



For me, Spinoza deserves our respect, not for the fact that he fought against religious suppression and for democracy and peace (which are noble deeds, indeed), but for the fact that he sees rationalism as the solution to human strife. We should use our intellect to try to come closer to the truth, to guide our actions and to consider the best option for all parties involved. This idea - using reason to increase humanity, dignity and peace - is enough to make Spinoza one of the most enlightened thinkers, ever.

Spinoza is a staunch defender of democracy, albeit not in an Ancient Greece-like form, but in a representative form. One of his strongest arguments in favor of democracy is that the people and the government are near-identical. This leads to broad support for the state's power and therefore to peace.

Spinoza makes God all powerful and His creation of a universe necessary because for Spinoza all that happens must be and any God who does not necessarily follow the 'laws of nature' would not be the most perfect being and Spinoza will make Nature itself the same as God Himself and each must follow necessarily from the divine ordinance inherent within each such that one most likely should not refer to Spinoza as a pantheist since there is no 'there there' except for what is there (in the book *Radical Enlightenment* the author will also say that it is wrong to think of Spinoza as a pantheist).

According to Spinoza the Bible, both the New and the Old Testament, teaches the believer obedience and a path for salvation, and that obedience to Goodness with its contemplation of the Divine of the One is at the nexus of faith and that's what faith means. All life and everything that exist has a *conatus* (Latin: struggle) and all existence must be in order to exist. Schopenhauer turns *conatus* into *will* and Nietzsche turns it into *will to power* and Heidegger turns it into *care* (he also makes it into *will to power* but goes back to *care*. The intro to this book written in 1883 mentions that Kant is almost the only major philosopher who was not overly influenced by Spinoza and doesn't follow Spinoza's One substance (reality) path and just to note Plotinus has a lot of foreshadowing to Spinoza and Spinoza seems to have nothing but respect for Maimonides.

"[P]eople must be governed in such a way that they can live in harmony, even though they openly hold different and contradictory opinions. We cannot doubt that this is the best way of ruling, and has the least disadvantages, since it is the one most in harmony with human nature. In a democratic state (which is the one closest to the state of nature) all men agree, as we showed above, to act--but not judge or think--according to the common decision. That is, because people cannot all have the same opinions, they have agreed that the view which gains the most votes should acquire the forces of a decision" ("A Free State" 14).

Here Spinoza is making his argument for philosophical freedom, and simultaneously placing limits of freedom to break the laws of a state. Freedom to think, but not to act. This passage is interesting to me, in part, because I've just finished reading Walter Benn Micheal's *The Trouble with Diversity*, in which he ridicules (among other things) the idea of "diversity of thought." Should we let our business board meetings include people who think the business

shouldn't exist? Should we let hard-core creationists teach high school biology? No, he says. Ideas aren't identity-- ideas should battle each other to the death.

Spinoza's tack is rather different. He suggests the kind of pluralism where people "openly hold different and contradictory opinions" despite the way that they agree to act. Spinoza doesn't seem to spend a lot of time talking about how these opinions might interface with people's compliance to act, except where he says earlier that pious dogmas don't have to be true, "not only such as are necessary for inculcating obedience; i.e. those that confirm the mind in love towards our neighbor" ("Faith and Philosophy" 8). This seems to imply--and I might be making a leap here--that as long as your opinions don't break down society into violent chaos, that you can think what you'd like. Like Michaels, Spinoza expects these ideas to have to battle it out, except not for philosophical dominance, but in political. The tyranny of the majority can force a decision, but only a decision of action, not a decision of opinion, which remains stubbornly individual.

Spinoza takes a "third way" when it comes to interpreting the scriptures. One school (Augustine, Maimonides, Ibn-Rushd etc.) advocated making the scriptures subservient to reason if they do not agree with reason (interpret more allegorically) while the other (Luther, Al-Ghazali, etc.) advocated to make reason subservient to the scriptures (interpret more literally).

Spinoza wants to divorce philosophy and theology in claiming that they operate in their own, completely separate, realms; theology and revelation is meant to inspire obedience and piety in the people while philosophy is meant to inspire reason and truth. Currently I am in favor of some version of this argument, although I think Kant did a better job than Spinoza at banishing philosophy from theology and theology from philosophy.

