

## Introduction

It is often claimed that the history of Jewish thought from the Enlightenment to today can be read as an extended response to Spinoza's challenge to Judaism.<sup>1</sup> We can go a step further and say that the entire project of constituting "Jewish identity" and "Jewish thought"—the wrangling over their boundaries and basic character—has been linked from birth with interpretations of Spinoza and in particular the dilemma of his Jewishness. Spinoza and Spinozism have proved a litmus test for virtually every modern configuration of anything Jewish. One can include or exclude Spinoza; one cannot ignore him.<sup>2</sup>

The Jewish responses to Spinoza gathered here are thus every bit as much primary sources as passages from the *Theological-Political Treatise* or the *Ethics*. They are not simply readings *in* Jewish thought, as if the latter were a stable, transcendent category with only Spinoza's understanding at any moment in time and place in question. They are readings that belong to the history of efforts to determine just what is Jewish thought, and even more fundamentally who or what is Jewish.

What follows is an attempt to explain how and why Spinoza became, and has remained, so relevant to a range of Jewish thinkers and in particular to the problem of self-definition. While the sources of this fascination are complex, we can reduce it to a triad of factors. The first has to do with Spinoza's "story," centering above all on the scandal and enigma of his excommunication as a heretic by the Sephardic congregation of Amsterdam in 1656 and the fallout from this rupture. The second has to do with Spinoza's thought, specifically with its status as a complete, systematic alternative to traditional Judaism that nevertheless appears to have some mooring (how much is mooted) in Jewish sources. The third has to do with Spinoza's posthumous influence on Judaism. Life, philosophy, and legacy: these are the main terrains on which the battle over Spinoza's Jewishness has, historically, been waged.

### *Life*

There is some irony in the fact that Spinoza's Jewishness would become a subject of such uncertainty considering that he belonged to the first generation of

his family in centuries that was openly Jewish from birth. Baruch Spinoza was born in Amsterdam on November 24, 1632, to parents who were former Portuguese conversos (or descendants of baptized Jews) and had become stalwarts of the city's Sephardi community. That this community existed at all was a result of one of the most significant developments of early modern Jewish history. Hounded by the Inquisition, which suspected them (in some cases rightly) of practicing a crypto-Judaism, Portuguese conversos began to emigrate from the Iberian peninsula in growing numbers in the seventeenth century to environments that either turned a blind eye to their "Judaizing" or even permitted their open "return" to Judaism. One such place was Amsterdam. The most religiously tolerant setting for the practice of Judaism in seventeenth-century Western Europe—where Jews were actually prohibited, by law, from having to wear distinguishing badges or garments or to settle in a compulsory ghetto—Amsterdam also beckoned on account of its rising stature in maritime commerce.<sup>3</sup> The merchants among the Jewish newcomers to the city contributed no small amount to the burnishing of this reputation; with their extensive contacts with agents throughout a Sephardic and converso diaspora that stretched from the Ottoman Empire to the Americas, they helped build Amsterdam into a colossus of Atlantic and world trade in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup>

By Spinoza's early years, the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam were well on their way to becoming the most prosperous Jewish community of the era. Baruch—or "Bento," as he was popularly known in a community whose vernacular remained Portuguese—grew up worshipping at the Sephardic Talmud Torah congregation, on whose prestigious and powerful governing board (or Mahamad) his father, Michael, a moderately successful importer of fruits and nuts, twice served. From age seven, Baruch attended the community's renowned Ets Hayim ("Tree of Life") academy. There, under the tutelage of leading rabbis in the community, such as Saul Levi Morteira and Menasseh ben Israel, he obtained a Jewish education that, unusual for the time, emphasized the study of the Bible and its classical commentaries along with Hebrew language and grammar. Even after leaving the school in his late teens to join his father's business, Spinoza apparently continued for a time to take part in the adult education classes offered by the community. Indeed, up until roughly a year before his fateful confrontation with the community, he continued to pay dues and annual voluntary contributions to the Talmud Torah congregation.<sup>5</sup>

No moment in Spinoza's life has drawn as much interest as his expulsion from Amsterdam Sephardic society in 1656. Not only generations of biogra-

phers and historians, but also artists, novelists, and playwrights, have speculated about the causes and circumstances of the clash between Spinoza and the community of his birth. The writ of excommunication (selection 1), which was first discovered by researchers in the mid-nineteenth century, contains vague references to Spinoza's "horrible heresies" and "monstrous deeds"; but it does not spell out the specific taboos he had violated, nor does it stipulate why so harsh and thoroughgoing a ban (or *herem*)—one that prohibited any association with the archheretic whatsoever—was deemed necessary.

