in this discussion, since his 1666 *Philosophy as the Interpreter of Holy Scripture* was one of the most significant unnamed works against which Spinoza was arguing in his *TTP*.[31] Meyer sought to interpret Scripture via the lens of Cartesian philosophy, but he did so on fairly standard theological foundations, including the doctrine of Scripture's divine inspiration.

Spinoza's indebtedness to Descartes is overwhelming, even though Spinoza parts ways from standard Cartesian philosophy.[32] For Spinoza, "Descartes was

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30 See the discussions in Pietsch, *Isaac La Peyrère*, 124–139 and 196–228; Morrow, "*Leviathan*," 37–40 and 42–48; Morrow, "Pre-Adamites," 16–20; Morrow, "French Apocalyptic Messianism," 208–210; R. H. Popkin, "Millenarianism and Nationalism—A Case Study: Isaac La Peyrère," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture Volume IV: Continental Millenarians: Protestants, Catholics, Heretics*, eds. John Christian Laursen and Richard H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 74–84; Arrigo Pacchi, "Hobbes and Biblical Philology in the Service of the State," *Topoi* 7 (1988): 231–239; and Henning Graf Reventlow, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1984), 194–222.

31 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 353–356; Gibert, *L'invention* [*The Invention*], 131–149 and 166; Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 7–11 and 15–17; Frampton, *Spinoza*, 175–195; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 197–217; J. Samuel Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), xi, 8, 8 n. 22, 11–12, 34–67; W.N.A. Klever, "Spinoza's Life and Works," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 13–60, at 29–31; Manfred Walther, "Biblische Hermeneutik und historische Erklärung: Lodewijk Meyer und Benedikt de Spinoza" ["Biblical Hermeneutics and Historical Explanation: Lodewijk Meyer and Benedict de Spinoza"], *Studia Spinozana* 11 (1995): 227–300; and J. Samuel Preus, "A Hidden Opponent in Spinoza's *Tractatus*," *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 3 (1995): 361–338; Pierre Macherey, "Louis Meyer, interprète de l'Écriture," (1989) in *Avec Spinoza. Études sur la doctrine et l'histoire du spinozisme* [With Spinoza: Studies about the Doctrine and the History of Spinozism], by Pierre Macherey (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 168–172; Jacqueline Lagrée, "Sens et vérité: philosophie et théologie chez L. Meyer et Spinoza" ["Meaning and Truth: Philosophy and Theology in L. Meyer and Spinoza"], *Studia Spinozana* 4 (1988): 75–92; Jacqueline Lagrée, "Louis Meyer et la *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres*. Projet cartésien, horizon spinoziste ["Lodewijk Meyer and *Philosophy as the Interpreter of S. Scripture:* Cartesian Project, Spinozist Perspective"], *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 1 (1987): 31–44; Sylvain Zac, *Spinoza et l'interprétation de l'Écriture* [*Spinoza and the Interpretation of Scripture*] (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965), 27–29. James Samuel Preus has done a lot to help us see that Spinoza's criticisms of Maimonides in his *TTP* is also a veiled critique of Spinoza's friend and contemporary Meyer. However, it is also clear that Spinoza is in fact taking on Maimonides himself, and specifically his *Guide of the Perplexed*, as James Arthur Diamond has recently demonstrated by examining carefully Spinoza's discussion of the word "spirit." See James Arthur Diamond, "Maimonides, Spinoza, and Buber Read the Hebrew Bible: The Hermeneutical Keys of Divine 'Fire' and 'Spirit' (*Ruach*)," *Journal of Religion* 91 (2011): 320–343, at 321–336.

32 See Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 259, 281, 342–343, 388, 546; Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion, and Politics: The Theologico-Political Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012), 9–11, 92, 144–147, 150, 155, 218; Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2012), 48, 60, 116;

his ticket to modernity."[33] Hahn and Wiker explain that, "… Meyer's *Philosophia* and Spinoza's *Tractatus* often travelled together as one book, a marriage that made perfect sense. Meyer provided the framework as a prolegomenon, and Spinoza … spelled out the full consequences, consequences all the more radical precisely because of Spinoza's radicalizing of Descartes."[34] I think this is generally correct, even though Meyer's work is almost certainly one of the main implied targets of Spinoza's criticism in his *TTP*, and although Spinoza disagrees with Descartes. Descartes' methodic doubt was an important underlying tool for Spinoza's biblical criticism. Moreover, although Spinoza took issue with Meyer's particular application of Cartesian philosophy to biblical interpretation, it likely had more to do with the traditional theological views concerning inspiration that Meyer retained than rationalism. As Preus makes clear, Meyer was "attempting to show how scripture's divine truths might be recovered through a philosophical method."[35] To drive the point home, Hahn and Wiker correctly identify Spinoza's debt to Descartes when they state that, "… Spinoza's entire philosophical approach, which undergirds his exegetical method, is based upon a radicalization of Descartes's project, one that itself rests on a presumed identity of being (nature) and the mathematical mode of human knowing."[36] Descartes' universe was Spinoza's universe.[37]

Michael Mack, *Spinoza and the Specters of Modernity: The Hidden Enlightenment of Diversity from Spinoza to Freud* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 7 and 11 n. 1; Michelle Beyssade, "Deux latinistes: Descartes et Spinoza" ["Two Latinists: Descartes and Spinoza"], in *Spinoza to the Letter: Studies in Words, Texts and Books*, ed. Fokke Akkerman and Piet Steenbakkers (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 55–68; Wiep van Bunge, *From Stevin to Spinoza: An Essay on Philosophy in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), entire book, especially 34–121, for situating Spinoza within his Dutch Cartesian context; Margaret D. Wilson, "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 89–141, at 89–90; Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Ethical Theory," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 267–314, at 267; Michael Della Rocca, "Mental Content and Skepticism in Descartes and Spinoza," *Studia Spinozana* 10 (1994): 19–42; Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1988), entire book; Edwin M. Curley, "Spinoza's Geometric Method," *Studia Spinozana* 2 (1986): 151–169. Susan James writes that, "Just as Descartes urges us to shed our prejudices about the natural world and only to accept ideas that we cannot doubt, Spinoza extends this project to theology by setting out to shake off his preconceptions about what Scripture says, and only accept claims that he is absolutely sure it asserts" (144–145).

33 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 206.

34 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 355. On the following page, Hahn and Wiker explain, "Clearly, Spinoza's philosophy and hence his treatment of Scripture were part of a larger, more general philosophical movement rooted in the new mechanist-materialist worldview as interpreted according to a mathematical-mechanical approach, and which had direct implications for a radically new approach to Scripture. Spinoza would go on to provide one" (356).

35 Preus, *Spinoza*, 38 n. 14.

36 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 546.

37 Moreover, as Spinoza begins his *TTP* by lamenting wars that have come about on account of

As important as Descartes was for Spinoza's initial philosophy and for applying Cartesian methodic doubt to Scripture, Francis Bacon was probably even more significant for Spinoza's purposes of developing a historical method, patterned on the then burgeoning hard sciences.[38] The hidden influence here is that of nominalism (and also Averroism).[39] Michael Waldstein sums up the history by explaining how William of Ockham took Scotus' voluntarism further, transforming it into nominalism. Luther was completely indebted to nominalism and passed it on to Protestants. Both Descartes and Bacon learned nominalist philosophy and bequeathed it to modernity through their reconceptualization of the world.[40] What is missing from this brief summary is the role of Francisco Suárez mediating the scholastic tradition filtered through nominalism to both Bacon and Descartes.[41]

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religious strife, so too Descartes situates his own *Discourse on Method* within the milieu of the Thirty Years' War. See the comments on this in Gillespie, *Theological Origins of Modernity*, 185.

