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Preliminaries

I. A Portrait of the Philosopher as a Young Man[1]

[1] After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity. II/5

[2] I say that *I resolved at last*—for at first glance it seemed ill-advised to be willing to lose something certain for something then uncertain. I saw, of course, the advantages that honor and wealth bring, and that I would be forced to abstain from seeking them, if I wished to devote myself seriously to something new and different; and if by chance the greatest happiness lay in them, I saw that I should have to do without it. But if it did not lie in them, and I devoted my energies only to acquiring them, then I would equally go without it.

[3] So I wondered whether perhaps it would be possible to reach my new goal—or at least the certainty of attaining it—without changing the conduct and plan of life which I shared with other men. Often I tried this, but in vain. For most things which present themselves in life, and which, to judge from their actions, men think to be the highest good, may be reduced to these three: wealth, honor, and sensual pleasure. The II/6 mind is so distracted by these three that it cannot give the slightest thought to any other good.

[4] For as far as sensual pleasure is concerned, the mind is so caught up in it, as if at peace in a [true] good, that it is quite prevented from thinking of anything else. But after the enjoyment of sensual pleasure is past, the greatest sadness follows. If this does not completely engross, still it thoroughly confuses and dulls the mind.

The mind is also distracted not a little by the pursuit of honors and wealth, particularly when the latter is sought only for its own sake, because it is assumed to be the highest good. [5] But the mind is far more distracted by honor. For this is always assumed to be good through itself and the ultimate end toward which everything is directed.

[1] From the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Bruder §§1–17.

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Nor do honor and wealth have, as sensual pleasure does, repentance as a natural consequence. The more each of these is possessed, the more joy is increased, and hence the more we are spurred on to increase them. But if our hopes should chance to be frustrated, we experience the greatest sadness. And finally, honor has this great disadvantage: to pursue it, we must direct our lives according to other men's powers of understanding—fleeing what they commonly flee and seeking what they commonly seek.

[6] Since I saw that all of these things stood in the way of my working toward this new goal, indeed were so opposed to it that one or the other must be given up, I was forced to ask what would be more useful to me. For as I say, I seemed to be willing to lose the certain good for the uncertain one. But after I had considered the matter a little, I first found that, if I devoted myself to this new plan of life, and gave up the old, I would be giving up a good by its nature uncertain (as we can clearly infer from what has been said) for one uncertain not by its nature (for I was seeking a permanent good) but only in respect to its attainment.

[7] By persistent meditation, however, I came to the conclusion that, if only I could resolve, wholeheartedly, [to change my plan of life], I
II/7 would be giving up certain evils for a certain good. For I saw that I was in the greatest danger, and that I was forced to seek a remedy with all my strength, however uncertain it might be—like a man suffering from a fatal illness, who, foreseeing certain death unless he employs a remedy, is forced to seek it, however uncertain, with all his strength. For all his hope lies there. But all those things men ordinarily strive for, not only provide no remedy to preserve our being, but in fact hinder that preservation, often cause the destruction of those who possess them, and always cause the destruction of those who are possessed by them.

[8] There are a great many examples of people who have suffered persecution to the death on account of their wealth, or have exposed themselves to so many dangers to acquire wealth that they have at last paid the penalty for their folly with their life. Nor are there fewer examples of people who, to attain or defend honor, have suffered most miserably. And there are innumerable examples of people who have hastened their death through too much sensual pleasure.

[9] Furthermore, these evils seemed to have arisen from the fact that all happiness or unhappiness is placed in the quality of the object to which we cling with love. For strife will never arise on account of what is not loved, nor will there be sadness if it perishes, nor envy if it is possessed by another, nor fear, nor hatred—in a word, no disturbances of the mind. Indeed, all these happen only in the love of those things that can perish, as all the things we have just spoken of can do.

[10] But love toward the eternal and infinite thing feeds the mind

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with a joy entirely exempt from sadness. This is greatly to be desired, and to be sought with all our strength.

But not without reason did I use these words *if only I could resolve in earnest*. For though I perceived these things [NS: this evil] so clearly in my mind, I still could not, on that account, put aside all greed, desire for sensual pleasure, and love of esteem.

[11] I saw this, however: that so long as the mind was turned toward these thoughts, it was turned away from those things, and was thinking seriously about the new goal. That was a great comfort to me. For I saw that those evils would not refuse to yield to remedies. And although in the beginning these intervals were rare, and lasted a very II/8
short time, nevertheless, after the true good became more and more known to me, the intervals became more frequent and longer—especially after I saw that the acquisition of money, sensual pleasure, and esteem are only obstacles so long as they are sought for their own sakes, and not as means to other things. But if they are sought as means, then they will have a limit, and will not be obstacles at all. On the contrary, they will be of great use in attaining the end on account of which they are sought, as we shall show in its place.

[12] Here I shall only say briefly what I understand by the true good, and at the same time, what the highest good is. To understand this properly, it must be noted that good and bad are said of things only in a certain respect, so that one and the same thing can be called both good and bad according to different respects. The same applies to perfect and imperfect. For nothing, considered in its own nature, will be called perfect or imperfect, especially after we have recognized that everything that happens happens according to the eternal order, and according to certain laws of Nature.

[13] But since human weakness does not grasp that order by its own thought, and meanwhile man conceives a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own, and at the same time sees that nothing prevents his acquiring such a nature, he is spurred to seek means that will lead him to such a perfection. Whatever can be a means to his attaining it is called a true good; but the highest good is to arrive—together with other individuals if possible—at the enjoyment of such a nature. What that nature is we shall show in its proper place: that it is the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of Nature.

[14] This, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand, so that their intellect and desire agree entirely with my intellect and desire. To do this it is necessary, *first*, to understand as much of Nature as suffices for acquiring such a nature; *next*, to form a society of the kind that is II/9

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desirable, so that as many as possible may attain it as easily and surely as possible.

[15] *Third*, attention must be paid to Moral Philosophy and to Instruction concerning the Education of children. Because Health is no small means to achieving this end, *fourth*, the whole of Medicine must be worked out. And because many difficult things are rendered easy by ingenuity, and by it we can gain much time and convenience in life, *fifth*, Mechanics is in no way to be despised.

[16] Before anything else we must devise a way of healing the intellect, and purifying it, as much as we can in the beginning, so that it understands things successfully, without error and as well as possible. Everyone will now be able to see that I wish to direct all the sciences toward one end and goal, namely, that we should achieve, as we have said, the highest human perfection. So anything in the sciences which does nothing to advance us toward our goal must be rejected as useless—in a word, all our activities and thoughts are to be directed to this end.

[17] But while we pursue this end, and devote ourselves to bringing the intellect back to the right path, it is necessary to live. So we are forced, before we do anything else, to assume certain rules of living as good:

1. To speak according to the power of understanding of ordinary people, and do whatever does not interfere with our attaining our purpose. For we can gain a considerable advantage from this, if we yield as much to their understanding as we can. Moreover, in this way, they will give a favorable hearing to the truth.

2. To enjoy pleasures just so far as suffices for safeguarding our health.

3. Finally, to seek money, or anything else, just so far as suffices for sustaining life and health, and conforming to those customs of the community that do not conflict with our aim.

II. A Critique of Traditional Religion

A. On Religion and Superstition[2]

[1] If men could manage all their affairs by a certain plan, or if fortune
III/5 were always favorable to them, they would never be in the grip of superstition. But since they are often reduced to such straits that they can bring no plan into operation, and since they generally vacillate wretch-

[2] From the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Bruder §§1–4, 7–10, 14–20.

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edly between hope and fear, from an immoderate desire for the uncertain goods of fortune, for the most part their hearts are ready to believe anything at all. While they are in doubt, a slight impulse drives them this way or that; and this happens all the more easily when, torn by hope and fear, they are at a loss to know what to do; at other times they are too trusting, boastful, and overconfident.