Most believe that Spinoza must have challenged certain beliefs so fundamental as to constitute articles of faith, perhaps previewing arguments against biblical and rabbinic authority that he would develop more fully in the *Theological-Political Treatise*. One influential thesis holds that Spinoza's ban was grounded in three heresies in particular: the claims that God exists only philosophically, that the soul dies along with the body, and that the law of Moses is not true.<sup>6</sup> Without a philosophical provocation of this sort, the extremity of the writ of excommunication for Spinoza is hard to understand, not to mention why it would specifically forbid "read[ing] anything written by him." Yet there continues to be a minority of scholars who view ideas as, at most, a secondary factor, pinning the responsibility for the rupture between Spinoza and the community on more mundane acts of defiance.<sup>7</sup> Another point of contention involves Spinoza's attitude toward and specific role in his ouster. Was a parting of ways something initiated and welcomed by Spinoza? Is it true, as a mid-twentieth-century biography of the philosopher claims, that "Spinoza had virtually de-communicated himself from Amsterdam Jewry before they ex-communicated him"?<sup>8</sup> Or was the ban imposed on Spinoza against his wishes? Did he perhaps remonstrate with his accusers, implying by his very willingness to voice his criticisms a desire to avert the path of total exit? Was Spinoza, in short, an enthusiastic or reluctant émigré from the Portuguese community? Most scholars lean toward the first option, but this view is not universal.<sup>9</sup> Even less consensus exists on the matter of Spinoza's personal identity in the wake of his departure. That Spinoza spurned the standard menu of options available to excommunicated Jews in premodern times, refusing the either-or of submitting to the authority of the Jewish community and seeking to be restored to the fold, or joining a new religious community, is clear. The meaning, however, of this "third way" of nonreconciliation and nonconversion is elusive. Was Spinoza's rejection of the baptismal waters simply a repudiation of membership in any religious body, or did it speak to the retention of some existential Jewishness that he was unwilling to renounce?

Could Spinoza even conceive of a “secular,” subversive, non-Halakhic Jewishness to which he might remain connected? Did he see himself as having left Judaism behind, or only the Judaism of the rabbis?

Over the centuries, Jews have responded to the questions of why Spinoza was excommunicated, whether a public break was something he wanted, and what sort of Jewish identity, if any, he exemplified afterward, in a variety of ways. Their perspectives can be grouped into three different camps, depending, roughly speaking, on whether they regard Spinoza as a hero or villain of the story or as something in between.

The first category consists of those who regard Spinoza as a nonconformist Jew, perhaps even as a heretical Jew, but as someone who was defiantly Jewish to the end and drew on the best traditions and ideals that Judaism had to offer. For this group, responsibility for the excommunication lay clearly with a Jewish establishment unwilling to tolerate public dissent, even if that dissent had authentic roots in classical sources. Spinoza may have opted out of the community, but only because he rightly refused to pay the price of staying put. Yet in refusing to renounce or even repress his convictions, Spinoza belonged to a long and proud Jewish “countertradition” of prophets, philosophers, rebels, would-be reformers, and heretics who challenged priestly, rabbinic, or communal authority in some way and suffered the consequences. Proof of Spinoza’s Jewish loyalty could be found in his lifelong rejection of conversion, a position he defended, years after his excommunication, in resisting a former Latin tutee’s attempt to persuade him to convert to Catholicism. To the latter’s argument that the truth of Christianity was borne out by its spread and prosperity along with a long history of martyrdom, Spinoza countered by invoking Judaism’s endurance through thousands of years of persecution and its own share of martyrs, hinting at a certain pride in this stubborn survival.<sup>10</sup> This romantic view of Spinoza began to be openly championed only in the nineteenth century, by Jewish thinkers who typically identified with the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) or other reformist and revolutionary movements. Among maskilim and Jewish radicals, many of whom had broken with a traditional upbringing themselves and been ostracized, in some cases even excommunicated for doing so, the story of Spinoza’s *herem* was increasingly seen as a prototype of their own experience, an *Ur*-rupture in the history of the Jewish intellectual that provided their own, less ballyhooed ruptures with redemptive meaning and purpose. Here is the origin of Spinoza’s reputation not simply as a dissenting or renegade Jew, but as the first modern Jew.