38 See for example, Juan Francisco Manrique Charry, "La herencia de Bacon en la doctrina spinocista del lenguaje" ["The Heritage of Bacon in the Spinozist Doctrine of Language"], *Universitas Philosophica* 54 (2010): 121–130; Preus, *Spinoza*, 7 n. 19, 24 n. 73, 26 n. 80, 38, 158 n. 9, 159 n. 12, 161–168, 163 n. 20–21, 181, and 195; Alan Gabbey, "Spinoza's Natural Science and Methodology," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 142–191, at 170–172; Alan Donagan, "Spinoza's Theology," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 343–382, at 343; Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 16–17; and Zac, *Spinoza*, 29–32.

39 See Hahn and Wiker's very good chapter, "The First Cracks of Secularism: Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham," in *Politicizing the Bible*, 17–59, which lays the groundwork for both how Averroist (via Marsilius) and nominalist (via Ockham) philosophy will undergird later biblical criticism as it develops, especially in the Reformation and its aftermath leading up through the Enlightenment. Their later chapters do a good job of integrating this material, showing how it plays out throughout history as biblical scholarship becomes critical. See also Gillespie's chapter, "The Nominalist Revolution and the Origin of Modernity," in *Theological Origins of Modernity*, 19–43.

40 Waldstein, "*Analogia Verbi*," 99–101. See also Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 36–38, 49; Steven Matthews, *Theology and Science in the Thought of Francis Bacon* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and Gillespie, *Theological Origins of Modernity*, 37–41.

41 For example, Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 53; Roger Ariew, *Descartes Among the Scholastics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), entire book for the late medieval scholastic context for Descartes' thought, but especially 3–4, 49–54, 71–72 for Suárez's influence; Gillespie, *Theological Origins of Modernity*, 174, 190; Emmanuel Faye, "Dieu trompeur, mauvais génie et origine de l'erreur selon Descartes et Suarez" ["Deceptive God, Evil Genius and the Origin of Error According to Descartes and Suárez"], *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 126 (2001): 61–72; J.-L. Marion, "A propos de Suarez et Descartes" ["On Suárez and Descartes"], *Revue internationale de philosophie* 50 (1996): 109–131; and Norman J. Wells, "Objective Reality of Ideas in Descartes, Caterus, and Suárez," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 33–61. Reviewing some of the reference material in Étienne Gilson, *Index scolastico-cartésien* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1912) is instructive here. Gilson's introduction mentions how neither Bacon, Descartes, nor Spinoza thought in a complete vacuum, but were in fact all three indebted to prior philosophical work within late medieval scholasticism. At one point Ariew insightfully hints that Suárez "seems to have been as much a Scotist as a Thomist (or perhaps may be better understood as neither Thomist nor Scotist)" (*Descartes*, 87). Indeed, it seems that although St. Thomas is certainly one of Suárez's primary masters, he filters St. Thomas through his other masters, Scotus and Ockham, as well as the general Jesuit reading of the

Michael Allen Gillespie situates Bacon firmly within his nominalist context and details the "extent of the power sought by Bacon" (in Waldstein's words).[42] This picture lifts the veil which Spinoza carefully placed over his hermeneutic. As we shall see below, as Bacon called for the torture of nature for the sake of power, so Spinoza sounds the call to eviscerate Scripture, with a specific political power in mind.[43] His use of history as the sharpened instrument will be the tool he will use.

Wielding History as a Weapon

For Spinoza, history did not so much have to do with development over time, rather, "The meaning of the term 'history,' for Spinoza, corresponded to the fundamental basis of the Greek *historein*, the critical examination of facts. For him there was a close analogy between the sphere of nature and the past events as facts to be transmitted. More precisely, history has to do with obtaining the true definition of the phenomena that were common in nature."[44] More than Herodotus or Thucydides, however, Spinoza was adapting a Baconian method to redeploy in the study of the history of the text of the Bible, or, more appropriately, he was using a Baconian method applied to the history *behind* the biblical texts.

What Spinoza presents us with in his *TTP* is a sort of Magna Carta of modern biblical criticism. He presents a fundamental shift in how the study of the Bible is to proceed. James Kugel claims that, "In a few pages of his remarkable little book the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Spinoza outlined a new proposal for *how* the Bible was to be read, and this program became the marching orders of biblical scholars for the next three centuries."[45] Indeed, modern biblical critics would

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Dominican Scholastic tradition. I am indebted to Victor Velarde-Mayol for bringing this to my attention. Significantly, Jakob Freudenthal's very important but apparently all-but completely forgotten 1887 essay on Spinoza provided important background information highlighting the influence of medieval scholasticism (including Suárez) on Spinoza. See J. Feudenthal, "Spinoza und die Scholastik" ["Spinoza and Scholasticism"], in *Philosophische Aufsätze. Eduard Zeller zu seinem fünfzigjährigen Doctor-Jubiläum gewidmet* [*Philosophical Essays: Festschrift on the Occasion of Eduard Zeller's Fifty-Year Anniversary of his Doctorate*] (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1887), 84–138.

42 Gillespie, *Theological Origins of Modernity*, 38–39.

43 Whether or not Bacon actually envisioned "torturing" nature through experimentation can be questioned. Peter Pesic challenges this notion, arguing instead that Bacon envisioned experimentation with nature to be a mutually difficult "trial" between the scientist and nature. See Peter Pesic, "Wrestling with Proteus: Francis Bacon and the 'Torture' of Nature," *Isis* 90 (1999): 81–94. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the description of the experimentation of nature in Bacon's method is that of being physically ripped apart, dissected. No such physical dissection and thus destruction is envisioned on behalf of the scientist.

44 Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 4: From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, trans. by Leo G. Perdue (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010 [2001]), 101.

45 Kugel, *How to Read*, 31. See also Dominique Barthélemy's comments that "Spinoza … presents a sort of 'discourse on method' for biblical criticism in chapters seven to ten of his *Tractatus*" ("History of Old Testament," 53). And later, in the same introductory essay, "… Spinoza clearly formulated for the first time the agenda of what would later be called 'higher criticism'" (54).

follow the rough outlines of Spinoza's method even when they departed from his conclusions and from his philosophical starting points. It should be made clear, however, that far from merely attempting to construct an objective method for the scientific study of the Bible, Spinoza intended his method to serve his politics, as Shlomo Pines so clearly states, "The exegesis and the critical historiography of Spinoza aided him well in his polemic and political propaganda. And in fact, this was without a doubt the principal intention for which he invented his exegetical and historical method."[46]

This is the danger in any attempt to distance oneself from the biblical narratives in order to secure a neutral or objective stance towards Scripture; to be neutral is to pick a side, it is to have a specific secular commitment. It is impossible to be completely free of theological and philosophical commitments when approaching Scripture. Spinoza's method, despite the ostensible intent to be of use to common people over and against the ruling theological political elite, requires a tremendous amount of education and effort. Israel comments that, "Perhaps the most formidable aspect of the *TTP*, viewed from a historical perspective, however, was precisely that it set out a new critical methodology and expertise in Hebrew philology resulting in a set of extremely challenging propositions designed to curtail theology's sway which are then pressed into the service of a general system and a body of moral philosophy that is in turn integrally linked to a particular kind of republican political thought."[47] The political motivations are ever present in Spinoza's *theo-political* work, as Menachem Lorberbaum clarifies, unmasking Spinoza's hidden purpose: "The agenda of the *TTP* is hence twofold: it seeks to destroy, to the extent possible, the theological foundations of institutionalized religion, and concomitantly to salvage a significant kernel that would enable the channeling of the elements of existing historical religions for the purposes of the sovereign."[48]

Spinoza did not invent wholesale the technical principles of the criticism that he wielded in his theo-political battle; they had already existed for some time. He inherited (in some cases directly in other cases indirectly) specific arguments against traditional attributions of authorship from much earlier traditions—

46 Shlomo Pines, "Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Maimonides and Kant," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 20 (1968): 3–54, at 17. My own English translation.