[2] Everyone, I think, knows this, though most people, I believe, do not know themselves. For no one has lived among men without seeing that, when they are prospering, even those who are quite inexperienced are generally so overflowing with wisdom that they believe themselves to be wronged if anyone wants to give them advice. In adversity, on the other hand, they do not know where to turn and humbly ask advice of everyone. They hear no advice so foolish and so absurd or groundless that they do not follow it. They hope now for better things, and then again fear worse, all for the slightest reasons. [3] For if, while they are tormented by fear, they see something happen which reminds them of some past good or evil, they think that it portends either a fortunate or an unfortunate outcome, and for that reason they call it a favorable or unfavorable omen, even though it may deceive them a hundred times. Again, if they see something unusual, and wonder greatly at it, they believe it to be a portent of disaster, which indicates the anger of the Gods or of the supreme God. Prey to superstition and contrary to religion, men consider it a sacrilege not to avert the disaster by sacrifices and votive offerings. They create countless fictions and interpret nature in amazing ways, as if the whole of nature were as insane as they are.

[4] In these circumstances, we see that it is particularly those who immoderately desire uncertain things who are thoroughly enslaved to every kind of superstition, and that they all invoke divine aid with votive offerings and unmanly tears, especially when they are in danger and cannot help themselves. Because reason cannot show a certain way to the hollow things they desire, they call it blind, and human wisdom hollow. The delusions of the imagination, on the other hand, and dreams and childish follies they believe to be divine answers. Indeed, they believe God rejects the wise, and writes his decrees not in the mind, but in the entrails of animals, or that fools, madmen, and birds foretell his decrees by divine inspiration and prompting. Thus does fear make men insane.

[7] Whatever some may say, who think that superstition arises from the fact that all mortals have a certain confused idea of divinity, from the cause of superstition I have given, it follows clearly, [first,] that all men by nature are liable to superstition; next, that, like all delusions of the mind and impulses of frenzy, it must be very fluctuating and inconstant; III/6

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and finally, that it is preserved only by hope, hate, anger, and deception, because it arises, not from reason, but only from the most effective of affects.

[8] As easily, then, as men are taken in by any kind of superstition, it is just as difficult to make them stand firm in one and the same superstition. Indeed, because the common people always remain equally wretched, they are never satisfied for long, but are most pleased by what is new, and has not yet deceived them. This inconstancy, indeed, has been the cause of many outbreaks of disorder and bloody wars. For as is evident from what we have just said, and as Curtius noted very aptly, "Nothing sways the masses more effectively than superstition."[3*] That is why they are easily led, under the pretext of religion, now to worship their Kings as Gods, now to curse and loathe them as the common plague of the human race.

[9] To avoid this evil [of inconstancy], immense zeal is brought to
III/7 bear to embellish religion—whether true or false—with ceremony and pomp, so that it will be considered weightier than every [other] influence and always worshiped by everyone with the utmost deference. The Turks have succeeded so well at this that they consider it a sacrilege even to discuss [matters of religion] and they fill everyone's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no room in the mind for sound reason even to suggest a doubt.

[10] But if the great secret of monarchic rule, and its whole interest, is to keep men deceived and to cloak in the specious name of religion the fear by which they must be checked, so that they will fight for slavery as they would for salvation, and will think it not shameful, but an honorable achievement, to give their life and blood that one man may have a ground for boasting, nevertheless, in a free state nothing more unfortunate can be contrived or attempted. For it is completely contrary to the common freedom to fill the free judgment of each man with prejudices, or to restrain it in any way. . . .

III/8 [14] I have often wondered that men who boast of their allegiance to the Christian religion—that is, to love, gladness, peace, continence, and honesty toward all—would contend so unfairly against one another, and indulge daily in the bitterest hate toward one another, so that each man's faith is known more easily from the latter [i.e., his hate] than from the former [i.e., his love, etc.]. For long ago things reached the point where you can hardly know what anyone is, whether Christian, Turk, Jew, or Pagan, except by the external grooming and dress of his body, or because he frequents this or that place of worship, or because he is at-

[3] * *History of Alexander the Great*, IV, x, 7.

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tached to this or that opinion, or because he is accustomed to swear by the words of some teacher. All lead the same kind of life.

[15] What, then, is the cause of this evil? Doubtless that to ordinary people religion has consisted in regarding the ministry of a church as a position worthy of respect, its offices as sources of income, and its clergy as deserving the highest honor. For as soon as this abuse began in the church, the worst men acquired a great desire to administer the sacred offices; the love of propagating divine religion degenerated into sordid greed and ambition, and the house of worship itself into a theater, where one hears not learned ecclesiastics, but orators, each possessed by a longing, not to teach the people, but to carry them away with admiration for himself, to censure publicly those who disagree, and to teach only those new and unfamiliar doctrines which the people most admire. From this, of course, there had to come great quarrels, envy, and hate, whose violence no passage of time could lessen.

[16] It is no wonder, then, that nothing has remained of the religion that used to be, beyond its external ceremony, by which the people seem more to flatter God than to worship him, no wonder that faith is nothing now but credulity and prejudices. And what prejudices! They turn men from rational beings into beasts, since they completely prevent everyone from using his free judgment and from distinguishing the true from the false, and seem deliberately designed to put out the light of the intellect entirely. [17] Piety—good heavens!—and religion consist in absurd mysteries, and those who scorn reason completely, and reject the intellect as corrupt by nature, they are the ones who are most undeservedly thought to have the divine light. Of course if they only had even the least spark of divine light, they would not rave so proudly, but would learn to worship God more wisely, and would surpass others in love, not, as now, in hate. Instead of persecuting with such a hostile spirit those who disagree with them, they would pity them—if, indeed, they feared for the salvation of the others, and not for their own position.

[18] Moreover, if they had any divine light, it would at least be manifest from their teaching. I confess that they could never have wondered sufficiently at the most profound mysteries of Scripture. Nevertheless, I do not see that they have taught anything but Aristotelian and Platonic speculations. Not to seem to constantly follow Pagans, they have accommodated Scripture to these speculations. [19] It was not enough for them to be insane with the Greeks; they wanted the Prophets to rave with them. This clearly shows, of course, that they do not see the divinity of Scripture even through a dream. The more immoderately they wonder at these mysteries, the more they show that they do not so much III/9

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believe Scripture as give [merely verbal] assent to it. This is also evident from the fact that most of them suppose, as a foundation for understanding Scripture and unearthing its true meaning, that it is, in every passage, true and divine. So what one ought to establish by understanding Scripture, and subjecting it to a strict examination, and what we would be far better taught by Scripture itself, which needs no human inventions, they maintain at the outset as a rule for the interpretation of Scripture.

[20] When I weighed these matters in my mind—when I considered that the natural light is not only scorned, but condemned by many as a source of impiety, that human inventions are treated as divine teachings, that credulity is considered faith, that the controversies of the Philosophers are debated with the utmost passion in the Church and in the State, and that in consequence the most savage hatreds and disagreements arise, by which men are easily turned to rebellions—when I considered these and a great many other things, which it would take too long to tell here, I resolved earnestly to examine Scripture afresh, with an unimpaired and free spirit, to affirm nothing concerning it, and to admit nothing as its teaching, which it did not very clearly teach me.

B. On Revelation[4]

III/15 [1] Prophecy, *or* Revelation, is the certain knowledge of some thing, revealed by God to men. And the Prophet is he who interprets the things revealed by God to those who cannot have certain knowledge of them, and who thus can only embrace the things revealed by sheer faith. . . . [2] From the definition we have just given [of prophecy], it follows that natural knowledge can be called prophecy. For the things we know by the natural light depend on the knowledge of God and of his eternal decrees. But this natural knowledge is common to all men, since it depends on foundations common to all men. Hence, the people, who are always thirsting for things which are rare and foreign to their nature, and who spurn their natural gifts, do not put much value on it. When they speak of prophetic knowledge, they wish to exclude natural knowledge. [3] Nevertheless, it can be called divine with as much right as anything else, since God's nature, insofar as we participate in it, and his decrees, as it were, dictate it to us. Nor does [this natural knowledge] differ from that which everyone calls divine except that the latter ex-

[4] From the *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. I ("Of Prophecy"), Bruder §§1–10, 13–19, 21–25, 40, 43, and 44, and ch. II ("Of Prophets"), §§1–4, 6, 10, 12–15, 25–27, 30–31, 35–39, 41–47, 53, and 57.