The second category consists of those who judge Spinoza guilty of apostasy in addition to heresy. In this perspective, Spinoza follows in the footsteps of previous deserters who became active polemicists against—and even persecutors of—their native religion. The foremost exponent of this view was Spinoza’s sternest critic in Jewish thought, the German Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen (selection 30), who famously judged Spinoza guilty of a “humanly incomprehensible betrayal” of Judaism. The absence of a formal conversion to Christianity in Spinoza’s case belied the fact that there was essentially an “intellectual” conversion, borne out, according to Cohen, by the coupling, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, of a disparaging, knowingly deceptive treatment of the Hebrew Bible and Judaism with a sympathetic interpretation of the New Testament and Christianity. It was Spinoza’s defection from Judaism and affiliation with nonconformist Christian sects that had precipitated his excommunication, and not the other way around, even if, in Cohen’s reading, it was also the ban that ultimately drove Spinoza to wreak such public revenge on his inherited religion in the *Treatise*. Others, such as Leo Strauss (selection 31), have demurred from attributing Spinoza’s biblical criticism and censure of Judaism to sheer malice, even while agreeing that his abandonment of his people was a cause of, rather than a response to, the *herem*.

The third camp consists of those who have striven for some kind of middle ground in their assessment of Spinoza and the community that expelled him. Already in the eighteenth century, we find the first Jewish thinker to openly expostulate on Spinoza at any length, Moses Mendelssohn (selections 4–8), deliberately carving out a nuanced position on his heretical predecessor. Mendelssohn opposed the main elements of Spinoza’s philosophy, biblical criticism, and interpretation of Judaism, yet he defended Spinoza’s character, portraying him as a well-intentioned intellectual pioneer who had advanced thought yet ultimately gone astray rather than as a malicious subversive. While Mendelssohn never weighed in on Spinoza’s excommunication per se, it is clear from his general rejection of all forms of religious coercion—including excommunication—that he found the *herem* unjust and probably believed that it was a cause, and not merely reflection, of Spinoza’s estrangement. Efforts at balance would also become common among nineteenth-century scholars associated with the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (“Science of Judaism”) movement. The author of the first truly scholarly biography of Spinoza, Jakob Freudenthal (selection 24) had deep admiration for, and even a sense of kinship with, his subject. Yet Freudenthal also believed that the perception of Spinoza as the victim of fanatical rabbis

determined to crush all opposition was a myth constructed by Spinoza's early non-Jewish biographers, who were determined to cast Jews in the worst light possible. Freudenthal indeed regretted that the "congregation of Amsterdam [had] cast away from itself one of the noblest men ever produced by Judaism" and ultimately concluded that "the rough manner in which the ban was applied is not to be excused." Still, he sought to provide historical context for why the community responded as it did, by evoking how galling and frightening Spinoza's heresy must have seemed to a congregation comprising mainly former Marranos who had "voluntarily undergone cruel persecutions for the sake of their religion."

Periodically, there have been very public—and thus far futile—calls to retroactively lift Spinoza's ban. One such episode, involving the Israeli prime minister David Ben-Gurion (selection 19), is excerpted in this book.<sup>11</sup> Such calls for amnesty are motivated by a deep identification with Spinoza, to be sure, but also by a desire to resolve the standoff between Spinoza and the community that expelled him and thereby recover Spinoza fully for Judaism. Yet daily we see evidence that the books on this confrontation are not so easily closed. Whenever debate surfaces over the legitimate bounds of criticism of Israel within the organized Jewish community; whenever the *fidelity* of the Jewish writer or intellectual to the larger Jewish society is put into question; whenever, in short, the values of individual freedom and communal unity appear to clash—at those moments we are reminded that the conflict between Spinoza and the community is not really past. To pardon Spinoza, however purely symbolically, would be to miss what makes him so profoundly relevant to controversies over "Jewish loyalty" and "Jewish values" and simply "Jewishness" that, like the fascination with Spinoza itself, show no signs of abating.

### *Philosophy*

For all the ink that has been spilled about Spinoza's excommunication and the significance of his refusal to convert post facto, these topics derive their fascination solely from the fact that Spinoza went on to become one of the great, if not the greatest, philosophers of Jewish descent. But for the latter, the question of Spinoza's identity would be of peripheral interest. The two works by Spinoza that have provoked the most commentary are, first, his magnum opus, the *Ethics*, an attempt, in five parts written in a notoriously difficult geometrical style, to provide what amounts to a philosophy of everything; and second, the *Theological-Political Treatise*, which contains Spinoza's most systematic critique of

Judaism, allegedly based on a rejoinder to the Jewish leadership of Amsterdam composed around the time of the ban. Yet Jewish thinkers have also wrestled with a host of lesser-known works, including Spinoza's never-finished study of Hebrew grammar, as well as a corpus of eighty-eight extant letters written by or to him.