47 Israel, "Early Dutch and German Reaction," 85. See also Magne Sæbø's comment that, "The critical philosophy of Spinoza—and of the subsequent Spinozism—not only encouraged rationalization and secularization but promoted even a shift of authority, from theology to philosophy, from biblical revelation-based faith and ecclesiastical tradition to the scepticism of critical minds" ("From the Renaissance," 41).

48 Lorberbaum, "Spinoza's Theological-Political," 169.

Gnostic sources,[49] Porphyry,[50] Ibn Hazm,[51] Ibn Ezra,[52] et al. Further textual and source critical issues had already emerged in the work of Peter Abelard,[53] Lorenzo Valla,[54] Erasmus,[55] et al, as well as from Spinoza's contemporaries Louis Cappel,[56] Isaac Vossius,[57] et al. Even his lengthy comments concerning the introduction of

49 Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Politics of Biblical Interpretation: A 'Criticism of Criticism,'" *New Blackfriars* 91 (2010): 528–545, at 530; and Jeffrey L. Morrow, "The Modernist Crisis and the Shifting of Catholic Views on Biblical Inspiration," *Letter & Spirit* 6 (2010): 265–280, at 267.

50 Morrow, "Politics of Biblical Interpretation," 530; and Morrow, "Modernist Crisis," 267.

51 Morrow, "Politics of Biblical Interpretation," 530–532; Morrow, "Modernist Crisis," 267–268; and R. David Freedman, "The Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 19 (1989): 31–38.

52 Barthélemy, "History of Old Testament," 3–5; Gibert, *L'invention* [*Invention*], 230–236; Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation Volume 2: From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009 [1994]), 234–246; Uriel Simon, "Abraham ibn Ezra," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Volume I: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300) Part 2: The Middle Ages*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 377–387; Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); and Angel Sáenz-Badillos, "Abraham ibn Ezra: Between Tradition and Philology," *Zutot* 2 (2003): 85–94.

53 Constant J. Mews and Micha J. Perry, "Peter Abelard, Heloise and Jewish Biblical Exegesis in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62 (2011): 3–19; Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation 2*, 143–151; and Ulrich Köpf, "The Institutional Framework of Christian Exegesis in the Middle Ages," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament I/2*, ed. Sæbø, 148–179, at 160.

54 J. Cornelia Linde, "Lorenzo Valla and the Authenticity of Sacred Texts," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 60 (2011): 35–63; Gibert, *L'invention* [*Invention*], 39–46; Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2010), 12 and 22; Debora Kuller Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Waco: Baylor University, 2010 [1994]), 17–20 and 47–49; Preus, *Spinoza*, 32 n. 101 and 181; Ronald K. Delph, "Valla Grammaticus, Agostino Steuco, and the Donation of Constantine," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996): 55–77; and Jerry H. Bentley, "Biblical Philology and Christian Humanism: Lorenzo Valla and Erasmus as Scholars of the Gospels," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8 (1977): 8–28.

55 Arnoud Visser, "Thirtieth Annual Erasmus Birthday Lecture: Erasmus, the Church Fathers and the Ideological Implications of Philology," *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 31 (2011): 7–31; Gibert, *L'invention* [*Invention*], 47–63; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 12–17; Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, 17 and 19–22; and Erika Rummel, "The Textual and Hermeneutic Work of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament 2*, ed. Sæbø, 215–230.

56 Barthélemy, "History of Old Testament," 16–24, 27–30, 33–35, and 51–52; Gibert, *L'invention* [*Invention*], 94–101; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 19–22; Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation 4*, 75–77; Shuger, *Renaissance Bible*, 14–15; Stephen G. Burnett, "Later Christian Hebraists," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament 2*, ed. Sæbø, 785–801, at 789–792; Preus, *Spinoza*, 32 n. 100 and 97 n. 90–91; Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," 390; and M.H. Goshen-Gottstein, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament: Rise, Decline, Rebirth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 365–399, at 372–376 and 374 n. 34.

57 Eric Jorink and Dirk van Miert, "Introduction: The Challenger: Isaac Vossius and the European World of Learning," in *Isaac Vossius (1618–1689): Between Science and Scholarship*, eds. Eric Jorink and Dirk van Miert (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1–14; Colette Nativel, "Isaac Vossius, entre Philologie et Philosophie" ["Isaac Vossius, between Philology and Philosophy"], in *Isaac Vossius*, eds. Jorink and van Miert, 243–254; Eric Jorink, "'Horrible and Blasphemous': Isaac La Peyrère, Isaac Vossius and the Emergence of Radical Biblical Criticism in the Dutch Republic,"

vowel pointing in the Hebrew text of the OT shows his awareness of the more recent debates from Elias Levita to the Buxtorf brothers.[58] Unfortunately, insufficient attention has been paid to the influence of medieval Muslim philosophy and biblical criticism on Spinoza, although some wonderful studies in this regard do exist.[59] Spinoza's knowledge of both Maimonides and Ibn Ezra would be one clear means of having such thought mediated to him, but he likely was aware of segments of medieval Muslim thought more directly.[60]

in *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700 Volume 1*, eds. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 429–450, at 433 and 441–447; and Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," 390.

58 Barthélemy, "History of Old Testament," 13–20, 28–29, 34, and 36; Gibert, *L'invention* [*Invention*], 27, 237–245, 281–283; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 19–20; Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation 4*, 73–76; Deena Aranoff, "Elijah Levita: A Jewish Hebraist," *Jewish History* 23 (2009): 17–40; Burnett, "Later Christian Hebraists," 787–789; James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 697–698 n. 60; Zelda Kahan Newman, "Elye Levita: A Man and His Book on the Cusp of Modernity," *Shofar* 24 (2006): 90–109; Preus, *Spinoza*, 32 n. 100, 97 n. 90–91, 181; Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Goshen-Gottstein, "Textual Criticism," 371–372, 375, 375 n. 38; and Richard A. Muller, "The Debate Over the Vowel Points and the Crisis in Orthodox Hermeneutics," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980): 53–72.

59 Youcef Djedi, "Spinoza et l'islam: un état des lieux" ["Spinoza and Islam: The State of the Question"], *Philosophiques* 37 (2010): 275–298; Carlos Fraenkel, "Spinoza on Philosophy and Religion: The Averroistic Sources," in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, eds. Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti and Justin Smith (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 58–81; Rafael Ramón Guerrero, "Filósofos hispano-musulmanes y Spinoza: Avempace y Abentofail" ["Hispano-Muslim Philosophers and Spinoza: Avempace and Ibn Tufail"], in *Spinoza y España: Actas del Congreso Internacional sobre «Relaciones entre Spinoza y España» (Almagro, 5–7 noviembre 1992)* [*Spinoza and Spain: Acts of the International Congress about "Relations between Spinoza and Spain" (Almagro, 5–7 November 1992)*], ed. Atilano Domínguez (Almagro: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 1994), 125–132; Juan Antonio Pacheco, "El 'Mahâsim al-mayâlis' de Ibn al-Arif y la Etica de Spinoza" ["The 'Mahâsim al-mayâlis' of Ibn al-Arif and the Ethics of Spinoza"], *La Ciudad de Dios* 203 (1990): 671–687; Roger Arnaldez, "Spinoza et la pensée arabe" ["Spinoza and Arabic Thought"], *Revue de Synthèse* 99 (1978): 151–174; Irving I. Horowitz, "Averroism and the Politics of Philosophy," *Journal of Politics* 22 (1960): 698–727; Stephen Chak Tornay, "Averroes' Doctrine of the Mind," *Philosophical Review* 52 (1943): 270–288; and Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning: Volume I* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1934), 8–13, 30, 125–126, 157, 189–190, 190 n. 3, 197–199, 284.

60 Carlos Fraenkel, "Reconsidering the Case of Elijah Delmedigo's Averroism and its Impact on Spinoza," in *Renaissance Averroism and its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anna Akasoy and Guido Guiglioni (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 213–236; Carlos Fraenkel, "Could Spinoza Have Presented the *Ethics* as the True Content of the Bible," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy* 4 (2008): 1–50; and Craig Martin, "Rethinking Renaissance Averroism," *Intellectual History Review* 17 (2007): 3–28. Youcef Djedi concludes, "A modern philosopher, Spinoza nevertheless is an heir of Judeo-Islamic thought" ("Spinoza," 298, my own translation).