"Men would never be superstitious, if they could govern all their circumstances by set rules, or if they were always favored by fortune..." Thus begins one of the greatest books in the history of philosophy. Spinoza is an esoteric writer; he doesn't shout everything he has to say, though an attentive reader has a chance, however slight, to discern at least part of it. The existence of this philosophical-political esotericism, first adequately described by Leo Strauss (in "Spinoza's Critique of Religion"), is now on the verge of becoming generally accepted. For a very good example of this new, but qualified, acceptance of Spinoza's esotericism from a left/postmodern perspective, check out the recent collection of essays, "The New Spinoza", edited by Montag & Stolze, especially the essay by Andre Tosel.

But the history of Spinoza reception is another story and another review. Many modern readers of Spinoza speak with vague unease about Spinoza's 'elitism', supposing it to be but another slight of the poor, weak and uneducated; we can perhaps begin to gauge the full length, breadth and depth of this philosophical 'elitism', and its true target, in a focused reading of the opening pages of the Preface to the Theologico-Political Treatise. "The human mind is readily swayed this way or that in times of doubt, especially when hope and fear are struggling for the mastery, though usually it is boastful, over-confident, and vain." Thus the problem with Man is not, strictly speaking, merely a lack of knowledge (and therefore the problem is not merely a lack of education) but also, and perhaps most importantly, a lack of self-control.

Immediately, Spinoza follows this sentence by saying, "[t]his as a general fact I suppose everyone knows, though few, I believe, know their own nature..." There is a disconnect not only between knowing and doing but also between 'knowing' in general and knowing oneself. In order to do good how important is it to know yourself? There are several ways to understand this. One possible way is to say that even those ('sainted' elites) that 'know' are, nevertheless, unable to control their emotional behavior. Perhaps it is even this emotiveness that is especially vulnerable to superstition...

But men, "in prosperity, are so over-brimming with wisdom [...] that they take every offer of advice as a personal insult"! Still, we are not surprised to read that "...superstition's chief victims are those persons who greedily covet temporal advantages..." (Note that it is not chiefly ordinary people that 'greedily covet temporal advantages' nor is it said that they are 'in prosperity'.) And, a little later, we learn that these people "are wont with prayers and womanish tears to implore help from God..." Indeed, Spinoza, when giving an example of this despicable behavior under duress turns to no less an exemplar than Alexander the Great - and his superstitious seeking of advice from seers. Now, the use of Alexander in this regard is a vital clue in our attempt to understand Spinoza's esotericism (i.e., his 'political' philosophy). The question is this: If Spinoza is indeed an elitist, exactly what is the position that can look down on not only the common people but also the actual 'elite'; i.e., the religious and political leaders?

Well, of course, Spinoza is a philosopher; indeed he is one of the greatest. This understanding of philosophy, as the

heights from which one looks down on everyone, is an old one. See, for instance, Averroes (in the so-called 'Decisive Treatise') for an overt example of the philosophical attempt to control a faction of the medieval elite (i.e., the theologians) with another faction of the medieval elite - the Islamic Jurists. Also, one should of course consider Machiavelli's Prince for a somewhat more circumspect (or covert) example of philosophy attempting to control the direction of politics and the political elite. Spinoza's decision to view politics and theology (or politicians and theologians) as dangers that need to be moderated philosophically is thus not unprecedented. Also, on this line of thought one should perhaps also take into account Nietzsche who, in the 'Genealogy of Morals', seems to go so far as to present history itself as a struggle between priestly and warrior noble castes...

In electing to use Alexander as an example of superstition Spinoza is indicating that philosophy is above both religion and politics. Indeed, Spinoza continues in a (ahem) 'Nietzschean' vein and says, \"that prophets have most power among the people, and are most formidable to rulers, precisely at those times when the state is in most peril. I think this is sufficiently plain to all, and will therefore say no more on the subject.\" Well perhaps not entirely plain; this basically says, for those that have ears to hear: 'Statesman! Either satisfy the common people or forfeit your right to rule to the prophets and their theologians.' Thus the 'war' between priestly and warrior castes was quietly noted, by Spinoza, long before Nietzsche. As an aside I should perhaps note that one also finds oneself (perhaps) nervously asking, at this point, are people today 'satisfied'?