Before pivoting in this section from Jewish responses to Spinoza as a historical figure to Jewish responses to his philosophical writings, let me pause here to provide an overview of Spinoza's thought, especially those elements of his philosophy that would prove to be of greatest relevance to his Jewish apologists and critics. Spinoza's philosophy is complex, intricate, and not easily reduced. There is, however, a central claim that underpins his system. This is the idea, developed via definitions, axioms, and propositions in the *Ethics*, that there is only one *substance*, or entirely self-caused and self-explanatory being (as Spinoza puts it, a being that is "in itself and conceived through itself").<sup>12</sup> This substance, which is necessarily undivided and unproduced, has infinitely many *attributes*, each of which expresses the eternal and infinite essence of substance (E1, d6). Only two of these attributes are known to us—namely, thought and spatial extension (E2, pp. 1–2). Everything else is causally and conceptually dependent, inhering in substance and its attributes. Spinoza calls these finite particulars *modes*, or "that which is in another through which it also conceived" (E1, d5). Finally, this substance has a name, or rather two. Contrary to dualistic cosmologies that view nature as a separate, subordinate substance created and acted on by a transcendent deity, Spinoza identifies the one substance with God, and God with Nature. "God, or Nature," as Spinoza famously puts it—"Deus sive Natura"—is all that exists, and "acts from the same necessity with which [it] exists" (E4, preface).

By now, especially if you are new to Spinoza, you will undoubtedly have many questions. What does it mean to say that God and Nature are alternative names for the same substance? What exactly is an attribute, and how does it differ from substance? How can substance be single and uniform, yet consist of an infinite number of attributes and modes? If God is an extended substance, if he has dimensions, how can he be said to be undivided? These questions have long bedeviled and divided students of the seventeenth-century philosopher, and we will not be able to address all or even most of them here. What is clear, and for our purposes paramount, is that Spinoza denies the reality of the supernatural along with any ontological breach between God and the cosmos. Virtually the entirety of Spinoza's philosophy can be shown to rest in some fashion on this core insight.

Several consequences follow from this metaphysical monism (the view that only one reality exists). First, unlike the God of most believing Jews and Christians, Spinoza's God is not a stage manager or director of nature and history. There is no place, in Spinoza's system, for the biblical idea of a personal and uncreated God who is the creator, master, judge, and ultimately redeemer of the extended universe, or who cares about the conduct and destiny of humankind and listens to and answers the prayers of individuals and communities. Spinoza's God is also incommensurate with the highly depersonalized divinity of a medieval religious philosopher such as Maimonides, who despite rejecting the ascription of any positive attributes to God allows for the possibility that the world's existence is the result of a creative act of divine will and purpose.<sup>13</sup> Even this is too anthropomorphic for Spinoza; the idea that God would act not by ironclad necessity, but out of conscious choice, for the sake of some end, is nothing more than a projection of an imperfect human understanding onto him.

The upshot of this radical demythologizing of God is an almost airtight determinism. Miracles, understood as events that contradict the lawful order of nature, are inadmissible, insofar as they presume that God is a separate agent manipulating things from without. "God is the immanent, not the transitive cause of all things," Spinoza writes (E1, p. 18). Nor is there any ground for believing in free will. There are no decisions—divine or human—that are unconditioned and utterly arbitrary; everything has a cause from which it follows. We may feel ourselves to be willing our actions, but this, Spinoza writes, is no different from holding that a falling stone could "believe that it is very free, and that it perseveres in motion for no other cause than because it wills to."<sup>14</sup> Spinoza's substance monism also underlies his insistence that thought and extension are "one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that" (2Ep7, Schol). There is no need to posit some external cause to explain their interaction; as Spinoza claims, "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (2Ep7). What we are, as humans, is simply complex, finite modes of the one substance, God-or-Nature, conceived of in one way as bodies (through the attribute of extension) and in another as the ideas of those bodies, or as minds (through the attribute of thought). The notion that humans should aim to master their corporeal natures—to achieve "mind over matter"—is incompatible with the reality that all thoughts are necessarily embodied, just as all bodies are necessarily ideated.