Spinoza's Discourse on Method: Philosophy and Politics Unite

One key move Spinoza makes in his criticism is a more developed criticism of the sources. Spinoza employed his Cartesian doubt to the traditional attributions of authorship in the OT. The purpose was not to ascertain who actually was responsible for writing the books—for which he tentatively credits Ezra—although this was one central quest for which his method explicitly calls. Rather, Spinoza's source criticism served a different purpose. Dominique Barthélemy clarifies how, "Spinoza, as La Peyrère before him, thought, therefore, that if it could be shown that the books of the Old Testament had not been written by Moses and the Prophets but by much later compilers, one would be obliged to question the sacred nature of this collection of books."[61]

In his *TTP* Spinoza outlines the contours of his method of biblical interpretation, on what he argues must be followed in order to arrive at the true meaning of the text.[62] At the outset of his work, Spinoza explains how he came about writing the *TTP*. He was upset with religious strife and the dearth of recourse to "the natural light of reason" around him. Thus, he writes, "I resolved in all seriousness to make a fresh examination of Scripture with a free and unprejudiced mind, and to assert nothing about it, and to accept nothing as its teaching, which I did not quite clearly derive from it. With this proviso in mind, I devised a method for interpreting the sacred volumes."[63] One of the key moves Spinoza makes—indeed,

61 Barthélemy, "History of Old Testament," 63.

62 On Spinoza's method, see Spinoza, *TTP*, Preface no. 10, Ch. 7 no. 2–18; Israel, 8–9, 98–111; Akkerman, 68–71 and 278–311; Gebhardt, 9, 98–112; Steven Nadler, *A Book Forged in Hell: Spinoza's Scandalous Treatise and the Birth of the Secular Age* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2011), 134–142; Barthélemy, "History of Old Testament," 53–57; Gibert, *L'invention* [*The Invention*], 161–165; Sinai, "Spinoza and Beyond," 196–203; Robert Barron, "Biblical Interpretation and Theology: Irenaeus, Modernity, and Vatican II," *Letter & Spirit* 5 (2009): 173–191, at 181–182; Steven Nadler, "The Bible Hermeneutics of Baruch de Spinoza," in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament II*, ed. Sæbø, 827–836, at 831–834; Paul J. Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics: A Reading of Benedict Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 16; Walther, "Biblische Hermeneutik" ["Biblical Hermeneutics"], 227–299; Manfred Walther, "Biblische Hermeneutik und/oder theologische Politik bei Hobbes und Spinoza: Historische Studie zur Theorie der Ausdifferenzierung von Religion und Politik in der Neuzeit" ["Biblical Hermeneutics and/or Theological Politics in Hobbes and Spinoza: A Historical Study of the Theory of Differentiation of Religion and Politics in the Modern Age"], in *Hobbes e Spinoza* [*Hobbes and Spinoza*], ed. Bostrenghi, 623–669; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics II: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1989), 14–19; Pierre-François Moreau, "Le méthode d'interprétation de l'Écriture Sainte: déterminations et limites" ["The Method of Interpretation of Sacred Scripture: Demarcations and Limits], in *Spinoza: science et religion* [*Spinoza: Science and Religion*], ed. Renée Bouveresse (Paris: Vrin, 1988), 109–114; and Juan José Garrido, "El método histórico-crítico de interpretación de la Escritura según Spinoza" ["The Historical-Critical Method of Interpretation of Scripture according to Spinoza"], in *El método en teología. Actas del primer Simposio de Teología e Historia (29–31 mayo 1980)* [*Method in Theology: Acts of the First Symposium of Theology and History (29–31 May 1980)*], ed. The Faculty of Theology of Saint Vincent Ferrer (Valencia: The Faculty of Theology of Saint Vincent Ferrer, 1981), 269–281.

63 Spinoza, *TTP*, Preface, no. 10; Israel, 8–9; Akkerman, 68–69; and Gebhardt, 9.

many scholars see this as the main purpose in writing his *TTP*—is the radical and absolute separation of faith from reason and of theology from philosophy.[64] Spinoza claims that he had no intent on making faith and theology subordinate to reason and philosophy. Indeed, his 15th chapter is entitled, "Where it is shown that theology is not subordinate to reason nor reason to theology, and why it is we are persuaded of the authority of Holy Scripture."[65] Nevertheless, since, for Spinoza, theology and faith tend to deal solely with interior matters, often with matters of the imagination, and reason deals with objective reality, for those who do not share his mechanistic worldview, who resist the privatization of their faith, Spinoza's program takes theology and faith into exile.

The weapon of Spinoza's method is the acid of his historical enquiry. Scripture is to be studied historically, using "no other light than that of natural reason," as with any other ancient book.[66] Levenson remarks, "History supplied Spinoza

64 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 14 no. 1–14, Ch. 15 no. 1–10; Israel, 178–194; Akkerman, 464–503; Gebhardt, 173–188; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 57, 94, 134–135, 142, 218; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 20, 65; Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, 10, 12; Brayton Polka, *Between Philosophy and Religion: Spinoza, the Bible, and Modernity Volume I: Hermeneutics and Ontology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 3 and 25; Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, rev. and expanded ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 244; Preus, *Spinoza*, 15 n. 45, 74, 81, 194, and 207; George M. Gross, "Reading the Bible with Spinoza," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 7 (1995): 21–38, at 29; Harvey Shulman, "The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 7 (1995): 39–55, at 44 and 46; and Sylvain Zac, "Philosophie et théologie chez Spinoza" ["Philosophy and Theology in Spinoza"], *Revue de Synthèse* 89–91 (1978): 81–95.

65 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 15 title; Israel, 186; Akkerman, 482–483; and Gebhardt, 180.

66 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 18; Israel, 111; Akkerman, 310–311; and Gebhardt, 112. Matthew Levering comments astutely, "Spinoza's key principle corresponds, in a certain way, to the parallel that the medieval (and some patristic) theologians had drawn between 'the book of Nature' and 'the book of Scripture.' He argues that one must interpret nature and Scripture by using the same methods. … The difference with patristic-medieval interpretation thus begins with a different understanding of 'nature': for the patristic-medieval tradition, nature is a created participatory reality that signifies its Creator and possesses a teleological order; for Spinoza nature simply yields empirical data within the linear time-space continuum. It is not that the medieval rejected empirical study of nature; rather the difference is that Spinoza's 'nature' is metaphysically thin" (*Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 115). See also Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 280–281, 361–362, 364–368, 385, 391–392, 544; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 54, 142, 145, 148, 161, 178; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 32, 66, 76–103, 132–135, 137, 139; Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal, introduction to *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, eds. Melamed and Rosenthal, 1–10, at 1; Thomas Hippler, "Spinoza et l'histoire" ["Spinoza and History"], *Studia Spinozana* 16 (2008): 155–176; Preus, *Spinoza*, ix, 2, 16–17, 22, 54, 98, 100, 156, 158; Gilbert Boss, "L'histoire chez Spinoza et Leibniz" ["History in Spinoza and Leibniz"], *Studia Spinozana* 6 (1990): 179–200; Richard H. Popkin, "Philosophy and the History of Philosophy," *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 625–632, at 626–627; and Sylvain Zac, "Durée et histoire chez Spinoza" ["Time and History in Spinoza"], *La Nouvelle Critique* 113 (1978): 29–36.

with the coffin into which he placed the Torah."[67] Spinoza's method required an exhaustive account of the history and philological points of each text, after which discussion he proceeds to tell his readers that such an attempt is impossible.[68] The main points of his method are as follows:

A. The construction of a "natural history" of the Bible: "The [correct] method of interpreting nature consists above all in constructing a natural history, from which we derive the definitions of natural things, as from certain data. Likewise, to interpret Scripture, we need to assemble a genuine history of it and to deduce the thinking of the Bible's authors by valid inferences from this history, as from certain data and principles."[69]

B. To construct this history from Scripture alone.[70]

C. Constructing a history of Scripture will proceed via several steps:

(1) it "must include the nature and properties of the language in which the biblical books were composed and in which their authors were accustomed to speak."[71]

This step will further involve:

(1.a) to "investigate *all* the possible meanings that *every* single phrase in common usage can admit."[72]

(2) it "must gather together the opinions expressed in each individual book and organize them by subject so that we

67 Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 95.