Kojeve, the architect of the most recent apotheosis of the political (i.e., the Universal Homogenous State), seems to confirm this interpretation (in his \"Introduction to the Reading of Hegel\") by saying that as \"long as History continues, or as long as the perfect State is not realized [...] the opposition of these two points of view (the \"philosophical\" and the religious or theological) is inevitable.\" Of course Kojève, following a Hegel that never existed, attempts to convince us that politics and philosophy are exactly the same and that theology was ever nothing. His mistake, from the viewpoint of philosophy, can perhaps be said to be that he took sides in the interminable war between elites. ...But that is another story. However, Kojève is correct insofar as he is understood to be maintaining that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the political and the religious...

Back to Spinoza. Satisfying the common people seems to be easier said than done. In a terrifyingly memorable passage - that is both a diagnosis and a prophecy - Spinoza writes, \"[f]or, as the mass of mankind remains always at about the same pitch of misery, it never assents long to any one remedy, but is always best pleased by a novelty which has not yet proved illusive.\" Thus, given the perpetual emotional dissatisfaction of the people, Spinoza seems to be indicating that no one ever rules for long. He also seems to be indicating that emotions (at least among the 'mass of mankind') are uncontrollable and that the people are, in the long run, unsatisfiable. (...So exactly what is Enlightenment - and exactly why is Spinoza supporting it? ...Hmmm.)

\"Superstition, then, is engendered, preserved and fostered by fear\", Spinoza had earlier said. But fear is an opportunity for philosophy, I mean for philosophical intervention. Machiavelli (in 'The Prince', chapter 6), after all, had already confirmed that the oppression, dissatisfaction and dispersal of the people was, above all, an opportunity for the creative One. Spinoza says that, \"Prophets have most power among the people, and are most formidable to rulers, precisely at those times when the state is in most peril.\" The fundamental argument (and struggle), of course, between philosophers and the political-religious elites, seems to be over the exact identity of the creative One. For the religiously inclined the creative one is God and those who act in his name, for the politically 'pious' the creative one is the (hereditary, patriotic or revolutionary) 'Prince'. For Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Nietzsche one suspects that, 'behind the scenes and between the lines', the creative one (the bringer of New Modes and Orders, to quote Machiavelli) can only be the philosopher.

Spinoza's final chapters argue for a sort of absolutist democracy, where the people themselves are the absolute sovereigns of the state. Though this sovereign power should have absolute right to place laws and restrictions on actions (whatever is for the benefit of the state), the state should not exercise any laws or actions that restrict speech or thought. As such, it is one of the earliest defenses of free speech of the modern era.

If a prophet dreamt of God commanding him, then these commands came from the prophet's Imagination itself, but that's fine, Imagination is part of Nature after all, so it is of humans psychology to look for God and worship him. So what should we take from Prophets and Scriptures?

We have Reasoning, that's part of our Nature, we used to assess Scripture. Spinoza is claiming to objectively assess Scripture, through objective historical study of Scripture, but he is actually first being Descartes-Skeptical (which allows him to start from scratch regarding a subject such as Theology) but mind you he's not starting fully from scratch but he does have the God-is-Nature belief to start with.

One can find truth in Scripture, but the truth that makes one live a happy sound life. Community things such as Ceremonies are aimed at the community that the Scripture was revealed to, we as individuals not living in these communities shouldn't care about these ceremonies.

Scriptures are full of amusing histories for the common people who believe in Scriptures, but Belief itself is not sufficient, they should also consult ministers to teach them the real meaning behind them for them to live a better happy life.

Comparing Spinoza with Hobbes. To Spinoza, since God is Nature, and Miracles are the break of such Nature, Miracles are nonsensical. To Hobbes, a Materialistic (the natural world is truth, but God is above it, not it), a Miracle can happen and it is a prove of God, thus believing in someone who says that a Miracle happened to him, you can either believe or not believe in his words, it depends in your belief on the person claiming that and not the Miracle itself, you didn't see the Miracle with your own eyes after all. To Spinoza, whatever happens happens according to its Nature. Why do people think of Miracles as something special (even tho things following their Nature is itself something very special to Spinoza) is that people like to think of themselves as something special to the point that "God" breaks the Nature of things to help them, that's so absurd and contradictory to God's Nature. What's a Miracle? It's a Natural phenomenon that is not understood by the reporter of the Miracle. God's Nature is to follow God's Nature, to me that makes God so passive and not actively active as Spinoza sees it. Does God feel and think? Or is God just the Causality in itself? What if it's God's Nature to change the Nature of things (a Miracle) for a prophet just to comfort him in the truth of his prophesy? But to Spinoza, God is the purpose-less Causality. What's the prove of that then? He can't of course prove it, he can only believe in it and start from there.