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tends beyond the limits of [natural knowledge] and that the laws of human nature, considered in themselves, cannot be its cause. But in the certainty which natural knowledge involves, and in the source from which it is derived, which is God, it is in no way inferior to prophetic III/16
knowledge—unless, perhaps, someone wishes to understand, or rather to dream, that the Prophets had, indeed, a human body, but not a human mind, and thus that their sensations and awareness were of an entirely different nature than ours are.

[4] But though natural knowledge is divine, nevertheless those who spread it cannot be called Prophets. For the things they teach other men can perceive and embrace with the same certainty and excellence as they do, and that not by faith alone.

[5] Simply because our mind contains objectively in itself, and participates in, the nature of God, it has the power to form certain notions which explain the nature of things and teach us how to conduct our lives. We can, therefore, rightly maintain that the nature of the mind, insofar as it is conceived in this way, is the first cause of divine revelation. For whatever we clearly and distinctly understand, the idea of God (as we have just indicated) and nature dictate to us, not indeed in words, but in a far more excellent way, which agrees best with the nature of the mind, so that everyone who has tasted the certainty of the intellect has doubtless experienced it in himself.

[6] Since my principal purpose is to speak only of those things which concern Scripture, it is enough to have said these few things about the natural light. So I proceed to discuss in greater detail the other causes and means by which God reveals to men those things which exceed the limits of natural knowledge—and even those which do not exceed them. (For nothing prevents God from communicating to men in other ways the same things we know by the light of nature.)

[7] But whatever can be said about these matters must be derived from Scripture alone. For what can we say about things exceeding the limits of our intellect beyond what has been passed down to us from the Prophets themselves, either orally or in writing? And because today, so far as I know, we have no Prophets, nothing is left to us but to expound the sacred books left to us by the Prophets. But with this precaution: we should maintain nothing about such things, nor attribute anything to the Prophets themselves which they did not clearly say repeatedly.

[8] Here the first thing to be noted is that the Jews never mention or heed intervening, *or* particular, causes, but for the sake of religion and of piety, *or* (as is commonly said) of devotion, they always recur to God. III/17
For example, if they have made money by trade, they say that God has

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provided it to them; if they desire that something should happen, they say that God has [so] disposed their heart; and if they even think something, they say that God has told them this. So not everything which Scripture asserts that God has said to someone is to be regarded as prophecy and supernatural knowledge, but only those things which Scripture expressly says were prophecy *or* revelation, or [whose status as prophecy] follows from the circumstances of the narration.

[9] So if we run through the sacred books, we will see that all those things God revealed to the Prophets were revealed to them either in words, or in visible forms, or in both words and visible forms. The words and the visible forms were either true, and outside the imagination of the Prophet who heard or saw them, or else imaginary, [occurring] because the imagination of the Prophet was so disposed, even while he was awake, that he clearly seemed to himself to hear words or to see something.

[10] It was by a true voice that God revealed to Moses the laws he willed to be prescribed to the Hebrews, as is apparent from Exodus 25:22. . . . This indeed shows that God used a true voice, since Moses used to find God there, available to speak to him, whenever he wanted to. And as I shall soon show, this was the only true voice by which the law was pronounced. . . .

III/18 [13] In the opinion of certain Jews, the words of the Decalogue were not pronounced by God. They think, rather, that the Israelites only heard a sound, which did not pronounce any words, and that while it lasted, they perceived the laws of the Decalogue with a pure mind. I too have sometimes conjectured this, because I saw that the words of the Decalogue in Exodus are not the same as those of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy.[5] Since God spoke only once, it seems to follow from this [variation] that the Decalogue does not claim to teach the very words of God, but only their meaning. [14] But unless we wish to do violence to Scripture, we absolutely must grant that the Israelites heard a true voice. For Scripture says expressly, in Deuteronomy 5:4, that *face to face God spoke to you and so on*, that is, as two men usually communicate their concepts to one another, by means of their two bodies. So it seems more compatible with Scripture [to suppose] that God truly created some voice, by which he revealed the Decalogue. . . .

[15] But not every difficulty is removed in this way. For it seems quite foreign to reason to maintain that a created thing, dependent on God in the same way as any other, could express, in reality or in words, or

[5] Cf. Exodus 20:1–17 with Deuteronomy 5:1–21.

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explain through his own person, the essence or existence of God, by saying in the first person, "I am your God, Yehowah, and so on." Of course, when someone says orally, "I have understood," no one thinks that the mouth of the man saying this has understood, but only that his mind has. Nevertheless, because the mouth is related to the nature of the man saying this, and also because he to whom it is said had perceived the nature of the intellect, he easily understands the mind of the man speaking by comparison with his own. [16] But if people knew nothing of God beyond his name—and desired to speak to him, in order to become certain of his Existence—I do not see how their request would be satisfied by a creature (who was no more related to God than any other creature and who did not pertain to God's nature) who said, "I am God." What if God had twisted Moses' lips to pronounce and say III/19
the same words, "I am God"? Would they have understood from that that God exists? What if they were the lips, not of Moses, but of some beast?

[17] Next, Scripture seems to indicate absolutely that God himself spoke—that was why he descended from heaven to the top of Mt. Sinai—and that the Jews not only heard him speaking, but that the Elders even saw him. See Exodus 24[:10]. Nor did the law revealed to Moses (to which nothing could be added and from which nothing could be taken away, and which was established as the legislation of the Country) ever command us to believe that God is incorporeal, or that he has no image *or* visible form, but only to believe that God exists, to trust in him, and to worship him alone.

Lest they fall away from his worship, it commanded them not to fictitiously ascribe any image to him, and not to make any image. [18] For since they had not seen the image of God, they could not make any which would resemble God, but only one which would resemble another created thing which they had seen. So when they worshiped God through that image, they would think not about God, but about the thing that image resembled, and they would bestow on that thing the honor and worship due to God. But Scripture clearly indicates that God has a visible form and that it was granted to Moses, when he heard God speaking, to look upon it, though he was permitted to see only the back parts.[6] I do not doubt but what there is some mystery concealed here. . . .

[19] That Revelation has happened by images alone is evident from 1 Chronicles 21[:16] where God shows his anger to David through an

[6] See Exodus 33:20–23.

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Angel holding a sword in his hand. . . . Maimonides and others claim that this story, and likewise all those that tell the appearance of some angel,[7*] happened in a dream, but not really, because a person could not see an Angel with his eyes open. But they talk nonsense, of course. For their only concern is to extort from Scripture Aristotelian rubbish and their own inventions. Nothing seems more ridiculous to me.

III/20 [21] But all these things are confirmed more clearly from the text of Numbers 12:6–8, which reads: *if there is some Prophet among you, I shall reveal myself to him in a vision*, that is, through visible forms and symbols, for of the Prophecy of Moses he says that it is a vision without symbols, *I shall speak to him in a dream*, that is, not with real words and a true voice. *But to Moses* (I do) *not* (reveal myself) *in this way; to him I speak mouth to mouth, and in a vision, but not with enigmatic sayings; and he looks upon the image of God*, that is, he looks upon me as a friend and is not terrified when he speaks with me, as is maintained in Exodus 33:11. So there can be no doubt that the other Prophets did not hear a true voice. This is confirmed still further by Deuteronomy 34:10, where it is said that *there has never existed* (strictly, arisen) *in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom God knew face to face*. This, indeed, must be understood to refer to the voice alone. For not even Moses had ever seen God's face (Exodus 33[:20]).

[22] Besides these means I do not find in the Sacred Texts any others by which God communicated himself to men. So as we have shown above, no others are to be feigned or admitted. Of course, we clearly understand that God can communicate himself immediately to men, for he communicates his essence to our mind without using any corporeal means. Nevertheless, for a man to perceive by the mind alone things
III/21 which are not contained in the first foundations of our knowledge, and cannot be deduced from them, his mind would necessarily have to be far more outstanding and excellent than the human mind is.