68 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 375–377; Barthélemy, "History of Old Testament," 56–58; Morrow, "Early Modern," 17–20; Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation 4*, 102–103; Morrow, "Bible in Captivity," 296 and 299; Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, 16; and Dungan, *History of the Synoptic Problem*, 172.

69 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 2; Israel, 98; Akkerman, 278–281; Gebhardt, 98.

70 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 2–5; Israel, 98–100; Akkerman, 280–283; Gebhardt, 98–99.

71 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 100; Akkerman, 282–283; Gebhardt, 99–100.

72 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 100; Akkerman, 282–283; Gebhardt, 100. Emphasis added. Here Spinoza sees Hebrew as being the most important language, including for the New Testament.

may have available by this means *all* the statements that are found on each topic."[73]

(2.a) then the exegete must "make note of any that are ambiguous or obscure or seem to contradict others."[74]

(3) the exegete "must explain the circumstance of *all* the books of the prophets."[75]

This final step will involve:

(3.a) investigating all aspects of "the life … of the author of each individual book."[76]

(3.b) investigating all aspects of the "character … of the author of each individual book."[77]

(3.c) investigating all aspects of the "particular interests of the author of each individual book."[78]

These include:

(3.c.i) "who exactly" was "the author of each individual book."[79]

(3.c.ii) "on what occasion … the author of each individual book" wrote their book.[80]

(3.c.iii) "for whom … the author of each individual book" wrote their book.[81]

73 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 100; Akkerman, 282–285; Gebhardt, 100. Emphasis added.

74 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 100; Akkerman, 284–285; Gebhardt, 100.

75 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101. Emphasis added.

76 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

77 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

78 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

79 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

80 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

81 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

(3.c.iv) "in what language ... the author of each individual book" wrote their book.[82]

(3.d) the exegete must investigate "the fate of each book."[83]

This includes:

(3.d.i) "how it was first received."[84]

(3.d.ii) "whose hands it came into."[85]

(3.d.iii) "how many variant readings there have been of its text."[86]

(3.d.iv) "by whose decision it was received among the sacred books."[87]

(3.d.v) "how all the books which are now accepted as sacred came to form a single corpus."[88]

D. "*All* this, I contend, has to be dealt with in a history of the Bible."[89]

Spinoza then emphasizes that, "Only when we have this history of Scripture before us and have made up our minds not to accept anything as a teaching of the prophets which does not follow from this history or may be very clearly derived from it, will it be time to begin investigating the minds of the prophets and the Holy Spirit."[90] Immediately after this, Spinoza emphasizes that this too "requires a method."[91] He then proceeds to enumerate the steps involved in this method, after which he examines how to study philosophical questions in Scripture (again with a proper method in hand).

82 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

83 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

84 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

85 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

86 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

87 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

88 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101.

89 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 101; Akkerman, 286–287; Gebhardt, 101. Emphasis added.

90 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 6; Israel, 102; Akkerman, 288–289; Gebhardt, 102.

91 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 6; Israel, 102; Akkerman, 288–289; Gebhardt, 102.

He then concedes some serious obstacles involved that make his method prohibitively difficult: (1) "it requires a *perfect* knowledge of the Hebrew language";[92] (2) there is also "our inability fully to reconstruct the history of Hebrew";[93] (3) moreover, "the very nature and structure of the [Hebrew] language create so many uncertainties that it is impossible to devise a method which will show us how to uncover the true sense of all the statements of Scripture with assurance";[94] (4) "numerous ambiguities [in Hebrew] are inevitable, and … no method will resolve them all";[95] and finally, (5) the method "requires a history of the vicissitudes of all the biblical books, and most of this is unknown to us."[96] One of the purposes of all of this tedium is to narrow down the point of Scripture to a few general moral principles (love of neighbor and obedience to the state) which in turn served both his religious and political ideals.[97]

Sola Scriptura = Nulla Scriptura

Within his method, Spinoza appears to adopt the Protestant notion of *sola Scriptura*; he claims to interpret Scripture by recourse to Scripture alone. His advocacy of a sola scriptura-like position is aimed against ecclesiastical authorities.[98] To adapt Jaroslav Pelikan's witticism, Spinoza's adherence to *sola Scriptura* notwithstanding, he "showed that the 'Scriptura' has never been 'sola.'"[99]

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92 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 11; Israel, 106; Akkerman, 296–299; Gebhardt, 106. Emphasis added.

93 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 12; Israel, 106; Akkerman, 298–299; Gebhardt, 106.

94 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 12; Israel, 106; Akkerman, 298–299; Gebhardt, 106–107.

95 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 14; Israel, 108; Akkerman, 302–303; Gebhardt, 109.

96 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 15; Israel, 109; Akkerman, 304–305; Gebhardt, 109.

97 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 368–370, 373–374, 377–379; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 188, 189 n. 9, 194, 196, 203, 205; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 141–142, 154–156; Moira Gatens, "Spinoza's Disturbing Thesis: Power, Norms and Fiction in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," *History of Political Thought* 30 (2009): 455–468; Dungan, *History of the Synoptic Problem*, 174, 216, 238, and 253; Andrew Fix, "Bekker and Spinoza," in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism Around 1700: Papers Presented at the International Colloquium, Held at Rotterdam, 5–8 October 1994*, eds. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 23–40, at 30; and Norman O. Brown, "Philosophy and Prophecy: Spinoza's Hermeneutics," *Political Theory* 14 (1986): 195–213, at 199.

98 Preus, *Spinoza*, 12, 12–13 n. 38, 134, 134 n. 91; and Martin Greschat, "Bibelkritik und Politik: Anmerkungen zu Spinozas Theologisch-politischem Traktat" ["Biblical Criticism and Politics: Notes on Spinoza's Theological-political Treatise], in *Text—Wort—Glaube: Kurt Aland Gewidmet* [*Text—Word—Faith: Festschrift for Kurt Aland*], ed. Martin Brecht (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 324–343, especially 331–332, show the differences between the Reformers' understanding of *sola Scriptura* and Spinoza's.

99 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300–1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), vii, where he writes, "Despite their protestations of 'sola Scriptura,' the Reformers showed that the 'Scriptura' has never been 'sola.'"

This brings us to another key interpretive move by Spinoza, and that is his exaltation of literal exegesis.[100] Indeed, Yirmiyahu Yovel labels Spinoza "the enemy of allegorization,"[101] and his biblical hermeneutic as "an anti-allegorical method of interpretation."[102] And yet, Spinoza's literal exegesis smacks of the secular allegorism I described in the introduction.[103] Spinoza rapidly turns shades of Machiavelli when we examine his "literal" exegesis in *TTP*. His literal exegesis, or rather his secular allegorization—ostensibly an attempt to unmask the powerful politics at play barely discernable between the lines of the Hebrew text—is a façade for his political machinations.