Are religions good? Spinoza says of course they are. It can grab common people's imagination and obedience, it makes them live happy as individuals and as a society. But philosophers, can go further than the common man and grasp a better and clearer understanding of Nature.

Are Prophets just a bunch of liars to Spinoza? I think that's not the point; they are doing what they're doing for the sake of teaching others how to live. That makes Prophets great philosophers for common people, and philosophers to be great philosophers for "smart" people. I don't like this. To me, I can say to Spinoza that it is the Nature of common people to believe in Scriptures the way they do, for Faith is something independent of Reasoning, Spinoza lacks the former and that's why he missed it in his philosophy. He indeed knows what is it about (he used it to explain humans tendency to make up religions) but he doesn't know what it is, and that's fine, it's not the Nature of Spinoza to feel Faith.

"For anyone whose knowledge rises even slightly above the common level knows that God does not have a right hand or a left hand, and does not move or stay still, and is not in space but is absolutely infinite, and all perfections are contained in him. These things, I say, are known to those who judge things from what is gathered by pure intellect, and not as the imagination is affected by external senses, as the common people do, who therefore imagine God as corporeal and as holding royal power... Many events in the Bible have been adapted to these and similar beliefs (as we have said), and accordingly they must not be accepted as real by philosophers." I think this summarizes Spinoza nicely and shows him as a continuation to Descartes Philosophy somehow. But it also shows how it's impossible for Spinoza's philosophy to find any mysticism anywhere, Scriptures or whatsoever, and this makes reading this book so boring, I already know that Spinoza's reactions are going to be Naturalistic in denying anything that is not. No fun in that! Spinoza in short: "Can Causality contradict itself? No, because Causality can't contradict itself." I think that Spinoza's Philosophy is teaching us that we should not study it, but to study Newton's instead, for Newton is telling how Nature works.

"And as the highest authority to interpret Scripture rests with each individual, the rule of interpretation must be nothing other than the natural light of reason which is common to all men, and not some light above nature or any external authority. The criterion should not be so difficult that it cannot be applied by any but the most acute philosophers, but should be adapted to the natural and common intelligence and capacity of (all) human beings, as we have shown that our norm is; for we have seen that the difficulties which it continues to present have their origin not in the nature of the method but in men's carelessness."

"This will be straightforward for us now that we know that it was not the purpose of the Bible to teach any branch of knowledge. For from this we can readily infer that it requirea nothing of men other than obedience, and condemns not ignorance but disobedience. Since obedience to God consists solely in love of our neighbor (for he who loves his

neighbor, with intentions of obeying God, has fulfilled the Law, as Paul observes in his Epistle to the Romans, 13.8), it follows that the only knowledge commended in Scripture is that which everyone needs to obey God according to this command, that is if, lacking this knowledge, they must necessarily be disobedient or at least deficient in the habit of obedience. All other philosophical concerns that do not directly lead to this goal, whether concerned with Knowledge of God or of natural things, are irrelevant to Scripture and must therefore be set aside from revealed religion."

"and consequently men may have totally the wrong ideas about God's nature without doing any wrong. It is not in the least surprising, therefore, that God adapted Himself to the imaginations and preconceived opinions of the prophets and that the faithful have held conflicting views about God... Nor is it at all surprising that the sacred books express themselves so inappropriately about God throughout attributing hands and feet to him... They are here manifestly speaking according to the [utterly deficient] understating of the common people, whom Scripture strives to render not learned but obedient. However, theologians as a rule have contended that whatever they could discern with the natural light of reason is inappropriate to the divine nature and must be interpreted metaphorically and whatever eludes their understanding must be accepted in the literal sense. But if everything of this sort which is found in the Bible had necessarily to be construed and explained metaphorically, then Scripture would have been composed not for the common folk and uneducated people, but exclusively for the most learned and philosophical."