[23] I do not believe that anyone has reached such perfection, surpassing all others, except Christ, to whom God immediately revealed—without words or visions—the conditions which lead men to salvation. So God revealed himself to the Apostles through Christ's mind, as formerly he had revealed himself to Moses by means of a heavenly voice. And therefore Christ's voice, like the one Moses heard, can be called the voice of God. And in this sense we can also say that God's Wisdom, that is, a Wisdom surpassing human wisdom, assumed a human nature in Christ, and that Christ was the way to salvation.

[7] * E.g., to Manoah [Judges 13:8–20], and to Abraham when he was intending to sacrifice his son [Genesis 22:11–18].

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[24] But it is necessary to warn here that I am not speaking at all about those things which certain Churches maintain about Christ, nor do I deny them. For I freely confess that I do not grasp them.[8] I have only affirmed what I conclude from Scripture itself. For nowhere have I read that God appeared or spoke to Christ, but that God was revealed to the Apostles through Christ, that he is the way to salvation, and finally, that the old law was imparted by an Angel, but not by God immediately. So, if Moses spoke with God face to face, as a man usually does with a friend (i.e., by means of their two bodies), Christ, indeed, communicated with God mind to mind.

[25] We have asserted, therefore, that except for Christ no one received God's revelations without the aid of the imagination, that is, without the aid of words or images, and so that there is no need to have a more perfect mind in order to prophesy, but only a more vivid imagination. . . .

[40] Let us come round, finally, to the point we have been aiming at. III/27
From all these [examples] these phrases of Scripture become clear: *the Spirit of God was in the Prophet*, *God infused his Spirit into men*, *men were filled with the Spirit of God*, *and with the Holy Spirit*, and the like. For they mean nothing other than that the Prophets had a singular virtue, beyond what is ordinary, that they cultivated piety with exceptional constancy of heart, and that they perceived God's mind, *or*, judgment. . . .

[43] Therefore, we can now affirm, without any reservation, that the III/28
Prophets perceived God's revelations only with the aid of the imagination, that is, by the mediation of words or of images, the latter of which might be either true or imaginary. For since we find no other means in Scripture except these, we are not permitted to feign any others.

[44] If you ask by what laws of nature this [revelation] was made, I confess that I do not know. I could, indeed, say, as others do, that it was made by the power of God. But that would be idle chatter. For it would be the same thing as trying to explain the form of some singular thing by some transcendental term. All things are made through the power of God. Because the power of nature is nothing but the power of God

[8] Spinoza's references to Jesus in the *Theological-Political Treatise* caused concern among some of his first readers. In response to a request from Spinoza to indicate the passages in this work which had made learned men uneasy (Letter 68), Oldenburg wrote that some readers thought Spinoza might be concealing his "opinion concerning Jesus Christ, the redeemer of the world and sole mediator for mankind, and his incarnation and atonement." In subsequent correspondence with Oldenburg Spinoza explains that he thinks the doctrine of the incarnation, according to which God assumed a human nature, involves a contradiction (Letter 73), and that he accepts Christ's passion, death, and burial literally, but his resurrection only allegorically (Letter 78).

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itself,[9] it is certain that insofar as we are ignorant of natural causes, we do not understand God's power. So it is foolish to fall back on that same power of God when we do not know the natural cause of some thing, that is, when we do not know God's power itself. But there is no need now for us to know the cause of prophetic knowledge. For as I have already indicated, here we are trying only to investigate the teachings of Scripture in order to draw our conclusions from them, as we would draw conclusions from the data of nature. We are not concerned in the least with the causes of those teachings.

III/29 [1] . . . [A]s we have already indicated, the prophets were endowed, not with a more perfect mind, but instead, with a power of imagining unusually vividly. The Scriptural narratives also teach this abundantly. For it is agreed that Solomon excelled all other men in wisdom, but not in the gift of prophecy. . . . This agrees also with both experience and reason. For those who have the most powerful imaginations are less able to grasp things by pure intellect. And conversely, those who are more capable in their intellect, and who cultivate it most, have a more moderate power of imagining, and have it more under their control. They keep it, as it were, in check, lest it be confused with the intellect.

[2] So those who look in the books of the prophets for wisdom, and knowledge of natural and spiritual matters, go entirely astray. Since the time, philosophy and, finally, the matter itself demand it, I have decided to show this fully here. I care little for the protests of superstition, whose greatest hatred is directed against those who cultivate true
III/30 knowledge and true life. Alas! Things have reached a state now where those who openly confess that they have no idea of God, and that they know God only through created things (of whose causes they are ignorant), do not blush to accuse philosophers of atheism.

[3] To develop my subject in an orderly way, I shall show that prophecies varied, not only with the imagination and physical temperament of

[9] Another passage which caused concern among Spinoza's readers. Oldenburg complained (Letter 71) that Spinoza seemed to "speak ambiguously about God and Nature, and in the opinion of many, to confuse these two things." In reply Spinoza acknowledged that he had an opinion about the relation between God and Nature very different from the one modern Christians usually defend: "For I maintain that God is, as they say, the immanent, but not the transitive, cause of all things. That all things are in God and move in God, I affirm, I say, with Paul, and perhaps also with all the ancient philosophers, although in another way; and I would also dare to say, with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as it is permissible to conjecture from certain traditions, corrupted as they are in many ways. Nevertheless, some people think the *Theological-Political Treatise* rests on the assumption that God is one and the same as Nature (by which they understand a certain mass, or corporeal matter). This is a complete mistake." On the relation between God and Nature, see the excerpt in §IV.B. from the *Short Treatise*, I, ch. viii, and *Ethics* IP29S.

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each prophet, but also with the opinions with which they were imbued, and so, that prophecy never made the prophets more learned, as I shall shortly explain more fully. But first, I must treat here of the certainty of the prophets, both because it is relevant to the argument of this chapter, and also because it will be of some use in demonstrating the conclusion we intend to establish.

[4] Unlike a clear and distinct idea, the simple imagination [of a thing] does not, of its nature, involve any certainty. Something must be added to the imagination—namely, reasoning—if we are to be able to be certain of the things we imagine. From this it follows that prophecy, through itself, cannot involve certainty, for as we have shown, it depends solely on the imagination. Therefore, the prophets were certain concerning God's revelation, not through that revelation itself, but through some sign. This is evident from Genesis 15:8, where Abraham asked for a sign after he had heard God's promise. He trusted God, of course, and did not ask for a sign in order to have faith in God. He asked for a sign in order to know that it was God who had made this promise to him. . . .

[6] In this respect, therefore, prophecy is inferior to natural knowledge, which requires no sign, but involves certainty of its own nature. And indeed, this prophetic certainty was not mathematical, but only moral, as may also be established from Scripture itself. For in Deuteronomy 13[:2] Moses warns that any prophet who wants to teach new III/31
Gods should be condemned to death, even though he confirms his teaching with signs and miracles. For as Moses himself goes on to say, God also makes signs and miracles to test the people. . . .

[10] The whole of prophetic certainty, therefore, is founded on these three things:

1) That they imagined the things revealed to them very vividly, in the way we are usually affected by objects when we are awake;

2) On a sign;

3) Finally, and mainly, that they had a heart inclined only to the right and the good.

And although Scripture does not always make mention of a sign, nevertheless we must believe that the prophets always had a sign. For as many have already noted, Scripture is not accustomed always to narrate all the conditions and circumstances, but rather to suppose them as known. . . .

[12] Since the certainty which arose in the prophets from signs was III/32
not mathematical (i.e., did not follow from the necessity of the perception of the thing perceived or seen), but only moral, and signs were

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given only to persuade the prophet, it follows that signs were given according to the opinions and capacity of the prophet, in such a way that a sign which would render one prophet certain of his prophecy could not convince at all another, who was imbued with different opinions. So the signs varied in each prophet.