In order to understand Spinoza's theo-political project, we must understand that he is writing in the midst of his contemporary Dutch political situation.[104]

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100 For example, Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 7, no. 5; Israel, 100–101; Akkerman, 284–285; Gebhardt, 100–101; Comments in Legaspi, "Literal Sense"; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 131; Daniel J. Lasker, "Reflections of the Medieval Jewish–Christian Debate in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Epistles*," in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, eds. Melamed and Rosenthal, 56–71, at 69; Howard Kreisel, "Philosophical Interpretations of the Bible," in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: From Antiquity Through the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Steven Nadler and T.M. Rudavsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 88–120, at 114; Barron, "Biblical Interpretation and Theology," 181–182; Nadler, "Bible Hermeneutics," 834; Kugel, *How to Read*, 32; Preus, *Spinoza*, 95, 189; Popkin, "Spinoza and Bible Scholarship," 306; Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 29, 144, 151, and 231 n. 5; Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics II*, 17; Sylvain Zac, "Spinoza et le langage" ["Spinoza and Language"], *Giornale critic della filosofia italiana* 8 (1977): 612–633; and Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), 42–46.

101 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 144. In context, Yovel is showing how Spinoza uses allegory despite the fact that he opposes allegorical interpretation in general.

102 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 231 n. 5.

103 Jon Levenson demonstrates this basic point when he unmasks Spinoza's hermeneutic of suspicion and discontinuity: "The Bible in Spinoza's naturalistic theology becomes another political text, and its real meaning lies not in its textuality, but in its historical message, of which its own authors may have been unaware. The *meaning* of the Bible belongs to the contemporary moralizing historian. And when the message is derived from the underlying history and not from the manifest text that it often contradicts, then we are very much in the world of modern historical criticism and far indeed from the world of traditional religion …" (*Hebrew Bible*, 96).

104 James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, entire book, especially 2, 4, 13, 30, 40, 52, 141; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 21–25, 33, 110–111, 130; Justin Steinberg, "Spinoza's Curious Defense of Toleration," in *Spinoza's Theological–Political Treatise*, eds. Melamed and Rosenthal, 210–230, at 222; Preus, *Spinoza*, 2, 5, 24, 108; Henri Krop, "Spinoza and the Calvinistic Cartesianism of Lambertus Van Velthuysen," *Studia Spinozana* 15 (1999): 107–136; Steven B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity* (New Haven: Yale University, 1997), entire book; Ernestine Van der Wall, "The *Tractatus Theologico-politicus* and Dutch Calvinism, 1670–1700," *Studia Spinozana* 11 (1995): 201–226; Feuer, *Spinoza*, 70, 119–135; Sylvain Zac, "Le chapitre XVI du *Traité théologico-politique*" ["Chapter 16 of the *Theological-political Treatise*"], *Tijdschrift voor de studie van de Verlichting*, Bruxelles 6 (1978): 137–150; Sylvain Zac, "Spinoza et l'état des Hébreux" ["Spinoza and the Hebrew State"], *Revue Philosophique* 80 (1977): 201–232; and Zac, *Spinoza*, 166.

As Susan James explains, "in seventeenth-century Holland the interpretation of Scripture was … a subject of tense theologico-political conflict."[105] Steven Nadler likewise explains Spinoza's goal for inserting his newly refined method into this ongoing theo-political debate: by deconstructing Scripture's supernatural and divine status Spinoza renders the Bible a dead letter, a natural literary work from which some moral profit may be derived, but one which will be unusable for state politics.[106]

Through his *TTP*, which he shrewdly published anonymously, Spinoza was able to attack several battlefronts at the same time. Through his evisceration of the Torah and his exaltation of the NT and of Jesus in place of Moses, as well as through his stringent critique of Maimonides and the Pharisees (a slightly less-than-veiled reference to Spinoza's Jewish contemporaries), Spinoza was able to exact revenge on the Jewish community that had excommunicated him. His evisceration of the Torah, and his more heavily veiled critique of Christian dogma and NT history, as well as his overt dismissals of Roman Catholic papal authority, struck out against both the Catholic Church and Catholic lands who had threatened to control the Netherlands in the not-so-distant past, as well as against the Calvinist orthodoxy which threatened to take tyrannical control of the Dutch Republic and perhaps convert it into a new Geneva. Finally, his more subtle critique of Maimonides and his comments on philosophy could be taken as pedagogical or collegial jabs at his intellectual sparring partners and comrades in philosophical arms—the Collegiants, Quakers, and other heterodox Protestants with whom he exchanged ideas, especially Meyer.

From Theocracy to Democracy: Spinoza on OT Priesthood

Spinoza's discussion of the change in the OT priesthood from firstborn sons within the tribes of Israel to the sons of Aaron within the priestly tribe of Levi provides a useful examination of Spinoza's method. Here we see clearly the influence of Machiavelli, among others. Machiavelli exerted a great influence on

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105 James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 141.

106 See Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 111, where he pens the following: "By showing that the Bible is not, in fact, the work of a supernatural God—'a message for mankind sent down by God from heaven,' as Spinoza mockingly puts it—but a perfectly natural human document; that the author of the Pentateuch is not Moses; that Hebrew Scripture as a whole is but a compilation of writings composed by fallible and not particularly learned individuals under various historical and political circumstances; that most of these writings were transmitted over generations, to be finally redacted by a latter-day political and religious leader—in short, by naturalizing the Torah and the other books of the Bible and reducing them to ordinary (though morally valuable) works of literature, Spinoza hopes to undercut ecclesiastic influence in politics and other domains and weaken the sectarian dangers facing his beloved Republic."

Spinoza, whom he read assiduously.[107] Graham Hammill has recently argued that, "Machiavelli enables—and Spinoza develops—a critical assessment of absolutism based on its attempt to manipulate and control the theological imaginary upon which political community depends."[108] Moreoever, Machiavelli championed the very secular allegorization this present article seeks to examine in Spinoza.[109]

Spinoza demystifies the Bible, naturalizing the supernatural.[110] He argues forcefully for the impossibility of miracles and demonstrates with sustained argument (spanning an entire chapter) that the prophets, rather than receiving divine oracles from God as a matter of public revelation, were simply possessed

107 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 342–343, 388; Graham Hammill, *The Mosaic Constitution: Political Theology and Imagination from Machiavelli to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 1, 21–22, 32, 66–68, 72, 78, 85–87, and 99; Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François Moreau, introduction to Spinoza, *Œuvres III: Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, ed. Moreau, 3–17, at 14; Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2010), 17–18; Filippo Del Lucchese, *Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza* (London: Continuum, 2009), whole book; Lorberbaum, "Spinoza's Theological-Political," 170–171, 173, 177, and 183 n. 19; Vittorio Morfino, *Il tempo e l'occasione. L'incontro Spinoza Machiavelli* [*The Time and the Occasion: The Encounter between Spinoza and Machiavelli*] (Milan: LED, 2002), entire book; Nadler, *Spinoza*, 111 and 270; Douglas J. Den Uyl, "Power, Politics, and Religion in Spinoza's Political Thought," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 7 (1995): 77–106, at 83; Étienne Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality," *Mededelingen vanwege Het Spinozahuis* 71 (1997): 3–36; Smith, *Spinoza*, 34–38; Edwin Curley, "Kissinger, Spinoza, and Genghis Khan," in *Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Garrett, 315–342, at 315–317, 327–329, 332–333, and 341 n. 35; Bernard Septimus, "Biblical Religion and Political Rationality in Simone Luzzato, Maimonides and Spinoza," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Isadore Twersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1987), 399–433; Eco Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980), 170–181; and Carla Gallicet Calvetti, *Spinoza lettore del Machiavelli* [*Spinoza a Reader of Machiavelli*] (Milan: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1972), entire book.

108 Hammill, *Mosaic Constitution*, 99. Hammill's third chapter, "Spinoza and the Theological Imaginary" (67–99) shows how Spinoza, "one of Machiavelli's most perceptive readers" (22), developed, honed, and took further Machiavelli's work, following the theo-political trajectory Machiavelli initiated.