Spinoza's Theological-Political Treatise has intrigued me for a while, here was one of the earlier books to approach the bible as fallible and openly raise questions which would later be the subject of much later biblical debate, such as the authorship of the Pentateuch. Since this was one of the first books like this, written in a time when freedom of speech wasn't a given, the book is a little uneven. During parts Spinoza tries to reinterpret scripture using scripture which seems to give authority to scripture, while in other parts he tries to show how scripture is a product of man and not God. My guess is that while he's trying to decrease the reliance on scripture for discovering god, he also wants to take care not to offend those people. In the end it slightly backfired, for a while he was thought of as an atheist and his book was banned, although now days the book's influence on historical criticism is felt.

A large chunk of the book Spinoza seems to try to take the supernatural elements out of the bible. To him things such as ten plagues in Egypt can easily be explained with natural causes, for example the locusts came by a wind from the east or a natural cause. If these things can be explained by natural causes, then its likely that the harder to explain things also likely happened with natural causes (although I don't remember him trying to explain away the virgin birth, but that might have been too dangerous). Furthermore he believes that god established the natural laws, and if god were to bend them at all to perform a miracle then that would in fact mean that he made a mistake establishing the laws.

The political part of the book is much smaller, its takes up the last few chapters, although the entire book is leading up to this point. Spinoza has been tearing down the inerrancy of the bible for the purpose of trying to get the government to allow freedom of speech and to philosophize, perhaps if the bible isn't so divine then people won't feel the urge to silence anyone who disagree with it. This freedom and a democracy leads to a more happy individual and state.

Spinoza provides a very readable treatise employing courage, honesty, with contextual clarity on a very emotionally charged subject - the construction, authorship, and integrity of the Jewish Tenakh, the Christian Old Testament. Filled with exacting information and appropriate questions and challenges, Spinoza navigates the terrain of the traditionally divinely inspired to openly reveal the untraditional reality of a potentially single authorship to what may be taken as 'A Hebrew Narrative' of their history.

This ancient author, living at least a thousand years after Moses, skillfully narrates the Hebrew history by gathering information from national collective sources, referred to in the writings themselves, and weaves a masterful work to provide a meaningful and useful history, which gives focus and purpose to a nation. The narrator incorporates not just history, but deep insights into the human condition, by the singular revelations given by God to the Hebrews through their prophets, while clarifying the general role the prophet and his practice.

The Pentateuch, therefore, was not written by Moses, though it contains information from documents written by Moses. Spinoza reveals the systematic patterns of textual construction used to unite not just the Pentateuch but also all the books of history up to the Babylonian Exile, with a specific purpose in mind, to create a enduring national identity. Spinoza highlights the sources for his perception into the narrative account with moments and places of history mentioned in the early books using names and dating that only one living hundreds of years latter could have used. He also points out mistakes the author makes by not paying attention to his information, creating challenging

contextual flow of information because the archived text is just dropped into narrative construction not fitting well, like a piece of a puzzle that does not fit its space.

The outcome, Spinoza considers that Philosophy/Science and Theology should not be dependent on each other since they have differing purposes and outcomes, but that each independently provides a source of truth that may guide humanity in their pursuit towards virtue, maturity, and civility.

To Spinoza, God is the Universe, but not merely the Universe... but rather it is the entire cosmos, SEEN FROM A UNIVERSAL, COSMIC POINT OF VIEW.

Now, to some cynics, this may seem to have no meaning. What is the difference between the Universe, seen from the universal/cosmic point of view, and just believing in absolutely nothing, except the physical universe, without intention?

Yet there is a huge difference. It is this: If I believe that God is all that ultimately matters, and if I believe God encompasses All That Is, then my viewpoint toward life must completely change. Because if THIS is what I believe in, then I no longer should be so obsessed with just my little life or even my little planet.

At minimum, I would see all conscious beings as equally a part of God, and therefore acting with selfishness would just be illogical, as Spock would say.

If we could see things from God's point of view, taught Spinoza, we would no longer be so obsessed with our selfish, petty little problems. So you didn't get that promotion? So you didn't get a date with that cute waitress? So what? Don't you realize that the Universe is a trillion, trillion, trillion times bigger than you or I?

In Spinoza's way of thinking, even if the whole Earth blew up, we shouldn't lament as much as most people would.

In a Universe of a billion times a billion planets (Carl Sagan, I'm calling YOU), in a cosmos of "billions and billions" of planets, aren't there going to be some other planets out there somewhere sustaining some sort of life?

Of course.