[13] So also the revelation itself varied, as we have said, in each prophet, according to the disposition of his physical temperament and of his imagination, and according to the opinions he had previously embraced. It varied according to his temperament in this way: if the prophet was cheerful, victories, peace, and things which move men in turn to joy were revealed to him; for such men usually imagine things of that kind more frequently; on the other hand, if the prophet was sad, wars, punishments, and all evils were revealed to him; and thus, as the prophet was compassionate, calm, prone to anger, severe, and the like, to that extent he was more ready for one kind of revelation than for another.

[14] It varied also according to the disposition of his imagination, in the following way. If the prophet was refined, he perceived the mind of God in a refined style; but if he was confused, then he perceived it confusedly. It varied similarly concerning those revelations which were represented through images. If the prophet was a countryman, bulls and cows were represented to him; if he was a soldier, generals and armies; if he was a courtier, the royal throne and things of that kind.

[15] Prophecy varied, finally, according to differences in the opinions of the prophets. To the magi, who believed in the trifles of astrology, Christ's birth was revealed through the imagination of a star rising in the east (see Matthew 2). To the augurs of Nebuchadnezzar the destruc-
III/33 tion of Jerusalem was revealed in the entrails of animals (see Ezekiel 21:26). The same king also understood this from oracles and from the direction of arrows which he hurled up into the air. Again, to those prophets who believed that men act from free choice and from their own power, God was revealed as indifferent, and as unaware of future human actions. We shall demonstrate all these things separately from Scripture itself. . . .

III/35 [25] With remarkable rashness everyone has persuaded himself that the prophets knew everything the human intellect can attain to. And although certain passages of Scripture indicate to us as clearly as possible that the prophets were ignorant of certain things, they prefer to say that they do not understand Scripture in those passages, rather than to concede that the prophets were ignorant of something. Or else they strive to twist the words of Scripture so that it says what it plainly does not mean. Of course, if either of these [ways of dealing with Scripture]

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is permissible, then it is all up with the whole of Scripture. In vain will we strive to show something from Scripture, if it is permissible to number the clearest [passages] among those which are obscure and impenetrable or to interpret them as one pleases.

[26] For example, nothing in Scripture is clearer than that Joshua, and perhaps also the author who wrote his history, thought that the sun moves around the earth, but that the earth is at rest, and that the sun III/36
stood still for some time. Nevertheless, there are many who do not want to concede that there can be any change in the heavens, and who therefore explain this passage in such a way that it seems to say nothing like that. Others, who have learned to philosophize more correctly, since they understand that the earth moves, whereas the sun is at rest, *or* does not move around the earth, strive with all their powers to twist the same [truth] out of Scripture, though it cries out in open protest against this treatment. I wonder at them indeed.

[27] Are we, I ask, bound to believe that Joshua, a soldier, was skilled in astronomy? and that the miracle could not be revealed to him, or that the light of the sun could not remain longer than usual above the horizon unless Joshua understood the cause of this? Both of these [alternatives] seem to me ridiculous. I prefer, therefore, to say openly that Joshua did not know the true cause of the greater duration of that light, that he and the whole crowd who were present all thought that the sun moves with a daily motion around the earth, and that on that day it stood still for some time. They believed this to be the cause of the greater duration of that light and they did not attend to the fact that a refraction greater than usual could arise from the great amount of ice which was then in that part of the air (see Joshua 10:11), or from something else like that, which is not our present concern. . . .

[30] If it is permissible to feign that Scripture thought otherwise, but wished, because of some reason unknown to us, to write in this way, III/37
then this is nothing but a complete overturning of the whole of Scripture. For each [interpreter] with equal right will be able to say the same thing about every passage in Scripture. As a result, it will be permissible to defend and to put into practice whatever absurdity or evil human malice can think up, without harm to the authority of Scripture. But what we have maintained contains no impiety. For though Solomon, Isaiah, Joshua, and the rest were prophets, they were nevertheless men, and nothing human should be thought alien to them.

[31] The revelation to Noah that God was destroying the human race [Genesis 6:11–13] was also according to his power of understanding, because he thought that the earth was not inhabited outside of Palestine. The prophets could be ignorant not only of things of this kind, but

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also of others of greater moment, without harm to their piety. And they really were ignorant of these things. For they taught nothing singular concerning the divine attributes, but had quite ordinary opinions about God. And their revelations were also accommodated to these opinions, as I shall now show by many testimonies from Scripture. From this you will easily see that [the prophets] are praised, and greatly commended, not so much on account of the loftiness and excellence of their understanding as on account of their piety and constancy of heart. . . .

III/38 [35] And Moses,[10] too, did not sufficiently perceive that God is omniscient and that all human actions are directed by his decree alone. For although God had told him (see Exodus 3:18) that the Israelites would obey him, he called the matter in question and replied (see Exodus 4:1): *what if they do not believe me and do not obey me*. And therefore God was revealed to him as indifferent and unaware of future human actions. For he gave him two signs and said (Exodus 4:8): *if it should happen that they do not believe the first sign, still they will believe the latter; but if they do not believe even the latter, take (then) some water from the river and so on.*

[36] And if anyone wants to assess carefully and without prejudice Moses' judgments, he will find clearly that his opinion of God was that he is a being who has always existed, exists, and always will exist. For this reason he calls him by the name *Yehowah*, which in Hebrew expresses these three times of existing. But concerning his nature he teaches nothing else than that he is compassionate, kind, and the like, and supremely jealous, as is established by a great many passages in the Pentateuch.[11] Next, he believed and taught that this being differs so from all other beings that it cannot be expressed by any image of anything seen, nor can it even be seen—not so much because the thing involves a contradiction as because of human weakness. Moreover, he also taught that by reason of his power he is singular or unique.

[37] He conceded, of course, that there are beings which—doubtless from God's order and command—perform the functions of God, that is, beings to whom God has given the authority, right, and power to direct nations, to provide for them, and to care for them. But he taught

III/39 that this being, which [the Jews] were bound to worship, was the highest and supreme God, *or* (to use a Hebrew phrase) the God of Gods. And so in the song of Exodus (15:11) he said: *who among the Gods is like you, Yehowah?* And Jethro [says] (in Exodus 18:11): *now I know that Yehowah*

[10] Spinoza gives many examples, but focuses particularly on Moses, because, as he points out, there is Scriptural warrant for giving him a special place among the prophets. Cf. Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10. The superiority of Moses to the other prophets was one of the thirteen principles Maimonides identified as essential to Judaism.

[11] E.g., in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9.

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is greater than all the Gods, that is, at last I am forced to concede to Moses that Yehowah is greater than all the Gods and singular in power. But it can be doubted whether Moses believed that these beings which perform the functions of God were created by God, since, so far as we know, he never said anything about their creation and beginning.

[38] In addition, he taught that this being brought this visible world out of chaos into order (see Genesis 1:2), that he put seeds in nature, so that he has the highest right and the highest power over all things, and (see Deuteronomy 10:14–15) that in accordance with this highest right and highest power he chose, for himself alone, the Hebrew nation and a certain region of the world (see Deuteronomy 4:19, 32:8–9), but that he left the other nations and regions to the care of the other Gods substituted by him. For that reason [Yehowah] was called the God of Israel and of Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 32:19), whereas the other Gods were called the Gods of the other nations.

[39] And for this reason also the Jews believed that the region God had chosen for himself required a special worship of God, different from that of other regions, and indeed that it could not permit the worship of other Gods, which was proper to other regions. For those nations which the King of Assyria brought into the lands of the Jews were believed to be torn to pieces by lions because they did not know the worship of the Gods of that land. (See 2 Kings 17:25, 26, etc.). . . .

[41] Finally, [Moses] believed that this being, *or* God, had his dwelling place in the heavens (see Deuteronomy 33:27), an opinion which was very common among the Gentiles.