109 Indeed, Hahn and Wiker insightfully underscore how, "In future exegesis, Machiavelli's mode of procedure is repeated, but in the service of other philosophies. … The pattern set is one in which the philosophy, no matter how far removed it is from the assumptions of the biblical text, becomes the secret knowledge that allows the exegete to wield the exegetical threshing tool. Passages that fit become the key to illumination; passages that do not must either be reinterpreted against the apparent meaning, or inferred to have some less than noble source. … The task of the enlightened exegete, then, is to ferret out all the 'real' passages—the ones that fit the philosophy—and reinterpret the rest, giving some *other* explanation for their appearance in the text" (*Politicizing the Bible*, 145).

110 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 364–368; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 139–184; Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 60; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 76–103; Michael A. Rosenthal, "Miracles, Wonder, and the State," in *Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise*, eds. Melamed and Rosenthal, 231–249, at 231; J. Garrido Zaragoza, "La desmitificación de la Escritura en Spinoza" ["The Demystification of Scripture in Spinoza"], *Taula* 9 (1988), 3–45; Richard H. Popkin, "Hume and Spinoza," *Hume Studies* 5 (1979): 65–93, at 87–89; and Zac, "Spinoza et le langage" ["Spinoza and Language"], 612–633.

of vivid imaginations.[111] As Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker put the matter, "Here, Spinoza revealed the key to his method of interpreting Scripture, even while concealing the ultimate reasons. … *Since* miracles are impossible, *therefore* the scientific exegete must look for another explanation of their common occurrence in Scripture."[112] Unsurprisingly, that explanation was political. In the style of Machiavelli, Spinoza argued that so-called miracles, which in reality must simply have been nothing more than natural phenomena, were described as miracles, not only on account of the piety of the people, but at root on account of the sheer political power of their rulers. Michael Rosenthal explains that, in Spinoza's mind, "Miracles are especially useful not only in producing veneration but also in consolidating and maintaining political power."[113]

Spinoza shared with many of his contemporaries a disdain for the priesthood and any priestly class.[114] This should not simply be read as a criticism of the synagogue officials (although this is certainly true in part), but rather, shares much in common with later 18th and 19th century criticisms of OT priesthood as a guise for attacks on the Catholic priesthood—only for Spinoza, all Christian clergy are in sight. Yovel writes that, "When Spinoza describes the political rule of God through his priestly representatives, he thinks more of the rabbis in the Diaspora than of Moses and the Levites. But his chief targets lie in the Christian world. He aims at the political claims of the pope and the Catholic establishment; at the demands of the Dutch Calvinist *predikanten*" (ministers), among others.[115]

Likewise, Spinoza's views on prophecy are "clearly derived from Spinoza's own scientific account of the nature of prophecy; and although he attempts to find support for it in the Bible itself, in fact this is a general rationalistic presupposition derived from his philosophy and then superimposed on the text."[116] Again, this serves his political program even as it violates his own methodological principles. Just as it is impossible to have the Scripture alone without a tradition to iden-

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111 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 364–368, 371–373; Hammill, *Mosaic Constitution*, 13–14, 72–81; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 51, 94, 130–133; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 76–103; Rosenthal, "Miracles," 231; Gross, "Reading the Bible," 22–36; Popkin, "Hume and Spinoza," 87–89, where he shows that Spinoza's demonstration of the impossibility of miracles is even more forceful than Hume's; André Malet, *Le traité théologico-politique de Spinoza et la pensée biblique* [*The Theological-Political Treatise of Spinoza and Biblical Thought*] (Paris: Sociéte les belles letters, 1966), 118; and Zac, *Spinoza*, 69–82.

112 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 365.

113 Rosenthal, "Miracles," 241.

114 James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 202. Israel explains, "Freethinkers, in short, followed Spinoza in depicting priesthood as professional agents of prejudice, uncritical thinking, and ignorance" (*Enlightenment Contested*, 102).

115 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 196. See also Preus, *Spinoza*, 4–5; and Feuer, *Spinoza*, 69.

116 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics II*, 195 n. 21.

tify what constitutes Scripture and how Scripture should be interpreted, so it is impossible to have a biblical interpretation without philosophical and theological assumptions. As with many later practitioners of historical criticism, Spinoza does not articulate his philosophical assumptions.

Spinoza's political views, like Hobbes's, fit broadly in the Erastian camp—what would be Gallicanism and other forms of Conciliarism in the Catholic world—a theo-political view that ultimately placed power in the hands of the state sovereign. Spinoza emphasized this using his discussion of the Hebrew state to bolster this claim, which included official biblical interpretation (as well as all public expression of religion) to rest in the hands of the head of state.[117] Yovel explains that, "By making the political authorities the sole interpreters of what is considered the word of God, Spinoza grants the secular government a monopoly over the normative domain as a whole—that is, over right and wrong, justice and injustice in all their valid applications."[118]

Starting with the biblical Hebrew state, the "Hebrew Republic," was familiar territory in early modern European political discourse.[119] In *TTP*, Spinoza understands the Israelite theocracy instituted by Moses in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt as an attempt by Moses to bring civil order to their newly formed nation. The golden calf episode reduced Israel to a wretched servitude. The angry God of the wilderness unleashed his wrath against Israel. The Levites thus replaced the firstborn priests. Priestly rule proved a disaster in the history of Israel, instigating rebellion and virtual anarchy. After the monarchy takes over, to bring peace to Israelite society, a new strife ensues, that of throne vs. altar, state ruler vs. priest.[120] Michael Legaspi explains the upshot, that, "Spinoza's Moses harnessed powerful religious impulses and kept dangerous social forces in check by creating

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117 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 382, 386; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 202–203, 262 n. 9; Steinberg, "Spinoza's Curious Defense," 219; Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2010), 130–134; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 132; Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis*, 112 and 137; Joseph B. Sermoneta, "Biblical Anthropology in 'The Guide of the Perplexed' by Moses Maimonides, and its Reversal in the 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus' by Baruch Spinoza," *Topoi* 7 (1988): 241–247, at 245–246; and Zac, "chapitre XVI" ["Chapter 16"], 137–150.

118 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 134.

119 James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 120, 265–269, 271–273; Nelson, *Hebrew Republic*, entire volume; and all of the essays in Schochet, Oz-Salzberger, and Jones, ed., *Political Hebraism*.

120 Spinoza, *TTP*, Ch. 17, no. 7–15 and 26–29; Israel, 213–220 and 225–229; Akkerman, 544–563 and 574–583; Gebhardt, 205–212 and 217–220; Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 383–386; Nadler, *Book Forged in Hell*, 144–146; Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 133–134; Bagley, *Philosophy, Theology, and Politics*, 37; Étienne Balibar, "*Jus-Pactum-Lex*: On the Constitution of the Subject in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*," in *The New Spinoza*, eds. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 171–206; Martin D. Yaffe, "'The Histories and Successes of the Hebrews': The Demise of the Biblical Polity in Spinoza's

a free and equal society held together by piety and common morality. He demonstrated how religion could serve noble political ends."[121]

A Secular Allegory for Political Ends

Spinoza's discussion of the wilderness period, discussed above, provides a useful example of secular allegory. The text seems to say one thing, but for Spinoza it "really" means something else. His literal exegesis amounts to little more than a secular theo-political allegory; what the text "really" means is *Realpolitik*. Levenson notes that, "Now any student of the Hebrew Bible knows that priests, prophets, and kings all take it on the chin quite a bit in that book, and the very worth of all three institutions was questioned at times. But what Spinoza does not respect is the claim of the text itself that each of them was divinely ordained and the fact that, on balance, the Bible is positive about them all."[122]

Spinoza's method is far too restrictive; so much so that it fails miserably on the grounds of explanatory power. This is unsurprising, of course, since Spinoza constructed his method to restrict the range of possible conclusions to support his theo-political project. Part and parcel of this project was to keep Scripture in the past; indeed to distance the exegete from the world of the text as much as possible. As Robert Barron, following Levenson, rightly notes, "this hyperconcentration on the intention of the historical author within his historical period, and in abstraction from the wider literary, theological, and metaphysical context, has led effectively to the relegation of the Bible to the past."[123] For Spinoza, biblical exegesis is "an offensive weapon."[124] In his mind, "biblical hermeneutics is an aggressive activity, offering the philosopher a mode of involvement in the social and cultural processes of his time."[125]

His method has been fairly left intact throughout the centuries since his death. Scholars in the Enlightenment and, later in the midst or wake of the *Kulturkampf*, built upon Spinoza's hermeneutic, honing various aspects while standing on his Machiavellian shoulders to construct theo-political tools of their own to denigrate the Judaism of the other in their midst, and utterly stomp out the Catholic bogeyman they feared might cause harm to the State. Since the end of the nineteenth century, scholars without any hidden agendas—from all backgrounds including Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic—have embraced Spinoza's heritage: historical biblical criticism. They typically do so without much knowledge of its

Theologico-Political Treatise," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 7 (1995): 57–75, at 62–63 and 65–68; and Zac, "Spinoza et l'état" ["Spinoza and the State"], 213.