Spinoza's philosophy is a little like Zen. It doesn't change your life in any obvious way, and yet it changes everything. Because your whole way of thinking about the universe changes. Zen "Enlightenment" is like Spinoza's philosophy. What matters afterward is not your little petty problems, like getting that promotion, but all of the cosmos. You become one with all the cosmos, and the things you used to think were so important cease to be very important at all, even though you still continue to live your life.

Spinoza essentially says that 'God is okay'. He does this by arguing that the physical world is compatible with God, that the spiritual world need not be known, or even necessarily real: it is possible God is physical, or even that he does not exist in the known universe. God is an unknown, but so is life. Therefore, until we claim to know everything it is pointless to argue that God is impossible, because to know God is impossible we would have to be like God.

At a more literal level, Spinoza is making an argument similar to knowledge of limits, that there is a correspondence between God and the World because they are both big categories. If we choose not to believe in God we might have to believe in something much worse, and in the end that might appear pointless or at least impractical.

The question is, "What is Spinoza's God?"

If we examine Spinoza's "[A Theologico-Political Treatise](#)" we find that Spinoza rests his understanding of God on the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Some passages are quoted below; the summary, however, is that he believed God to be the creator of existence and to be all-powerful. He apparently believed God to possess a corporeal form of some sort. He also believed that Christ "felt" God's being, while Moses "saw" and "heard" it. He believed that the lesser prophets "heard" God's voice. He seemed to believe that God's voice could be an actual sound in some cases. He clearly believed that God gives us free will.

Some excerpts demonstrating Spinoza's beliefs about God:

A Theologico-Political Treatise

Part 1 - Chapters I to V

PREFACE.

(45) Having thus laid bare the bases of belief, I draw the conclusion that Revelation has obedience for its sole object, therefore, in purpose no less than in foundation and method, stands entirely aloof from ordinary knowledge; each has its separate province, neither can be called the handmaid of the other.

(46) Furthermore, as men's habits of mind differ, so that some more readily embrace one form of faith, some another, for what moves one to pray may move another only to scoff, I conclude, in accordance with what has gone before, that everyone should be free to choose for himself the foundations of his creed, and that faith should be judged only by its fruits; each would then obey God freely with his whole heart, while nothing would be publicly honoured save justice and charity.

(47) Having thus drawn attention to the liberty conceded to everyone by the revealed law of God, I pass on to another part of my subject, and prove that this same liberty can and should be accorded with safety to the state and the magisterial authority - in fact, that it cannot be withheld without great danger to peace and detriment to the community.

CHAPTER I. - Of Prophecy

(29) Yet not even thus is all difficulty removed, for it seems scarcely reasonable to affirm that a created thing, depending on God in the same manner as other created things, would be able to express or explain the nature of God either verbally or really by means of its individual organism: for instance, by declaring in the first person, \"I am the Lord your God.\"

(32) Scripture seems clearly to point to the belief that God spoke Himself, having descended from heaven to Mount Sinai for the purpose - and not only that the Israelites heard Him speaking, but that their chief men beheld Him (Ex:xxiv.) (33) Further the law of Moses, which might neither be added to nor curtailed, and which was set up as a national standard of right, nowhere prescribed the belief that God is without body, or even without form or figure, but only ordained that the Jews should believe in His existence and worship Him alone: it forbade them to invent or fashion any likeness of the Deity, but this was to insure purity of service; because, never having seen God, they could not by means of images recall the likeness of God, but only the likeness of some created thing which might thus gradually take the place of God as the object of their adoration. (34) Nevertheless, the Bible clearly implies that God has a form, and that Moses when he heard God speaking was permitted to behold it, or at least its hinder parts.

(47) We may be able quite to comprehend that God can communicate immediately with man, for without the intervention of bodily means He communicates to our minds His essence; still, a man who can by pure intuition comprehend ideas which are neither contained in nor deducible from the foundations of our natural knowledge, must necessarily possess a mind far superior to those of his fellow men, nor do I believe that any have been so endowed save Christ. (48) To Him the ordinances of God leading men to salvation were revealed directly without words or visions, so that God manifested Himself to the Apostles through the mind of Christ as He formerly did to Moses through the supernatural voice. (49) In this sense the voice of Christ, like the voice which Moses heard, may be called the voice of God, and it may be said that the wisdom of God (i.e. wisdom more than human) took upon itself in Christ human nature, and that Christ was the way of salvation.