If we attend now to Moses' revelations, we shall find that they were III/40
accommodated to these opinions. For because he believed that God's nature admits of all those conditions which we have mentioned, compassion, kindness, and the like, God was revealed to him according to this opinion of his and under these attributes. (See Exodus 34:6–7, where it is told how God appeared to Moses, and the Decalogue, [Exodus 20:]4–5.)

[42] Next, we are told in [Exodus] 33:18[–23] that Moses asked God to be allowed to see him. But since, as we have already said, Moses had formed no image of God in his brain, and since, as we have already shown, God is revealed to the Prophets only according to the disposition of their imagination, God did not appear to him by any image. I say that this happened because it was inconsistent with Moses' imagination [for him to see God]. For other Prophets testify that they saw God, namely, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and so on. [43] And for this reason God replied to Moses, *you will not be able to see my face*. And because Moses believed that God is visible, that is, that it implies no contradiction in

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the divine nature [for God to be seen] (for otherwise he would not have asked anything like that), [God] adds, *since no one shall see me and live*. He therefore renders to Moses a reason consistent with his own opinion. For he does not say that it involves a contradiction on the part of the divine nature [for God to be seen], as it really does, but that it cannot happen because of human weakness.

[44] Next, to reveal to Moses that because the Israelites had worshiped the calf, they had become like the other nations, God says (Exodus 33:2–3) that he will send an angel, that is, a being which would take care of the Israelites in place of the supreme being, but that he does not wish to be among them. For this left nothing to Moses which would show him that the Israelites were dearer to God than the other nations, which God also gave over to the care of other beings, *or* angels. This is shown by Exodus 33:16.

[45] Finally, because God was believed to live in the heavens, he was revealed as descending from heaven to the top of a mountain. Moses also went up the mountain to speak with God, which would not be necessary for him at all, if he could imagine God to be everywhere with equal ease.

The Israelites knew almost nothing about God, even though he was revealed to them. They showed this more than sufficiently when, after a few days, they handed over the honor and worship due him to a calf [Exodus 32], and believed that it was the Gods which had brought them
III/41 out of Egypt. [46] Nor is it credible that men accustomed to the superstitions of the Egyptians, unsophisticated, and worn out by the most wretched bondage, would have understood anything sensible about God, or that Moses would have taught them anything other than a way of living—and that not as a philosopher, so that after some time they might be constrained to live well from freedom of mind, but as a legislator, so that they would be constrained by the command of the law to live well.

[47] So the way of living well, *or* true life, and the worship and love of God were to them more bondage than true freedom, and the grace and gift of God. For he ordered them to love God and to keep his law that they might acknowledge past goods received from God, such as their freedom from bondage in Egypt. He terrified them with threats, if they transgressed those precepts, and he promised them many goods if they respected them. So he taught them in the same way parents customarily do children who are lacking in all reason. Hence, it is certain that they did not know the excellence of virtue and true blessedness. . . .

III/42 [53] We conclude, therefore, that we are not bound to believe the Prophets regarding anything except what is the end and substance of

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revelation. In all other things each person is free to believe as he pleases. For example, the revelation to Cain teaches us only that God warned him to lead a true life, for that was the only intent and substance of the III/43
revelation, not teach the freedom of the will or philosophic matters. So even though the freedom of the will is contained very clearly in the words and reasonings of that warning, we are permitted to think the contrary, since those words and reasonings were only accommodated to Cain's power of understanding. . . .

[57] Finally, we must say absolutely the same thing about the reasonings and signs of the Apostles. There is no need to speak more fully about these matters. For if I were to enumerate all those Passages in Scripture which are written only *ad hominem*, *or*, according to someone's power of understanding, and which cannot be defended as divine teaching without great prejudice to Philosophy, I would give up the III/44
brevity I desire. Let it suffice, therefore, to have touched on a few, universal things. The rest the inquiring reader may weigh for himself.[12]

C. On God as an Agent in History[13]

[1] The true happiness and blessedness of each person consists only in the enjoyment of the good, but not in a self-esteem founded on the fact that he alone, to the exclusion of all the others, enjoys the good. For he who thinks himself more blessed because things are well with him, but not with others, or because he is more blessed than others and more fortunate, does not know true happiness and blessedness, and the joy which he conceives from that, unless it is childish, arises only from envy and a bad heart.

[2] For example, the true happiness and blessedness of man consist only in wisdom and in knowledge of the true, but not at all in the fact that one is wiser than others, or that the others lack true knowledge. For this does not increase his wisdom at all, that is, his true happiness. So someone who is glad for that reason is glad because of someone else's evil, and therefore is envious and evil. He knows neither true wisdom nor the peace of true life.

[3] Therefore when Scripture, to exhort the Hebrews to obey the law, says that God chose them for himself before the other nations (Deuter-

[12] It is characteristic of the *Theological-Political Treatise* to concentrate much more heavily on the Old Testament than the New. Spinoza excuses this neglect by disclaiming adequate knowledge of Greek to deal with it properly, but perhaps an unacknowledged reason is his concern for the sensibilities of his largely Christian audience. Cf. the provisional morality of the *Treatise on the Intellect* §17.

[13] From the *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. III ("On the Calling of the Hebrews"), Bruder §§1–15.

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onomy 10:15), that he is close to them, but not to others (Deuteronomy 4:4–7), that he has prescribed just laws only for them (Deuteronomy 4:8), and finally, that he has become known to them only, the others being treated as inferior (Deuteronomy 4:32), and so on, it speaks only according to the power of understanding of those who, as we have shown in the preceding chapter, and as Moses also witnesses (Deuteron-
III/45 omy 9:6–7), did not know true blessedness. [4] For surely they would have been no less blessed if God had called all equally to salvation; God would have been no less favorably disposed toward them, no matter how close he had been to the others; the laws would have been no less just, if they had been prescribed to all, nor would they themselves have been less wise; miracles would have shown the power of God no less if they had been performed on account of other nations also; and finally, the Hebrews would have been no less bound to worship God if God had bestowed all these gifts equally on all people.

[5] Moreover, what God says to Solomon—that no one after him would be as wise as he was (1 Kings 3:12)—seems to be only a manner of speaking, to signify exceptional wisdom. However that may be, we must not in any way believe that God promised Solomon, for his greater happiness, that he would not afterwards bestow such great wisdom on anyone else. For this would not increase Solomon's intellect at all, nor would a prudent King give less thanks to God for such a great gift, even if God had said that he would endow all with the same wisdom.

[6] But even if we say that in the passages of the Pentateuch just cited Moses was speaking according to the Hebrews' power of understanding, we still do not wish to deny that God prescribed those laws of the Pentateuch to them alone, nor that he spoke only to them, nor, finally, that the Hebrews saw wonders the like of which happened to no other nation. We mean only that Moses wanted to warn the Hebrews in this way, and especially by these reasons, so that he might bind them more to the worship of God, in accordance with their childish power of understanding. Next, we wished to show that the Hebrews did not excel the other nations in knowledge or in piety, but in something altogether different—*or* (to speak, with Scripture, according to their power of understanding) that, though the Hebrews were frequently warned, they were not chosen by God before all others for their true life and sublime speculations, but for something entirely different. What this was, I shall show here in an orderly fashion. [7] But before I begin, I want to explain briefly what, in the following, I shall understand by God's guidance, by God's aid (both external and internal), by God's choice, and finally, by fortune.

By God's guidance I understand the fixed and immutable order of

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nature, *or* the connection of natural things. [8] For we have said above, III/46
and have already shown in another place, that the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. Therefore, whether we say that all things happen according to the laws of nature, or whether we say that they are ordered according to the decree and guidance of God, we say the same thing.

[9] Next, because the power of all natural things is nothing but the power of God, through which alone all things happen and are determined, it follows that whatever man, who is also a part of nature, provides for himself, as an aid to the preservation of his being, or whatever nature provides for him, he himself doing nothing, all that is provided for him by the power of God alone, either insofar as it acts through human nature or through things outside human nature. Therefore, whatever human nature can provide, from its own power alone, for preserving its being, we can rightly call the internal aid of God, and whatever turns out for his advantage from the power of external causes, we can rightly call God's external aid.