121 Legaspi, *Death of Scripture*, 134.

122 Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 96.

123 Barron, "Biblical Interpretation and Theology," 182.

124 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics II*, 11.

125 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics II*, 11.

history, and under the assumption that the method itself is neutral. What matters, they think, is how the method is used. To a considerable extent, this is true. The main difficulty is that the method carries within itself problems that have not yet been fully assessed. Pope Benedict XVI called for a purification of historical criticism, whereby it would shine its critical light upon its own historical origins and philosophical assumptions, so as to root out detrimental aspects.[126]

Conclusion

Spinoza contributed to turning the Bible into a material book, like any other.[127] If it is true that the canon originated in the liturgy—as scholarship is increasingly demonstrating—then a proper biblical hermeneutic will naturally be liturgical and sacramental.[128] Although open to history, indeed requiring vigorous historical investigation, such a hermeneutic will starkly contrast with contemporary historical critical ones, which remain grounded in a suspicion of the sources. Spinoza launched criticism in the direction which it has followed. Regarding the titles of *TTP* chapters 7–10, Pierre Gibert notes that they "mark a significant change of paradigm in the critical approach of the biblical corpus."[129]

126 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Conflict," in *God's Word: Scripture—Tradition—Office*, by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, eds. Peter Hünermann and Thomas Söding, trans. by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008 [2005]), 91–126. See also Michael Maria Waldstein, "The Self-Critique of the Historical-Critical Method: Cardinal Ratzinger's Erasmus Lecture," *Modern Theology* 28 (2012): 732–747; and Scott W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids; Brazos, 2009), 25–40.

127 Hammill, *Mosaic Constitution*, 81; James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 128; and Morrow, "Bible in Captivity," 288.

128 That the canon was formed in and for liturgy, see Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University, 2012), 43. On the same page Wilken also shows how the Latin word, *testamentum* (testament), came to be used to translate the Greek word, *diathēkē* (covenant), but even still the idea of the New Covenant/New Testament (*Kainē Diathēkē/Novum Testamentum*) was applied to the Eucharist and only hesitatingly began to be applied to the documents gradually. He cites Origen, and observes that Origen's phraseology suggests "that the terminology was still novel in his day."

129 Gibert, *L'invention* [*The Invention*], 170. My own translation. Jean-Louis Ska similarly notes that: "Spinoza is undoubtedly the father of the historical-critical method and of modern exegesis although he is more a philosopher than a real exegete. To be sure, there is a great distance between the *Treatise* and, say, the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* [*Prolegomena to the History of Israel*] or *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* [*The Composition of the Hexateuch and the Historical Books of the Old Testament*] by Julius Wellhausen. But, to appreciate the novelty of Spinoza's 'natural' interpretation of Scripture (*interpretation naturae*), we should not look first of all for precise exegetical methods and even less for hypotheses about the formation of single biblical books. Spinoza's main contribution to modern exegesis is to be found in his systematic *secular* approach to the *Holy* Scripture. He brought the Bible down to earth and made it possible to hear the different, sometimes discordant, voices which resonate within this literary work" (*Exegesis of the Pentateuch*, 259).

Levenson too emphasizes Spinoza's significance when he clarifies that what Spinoza pioneered "was the systematic transference of the normativity of the Bible from its *manifest text* to its *underlying history* (at least as he reconstructed it)."[130] Were such a method sought for the sake of better understanding the text, were it bereft of anemic Cartesian doubt and nominalistic historical enquiries masking deeper political and often anti-theological agendas, the cause for concern would be far less. With regard to Spinoza and his method, however, Yovel reminds us that this was precisely Spinoza's point, to be a work which had a concrete effect in the politics of his day and for future generations. Spinoza was attempting to make an effective intervention in the course of the social and political events in the Dutch Republic.[131]

The purpose? The evisceration of Scripture. Spinoza wanted the text dissected endlessly to support a particular form of politics in his age and for future generations. Hahn and Wiker make clear: "the historical-critical method as originally designed by Spinoza is neither neutral nor scientific, but is rather the form of biblical studies that purposely transforms the Bible to act as a political support to keep order in a secular state. …"[132] In other words, "To keep the elite from turning against the philosophers, Spinoza fashions an exegetical method that produces the conclusions that reduce Scripture to a merely moral prop for civil order, one that allows the greatest freedom for philosophy."[133] In the end, this would serve other exegetes, often in the very midst of church and state conflicts, in support of ever more secular nation-states over and against the Catholic Church, and later any religious communities who refused the privatization of their faith.

Hahn and Wiker spell out the consequences of Spinoza's method, which we have seen played out in the university, the academy at large, as well as in the public eye in the realm of politics and media, on popular television and in literary works of popular fiction:

> Spinoza implied that illustrating the enormity of the task might "provoke him [the reader] into a hopeless undertaking," the reduction to hopelessness, it seems, being part of Spinoza's overall design. That is, Spinoza defined this exegetical exercise by the nearly hopeless task of recovering the historical origin of the Bible's original, preedited sources. A unified interpretation ever recedes because the flow of exegesis is toward maximum *disunity*

130 Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 96.

131 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics I*, 136.

132 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 364.

133 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 388.

> of the text, and it therefore produces an endless multiplication of ever larger technical commentaries focused on ever-shrinking textual shards.[134]

A Catholic response to this situation is not to give up on the importance of history and retreat solely to the realm of allegory. Rather, we need to unmask how claims that do away with traditional, patristic, medieval, spiritual exegesis and instead focus exclusively on the literal-historical level often mask a secular allegory at the service of another kingdom, not the Kingdom of God. We should take history seriously, and need not fear the disciplines of philology, textual criticism, archaeology, and even the hypothetical source theories of historical biblical criticism like source, form, and redaction criticism—which often prove to be incredibly useful heuristic devices. But we must be fully aware, when we engage in biblical exegesis, that we tread on sacred ground.

Those Catholics engaged in pre-theological biblical scholarly tasks like textual criticism need not abandon their posts; a re-orientation may be all that is necessary. It may require a purification of intention and purpose, always being aware that we work in the presence of God, and that our labor, especially regarding the understanding and interpretation of Scripture, should be handled with care. The ultimate goal, even in text criticism, sorting through variants in the manuscript tradition, is to become saints and help others do the same. Our goal is the Beatific Vision, and thus our very work must be mystagogical. We need to bring people to the divine waters of Scripture and the Sacraments so that they might quench their divine thirst while accompanying us as wayfarers through our heavenly pilgrimage on this earth.[135]

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134 Hahn and Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible*, 377.

135 I am indebted to Victor Velarde-Mayol for fruitful conversations on Spinoza as well as nominalism and late medieval scholasticism, and for bringing to my attention some important sources. I owe thanks to Nicolai Sinai for providing me a copy of his work, to Michael Legaspi for providing me with a copy of his SBL presentation, and to Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker for their generosity in providing me with copies of their work prior to publication as well as for many fruitful conversations on the themes brought up in this article. Finally, I owe Maria Morrow special thanks for critiquing a draft of this manuscript.