(116) Everything takes place by the power of God. (117) Nature herself is the power of God under another name, and our ignorance of the power of God is co-extensive with our ignorance of Nature. (118) It is absolute folly, therefore, to ascribe an event to the power of God when we know not its natural cause, which is the power of God.

CHAPTER IV. - OF THE DIVINE LAW.

(25) Inasmuch as the intellect is the best part of our being, it is evident that we should make every effort to perfect it as far as possible if we desire to search for what is really profitable to us. (26) For in intellectual perfection the highest good should consist. (27) Now, since all our knowledge, and the certainty which removes every doubt, depend solely on the knowledge of God;- firstly, because without God nothing can exist or be conceived; secondly, because so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God we may remain in universal doubt - it follows that our highest good and perfection also depend solely on the knowledge of God. (28) Further, since without God nothing can exist or be conceived, it is evident that all natural phenomena involve and express the conception of God as far as their essence and perfection extend, so that we have greater and more perfect knowledge of God in proportion to our knowledge of natural phenomena: conversely (since the knowledge of an effect through its cause is the same thing as the knowledge of a particular property of a cause) the greater our knowledge of natural phenomena, the more perfect is our knowledge of the essence of God (which is the cause of all things). (29) So, then, our highest good not only depends on the knowledge of God, but wholly consists therein; and it further follows that man is perfect or the reverse in proportion to the nature and perfection of the object of his special desire; hence the most perfect and the chief sharer in the highest blessedness is he who prizes above all else, and takes especial delight in, the intellectual knowledge of God, the most perfect Being.

(58) Hence the affirmations and the negations of God always involve necessity or truth; so that, for example, if God said to Adam that He did not wish him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, it would have involved a contradiction that Adam should have been able to eat of it, and would therefore have been impossible that he should have so eaten, for the Divine command would have involved an eternal necessity and truth. (59) But since Scripture nevertheless narrates that God did give this command to Adam, and yet that none the less Adam ate of the tree, we must perforce say that God revealed to Adam the evil which would surely follow if he should eat of the tree, but did not disclose that such evil would of necessity come to pass. (60) Thus it was that Adam took the revelation to be not an eternal and necessary truth, but a law - that is, an ordinance followed by gain or loss, not depending necessarily on the nature of the act performed, but solely on the will and absolute power of some potentate, so that the revelation in question was solely in relation to Adam, and solely through his lack of knowledge a law, and God was, as it were, a lawgiver and potentate. (61) From the same cause, namely, from lack of knowledge, the Decalogue in relation to the Hebrews was a law, for since they knew not the existence of God as an eternal truth, they must have taken as a law that which was revealed to them in the Decalogue, namely, that God exists, and that God only should

be worshipped. (62) But if God had spoken to them without the intervention of any bodily means, immediately they would have perceived it not as a law, but as an eternal truth.

(63) What we have said about the Israelites and Adam, applies also to all the prophets who wrote laws in God's name - they did not adequately conceive God's decrees as eternal truths.

(71) Christ, then, perceived (truly and adequately) what was revealed, and if He ever proclaimed such revelations as laws, He did so because of the ignorance and obstinacy of the people, acting in this respect the part of God; inasmuch as He accommodated Himself to the comprehension of the people, and though He spoke somewhat more clearly than the other prophets, yet He taught what was revealed obscurely, and generally through parables, especially when He was speaking to those to whom it was not yet given to understand the kingdom of heaven. (See Matt. xiii:10, &c.) (72) To those to whom it was given to understand the mysteries of heaven, He doubtless taught His doctrines as eternal truths, and did not lay them down as laws, thus freeing the minds of His hearers from the bondage of that law which He further confirmed and established.

CHAPTER V. - OF THE CEREMONIAL LAW.

(71) All Scripture was written primarily for an entire people, and secondarily for the whole human race; therefore its contents must necessarily be adapted as far as possible to the understanding of the masses, and proved only by examples drawn from experience. (72) We will explain ourselves more clearly. (73) The chief speculative doctrines taught in Scripture are the existence of God, or a Being Who made all things, and Who directs and sustains the world with consummate wisdom; furthermore, that God takes the greatest thought for men, or such of them as live piously and honourably, while He punishes, with various penalties, those who do evil, separating them from the good. (74) All this is proved in Scripture entirely through experience-that is, through the narratives there related. (75) No definitions of doctrine are given, but all the sayings and reasonings are adapted to the understanding of the masses. (76) Although experience can give no clear knowledge of these things, nor explain the nature of God, nor how He directs and sustains all things, it can nevertheless teach and enlighten men sufficiently to impress obedience and devotion on their minds.