[10] But from these [definitions] it is easy to infer what should be understood by God's choice. For since no one does anything except according to the predetermined order of nature, that is, according to God's eternal guidance and decree, it follows that no one chooses any manner of living for himself, nor does anything, except by the special calling of God, who has chosen him before others for this work, or for this manner of living.

[11] Finally, by fortune I understand nothing but God's guidance, insofar as it directs human affairs through external and unforeseen causes. With these preliminaries, we shall return to our purpose, which was to see why the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God before others. To show this, I proceed as follows.

[12] Whatever we can honorably desire is related above all to these three things: [i] to understand things through their first causes; [ii] to gain control over the passions, *or* to acquire the habit of virtue; and finally, [iii] to live securely and healthily. The means which lead directly to the first and second of these, and can be considered their proximate and efficient causes, are contained in human nature itself. So acquiring them depends chiefly on our power alone, *or* on the laws of human nature alone. For this reason we must absolutely maintain that these III/47
gifts are not peculiar to any nation, but have always been common to the whole human race—unless we wish to dream that formerly nature produced different kinds of men. [13] But the means which lead to living securely and preserving the body are chiefly placed in external things,

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and for that reason they are called gifts of fortune, because they depend for the most part on the course of external causes of which we are ignorant. So in this matter, the wise man and the fool are almost equally happy or unhappy.

Nevertheless, human guidance and vigilance can do much to help us to live securely and to avoid injuries from other men, and also from the beasts. [14] To this end reason and experience teach no more certain means than to form a society with definite laws, to occupy a definite area of the world, and to reduce the powers of all, as it were, into one body, the body of society. But to form and preserve a society requires no mean intelligence and vigilance. So the society which for the most part is founded and directed by prudent and vigilant men will be more secure, more stable, and less vulnerable to fortune. Conversely, if a society is established by men of untrained intelligence, it will depend for the most part on fortune and will be less stable. [15] If, in spite of this, it has lasted a long time, it will owe this to the guidance of another, not to its own guidance. Indeed, if it has overcome great dangers and matters have turned out favorably for it, it will only be able to wonder at and worship the guidance of God (i.e., insofar as God acts through hidden external causes, but not insofar as he acts through human nature and the human mind). Since nothing has happened to it except what is completely unexpected and contrary to opinion, this can even be considered to be really a miracle.

D. On Law and God as a Lawgiver[14]

III/57 [1] The word *law*, taken absolutely, means that according to which each individual, or all or some members of the same species, act in one and the same certain and determinate manner. This depends either on a necessity of nature or on a decision of men. A law which depends on a necessity of nature is one which follows necessarily from the very nature *or* definition of a thing. One which depends on a decision of men, and which is more properly called a rule of right, is one which men prescribe for themselves and others, for the sake of living more safely and conveniently, or for some other reasons.

[2] For example, that all bodies, when they strike against other lesser bodies, lose as much of their motion as they communicate to the other bodies is a universal law of all bodies, which follows from a necessity of
III/58 nature. Similarly, that a man, when he recalls one thing, immediately

[14] *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. IV, §§1–7, 9–21, 23–34, 37–39.

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recalls another like it, or one which he had perceived together with it, is a law which necessarily follows from human nature. But that men should yield, or be compelled to yield, the right they have from nature and bind themselves to a certain manner of living depends on a human decision.

[3] And although I grant absolutely that everything is determined by the universal laws of nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain and determinate way, I still say that the latter laws depend on a decision of men:

(I) Because, insofar as man is a part of nature, he constitutes part of the power of nature. So those things which follow from the necessity of human nature, that is, from nature itself, insofar as we conceive it through a determinate human nature, still follow, even though by necessity, from human power. Hence it can very well be said that the enactment of those laws depends on a decision of men, because in this way it depends chiefly on the power of the human mind. Nevertheless the human mind, insofar as it perceives things under the aspect of the true or the false, can be conceived quite clearly without the latter laws, but not without a necessary law, as we have just defined it.

[4] (II) Because we ought to define and explain things through their proximate causes. That universal consideration concerning fate and the connection of causes cannot help us to form and order our thoughts concerning particular things. Moreover, we are completely ignorant of the very order and connection of things, that is, of how things are really ordered and connected. So for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible. These remarks will suffice concerning law considered absolutely.

[5] But since the word *law* seems to be applied figuratively to natural things, and commonly nothing is understood by law but a command which men can either carry out or neglect, since law confines human power under certain limits, beyond which that power is extended and does not command anything beyond [human] powers—for that reason law seems to need to be defined more particularly: that it is a manner of living which man prescribes to himself and others for some end.

[6] Nevertheless, since the true end of laws is usually evident only to a few, and since for the most part men are almost incapable of perceiving it and do anything but live according to reason, legislators, to bind all men equally, have wisely set up another end, very different from that which necessarily follows from the nature of laws, by promising to the defenders of the laws what the multitude most love, and on the other hand, by threatening those who would break the laws with what they III/59

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most fear. In this way they have striven to restrain the multitude, like a horse with a harness, as far as they could.

[7] That is how it has happened that law is generally taken to be a manner of living which is prescribed to men according to the command of others, and consequently that those who obey the laws are said to live under the law, and seem to be slaves. And really, whoever gives each one his own because he fears the gallows does act according to the command of another and is compelled by evil. He cannot be called just. But the person who gives to each his own because he knows the true reason for the laws and their necessity, that person acts from a constant disposition, and by his own decision, not that of another. So he is rightly called just. . . .

[9] Since, therefore, the law is nothing but a manner of living which men prescribe to themselves or to others for some end, it seems that law must be distinguished into human and divine. By human law I understand a manner of living which serves only to protect life and the state; by a divine law, one which aims only at the greatest good, that is, the true knowledge and love of God. I call this law divine because of the nature of the greatest good, which I shall show here as briefly and clearly as I can.

[10] Since the intellect is the better part of us, it is certain that if we want to really seek our advantage, we should strive above all to perfect it as much as we can. For our greatest good must consist in the perfection of the intellect. Next, since all our knowledge, and the certainty which really removes all doubt, depend only on the knowledge of God (both because nothing can either be or be conceived without God, and
III/60 because we can doubt everything so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God), it follows that our greatest good and perfection depend only on the knowledge of God and so on.

[11] Next, since nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that all things in nature involve and express the concept of God, in proportion to their essence and perfection. Hence the more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God we acquire, or (since knowledge of an effect through its cause is nothing but knowing some property of the cause) the more we know natural things, the more perfectly do we know God's essence, which is the cause of all things.

[12] So all our knowledge, that is, our greatest good, not only depends on the knowledge of God, but consists entirely in it. This also follows from the fact that a man is more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing which he loves before all others, and

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conversely. Therefore, the man who is necessarily the most perfect and who participates in the greatest blessedness is the one who loves above all else the intellectual knowledge of God, the most perfect being, and takes the greatest pleasure in that knowledge. Our greatest good, then, and our blessedness come back to this: the knowledge and love of God.

[13] The means, therefore, which this end of all human actions (i.e., God, insofar as his idea is in us) requires can be called the commands of God, because they are prescribed to us, as it were, by God himself, insofar as he exists in our minds. Hence the manner of living which aims at this end is very well called the divine law. But what these means are, and what manner of living this end requires, and how the foundations of the best state and the manner of living among men follow from this, these matters all pertain to a complete Ethics. Here I shall proceed to treat only of the divine law in general.

[14] Since, then, the love of God is man's highest happiness and blessedness, and the ultimate end and object of all human actions, the only one who follows the divine law is the one who undertakes to love God, not from fear of punishment, nor from love for another thing, such as pleasures or reputation, and the like, but only because he knows God, *or* because he knows that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good.

[15] So the sum-total of the divine law, and its highest precept, is to love God as the highest good, as we have said, not from fear of some III/61
punishment or penalty, nor from the love of some other thing, in which we desire to take pleasure. For the idea of God dictates this: that God is our greatest good, *or* that the knowledge and love of God is the ultimate end toward which all our actions are to be directed.

[16] In spite of this, the man of the flesh cannot understand these things, and to him they seem hollow, because he has too meager a knowledge of God, and also because he finds nothing in this highest good to touch or eat, or affect the flesh which gives him his greatest pleasure, since [this good] consists only in contemplation and in a pure mind. But those who know that they have nothing more excellent than their intellect and a healthy mind will doubtless judge these things very solid.

[17] We have explained, therefore, what the divine law above all consists in, and which laws are human, namely, all those which have another aim, unless they have been enacted by revelation. For in this respect also things are referred to God (as we have shown above), and it is in this sense that the law of Moses, although it is not universal, but accommo-

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dated very much to the temperament and special preservation of one people, can still be called the law of God, *or* the divine law. For we believe that it was enacted by the light of prophecy.

[18] If now we attend to the nature of natural divine law, as we have just explained it, we shall see:

I. that it is universal, *or* common to all men; for we have deduced it from universal human nature;

II. that it does not require faith in historical narratives of any kind; for since this natural divine law is understood simply by the consideration of human nature, it is certain that we can conceive it as much in Adam as in any other man, as much in a man who lives among other men as in a man who lives a solitary life. [19] Nor can faith in historical narratives, however certain, give us any knowledge of God. Hence it also cannot give us the love of God. For the love of God arises from the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of God must be drawn from common notions which, through themselves, are certain and known. So it is far from being the case that faith in historical narratives is necessary for us to attain our greatest good. Nevertheless, although faith in historical narratives cannot give us the knowledge and love of God, we do not deny that reading them is very useful in relation to civil
III/62 life. For the more we have observed and the better we know the character and circumstances of men—which can best be known from their actions—the better will we be able to live more cautiously among them and accommodate our lives to their temperament, as much as reason suggests.

[20] III. We see that this natural divine law does not require ceremonies, that is, actions which in themselves are indifferent, and are called good only by institution or which represent some good necessary for salvation, or, if you prefer, actions whose reason surpasses man's power of understanding. For the natural light requires nothing which that light itself does not reach, but only that which can indicate to us very clearly the good, *or* the means to our blessedness. Those things which are good only by command and institution, or because they are representatives of some good, cannot perfect our intellect and are nothing but empty forms. They cannot be counted among the actions which are, as it were, the offspring or fruits of the intellect and of a healthy mind. But there is no need to show this more fully here.

[21] IV. Finally, we see that the highest reward of the divine law is the law itself, namely, to know God and to love him from true freedom and with a whole and constant heart. The penalty [for violating the divine law] is the privation of these things and bondage to the flesh, *or* an inconstant and vacillating heart. . . .

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[23] We can easily deduce what must be maintained regarding the question [whether, by the natural light, we can conceive God as a lawgiver, or prince prescribing laws to men?] from the nature of God's will, which is distinguished from his intellect only in relation to our reason, that is, in themselves God's will and God's intellect are really one and the same. They are distinguished only in relation to the thoughts we form concerning God's intellect.

[24] For example, when we attend only to the fact that the nature of a triangle is contained in the divine nature from eternity, as an eternal truth, then we say that God has the idea of the triangle, *or* understands the nature of the triangle. But when we attend afterwards to the fact that the nature of the triangle is contained in the divine nature in this way, III/63
solely from the necessity of the divine nature, and not from the necessity of the essence and nature of the triangle, indeed, that the necessity of the essence and properties of the triangle, insofar as it is also conceived as an eternal truth, depends only on the necessity of the divine nature and intellect, and not on the nature of the triangle, then the very thing we called God's intellect we call God's will *or* decree.

[25] So in relation to God we affirm one and the same thing when we say that from eternity God willed and decreed that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, or [when we say] that God understood this very thing. From this it follows that God's affirmations and negations always involve eternal necessity *or* truth.

[26] So if, for example, God said to Adam that he did not want him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [Genesis 2:17], it would imply a contradiction for Adam to be able to eat of that tree. So it would be impossible that he should eat of it. For that divine decree would have had to involve eternal necessity and truth. But since Scripture nevertheless relates that God did order Adam not to eat, and that notwithstanding Adam ate of the tree, we must say that God revealed to Adam only the evil which would necessarily befall him if he ate of that tree, but not the necessity of the connection between that act and that evil.

[27] That is why Adam perceived that revelation, not as an eternal and necessary truth, but as a law, that is, as an institution which profit or loss follows, not from the necessity and nature of the action performed, but solely from the pleasure and absolute command of some Prince. So it is only in relation to Adam, and because of a defect in his knowledge, that that revelation was a law, and God, as it were, a lawgiver or Prince.

[28] For the same reason, namely, because of a defect in their knowledge, the Decalogue was a law only in relation to the Hebrews. For since they did not know God's existence as an eternal truth, they had to

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perceive as a law what was revealed to them in the Decalogue: that God exists and that he alone is to be worshiped. If God had spoken to them immediately, without using any corporeal means, they would have perceived this, not as a law, but as an eternal truth.

[29] And what we say about the Israelites and Adam must also be said
III/64 about all the Prophets who prescribed laws in the name of God, namely, that they did not perceive God's decrees adequately, as eternal truths. For example, it must be said even of Moses himself that by revelation, or from the foundations revealed to him, he perceived the way the people of Israel could best be united in a certain region of the world, and could form a whole society, *or* set up a State, as well as the way that people could best be compelled to obedience. But he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that that way is best, nor even that the goal at which they were aiming would necessarily follow from the general obedience of the people in such a region of the world. [30] Hence he did not perceive all these things as eternal truths, but as precepts and things instituted, and he prescribed them as laws of God. That is why he imagined God as a ruler, a lawgiver, a king, as compassionate, just, and the like, when all these things are attributes only of human nature, and ought to be removed entirely from the divine nature.

But I say this only about the prophets, who prescribed laws in the name of God, and not about Christ.[15] [31] For however much Christ may seem also to have prescribed laws in the name of God, nevertheless we must hold that he perceived things truly and adequately. Christ was not so much a prophet as the mouth of God. For God revealed certain things to the human race through the mind of Christ (as we have shown in Chapter I), as previously he had revealed them through angels, that is, through a created voice, visions, and so on. So it would be as contrary to reason to maintain that God accommodated his revelations to the opinions of Christ as to maintain that, to communicate to the prophets the things to be revealed, God previously accommodated his revelations to the opinions of the angels, that is, of a created voice and of visions. No one could maintain anything more absurd than that, particularly since he was sent to teach, not only the Jews, but the whole human race. So it was not enough for him to have a mind accommodated only to the opinions of the Jews, [he required a mind accommodated] to the opin-

[15] Spinoza's contention that, Scriptural appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Jesus did not conceive God inadequately, as a lawgiver, may be another example of "yielding to the understanding" of his audience wherever possible. At any rate, though Matthew 13:10ff does suggest that Jesus taught one thing to his disciples and another to the multitudes, even what he taught his disciples was a doctrine of reward and punishment (cf. Matthew 13:40–43).

(continued...)

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NOTE: This index† is intended to provide a basic guide to the key concepts of Spinoza's philosophy, as represented by the works selected for this volume. The construction of an index for a set of translations presents formidable problems, arising mainly from the frequent lack of a one-to-one correspondence between the terms of the original text and those of the translation (but compounded in the case of Spinoza by the fact that, whereas the original text is usually in Latin, sometimes it is in Dutch). I have discussed and attempted to deal with those problems in the glossary-index of volume 1 of the *Collected Works of Spinoza* (Princeton University Press, 1985), but cannot undertake anything so complex here. Students who may want to undertake a more comprehensive investigation of Spinoza's terminology, can consult the glossary-index of that volume.‡

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†I am very much indebted to my wife Ruth for her work on the construction of this index, as well as for her help with the proofreading of the text.

‡The electronic version of that volume is available now with a very fast and powerful search program from InteLex Corp., P.O. Box 1827, Clayton, Georgia, 30525-1827. (This provides, in effect, a complete concordance to the text.)

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