(77) It is now, I think, sufficiently clear what persons are bound to believe in the Scripture narratives, and in what degree they are so bound, for it evidently follows from what has been said that the knowledge of and belief in them is particularly necessary to the masses whose intellect is not capable of perceiving things clearly and distinctly. (78) Further, he who denies them because he does not believe that God exists or takes thought for men and the world, may be accounted impious; but a man who is ignorant of them, and nevertheless knows by natural reason that God exists, as we have said, and has a true plan of life, is altogether blessed - yes, more blessed than the common herd of believers, because besides true opinions he possesses also a true and distinct conception. (79) Lastly, he who is ignorant of the Scriptures and knows nothing by the light of reason, though he may not be impious or rebellious, is yet less than human and almost brutal, having none of God's gifts.

—[A Theologico-Political Treatise](#).

It may be noted that some of these beliefs are orthodox and some heterodox, but all are logically grounded in Spinoza's reading of Jewish and Christian Scripture.

The present writer believes that Spinoza erred in attributing corporeality to God, but that he was correct in his understanding of the divine natures of Christ and Moses, as well as in the difference between the words of God, expressed as laws, and the Word of God, expressing fundamental truth.

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving."...

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace, according to His saying, "His grace hath transcended all things; My grace hath encompassed them all," hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness [such as Moses and Christ] to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence.

—[Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh](#), number XIX.

I believe that Spinoza went further and posited that God existed throughout the creation which correlates with the Vedic concept of Paramatma through which the universe is sustained, but as an impartial, unmanifest expansion meaning that He cannot be directly contacted through matter, but His existence can be deduced through matter if we accept that there is more to the universe than what we can observe. But this still does not necessitate that the universe alone is God.

This is similar to Krishna's statement in Bhagavad Gita 9.4

By Me, in My unmanifested form, this entire universe is pervaded. All beings are in Me, but I am not in them.

His statement \"He who loves God cannot strive that God should love him in return,\" makes it clear that he did not accept the concept of the personality of Godhead, the foundation of monotheistic beliefs.

As to whether or not he understood matter and spirit to be essentially different or two different aspects of the same substance I am not sure. I think the latter after reading [Nathan Ketsdever](#) answer with the list of propositions. Either way I don't think he understood God to be synonymous with the universe and its laws, so I'd plump for \" a subset of God and his qualities. \"

One of the things about arguments for the existence of God is that they don't usually tell us much about what this God is like. This is true for Spinoza's argument as well. But he has more to say about what this necessary being with infinite attributes are. Spinoza uses the words 'God' and 'Nature' interchangeably throughout his book. He also thinks there is only one substance, God, and all entities within it, you, me, the trees, are part of God in a literal sense. We don't exist independently. Furthermore, everything that happens is determinist, and necessary. There is no free will, and God has no power to influence anything which happens. Thus at least aspects of his view align with atheism pretty nicely.

(2) Spinoza was actually from shunned from the Jewish community in part because he was a suspected atheist.

(3) I myself have not given an endorsement of the argument. I've only explained it as the question is only asking what his argument for God is, not whether it is any good.

(4) As for what I think of it, I think it's a pretty clever argument. Ontological arguments are pretty clever in general, and they're actually very hard to criticize sufficiently. If you think it's impossible to argue from the definition to the existence of something, think for a second about mathematics. Pure mathematics proceeds purely through definitions and axioms. $2+2=4$ is necessarily true given the axioms of mathematics. Furthermore, mathematics is extremely useful for the enterprise of science. And even furthermore, the notion of infinity is in mathematics as well. We don't discover the truths of mathematics through empirical discovery, we discover them by doing complicated operations on chalkboards or even in our own heads.

(5) I suspect, as others such as Kant suspected, that the issue with the ontological argument has to do with whether an infinite being is possible at all. If it's true that it is possible that an infinite being exists, then the ontological argument might succeed, but this possibility has to be demonstrated. Gaunilo's parody argument plays off of this as he says that the ontological argument could be used to demonstrate the existence of any perfect thing, such as a perfect island. Thus something must be wrong with the argument. The wrongness is that we don't know whether a perfect island even possibly exists first.