What kind of ethics can be built on this metaphysical foundation? In biblical ethics, the commandments of an extramundane God are the source of morality,

and the ultimate good is to imitate God's holiness by taking pity on the unfortunate and acting selflessly to alleviate their suffering.<sup>15</sup> Spinoza rejects this. In its place, he proposes a rational ethics whose highest ideal is not self-sacrifice, but a kind of self-actualization. By using reason to grasp the natural laws, causes, and forces that explain reality, we enhance our powers of thought and action and obtain the only kind of freedom possible in Spinoza's system, a sober, stoical sort of freedom that comes from an adequate knowledge, based on clear and distinct ideas, of why things are the way they are. Spinoza thus envisions an autonomous morality, in which we work for the benefit of others not out of a sense of obligation or commiseration, but from a rational recognition of where our best interests truly lie. If this seems at odds with biblical ethics, there is a way in which the idea that man is formed in the divine image, and the imperative to emulate God, retains validity for Spinoza. By working to expand our knowledge of the universe, or God, Spinoza claims, we also become more *like* him. We come ever nearer to a view of things as they objectively exist and function in the totality of substance, without the distortions and omissions that typically cloud our partial and subjective perspectives. This is what Spinoza calls knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*, or "under the aspect of eternity." It culminates in what is, according to Spinoza, not only the loftiest aspiration, but also a deeply therapeutic one, bearing with it the promise of salvation, or human blessedness: the *amor dei intellectualis*, or the intellectual love of God (E5, p. 33). We love God best by attaining cognition of him, not through worship, obedience, or martyrdom. Spinoza thus holds on, loosely, to the biblical precept of loving and emulating God, but his understanding of this ethic is wholly intellectual; it is also astonishingly bold in its view of how completely man can know God. No medieval Jewish thinker—even the most rationalist among them—would presume to say that we can attain, through our own reason, knowledge of the essence of God. Spinoza's identification of God with Nature paves the way to such a claim. We approach a fuller understanding of God as we approach a fuller understanding of the fixed and eternal laws of the cosmos.

Spinoza recognized that living by this ethical philosophy was hard work likely to appeal to only a select few. That was no reason to abandon it—"all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare," the *Ethics* famously concludes (E5, p. 42)—but this philosophy could not serve, without modification, as the basis for a political order. Outlining a system that could was the task Spinoza set for himself in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Theological-Political Treatise*, or *TTP*). Unlike the *Ethics*, which was published by Spinoza's friends posthumously, the

*TTP* appeared during Spinoza's lifetime, albeit anonymously. As mentioned previously, it is widely believed that the nucleus of the work was a defense that Spinoza had written of his refusal to submit to the authority of Amsterdam Jewry. But the book as a whole was not published until 1670, fourteen years after Spinoza's excommunication, by which point its author was more directly concerned with contemporary Dutch politics. Spinoza's main goal in writing the *TTP* was to persuade the regents who governed the city of Amsterdam to enshrine and safeguard the "freedom to philosophize," allowing dissident perspectives like his own to be publicly expressed and debated. He also sought to lay out a vision of a polity that, without necessarily embracing his own substance monism and radically intellectualist ethics, could nevertheless more closely approximate his universalist outlook.

The chief obstacle standing in the way of this was the entanglement of politics and philosophy with religion. Even in the comparatively tolerant seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, the Reformed Church had considerable sway over affairs of state, and individuals who disseminated ideas deemed hostile to orthodox doctrine risked arrest and harsh punishment. By contrast, Spinoza envisioned a state where churches of any confession—including the "official" Reformed Church—would be stripped of all coercive influence and power. In order to convince civil authorities to move in this direction, Spinoza felt that he had to challenge religious clerics on their own terrain—namely, over how to interpret the Bible. The key was to seek "all knowledge of Scripture . . . from Scripture alone," putting any a priori assumptions about the truth of the Bible aside and avoiding reading into the text what was not there. On this basis, Spinoza aimed to show that several basic beliefs of both Judaism and Christianity could be invalidated through an accurate, unprejudicial understanding of the Bible itself, the very work most commonly invoked in their support. Read correctly, Spinoza contended, the Bible did not portray prophets—not even Moses—as gifted intellects blessed with a mode of cognition superior to human reason; they were merely great moral teachers with vivid imaginations. The Jews were no longer God's chosen people, since the biblical status of "election" only applied to a sovereign people, and the Jews had long ceased to be that. Jewish law was a "ceremonial law" that was binding only as long as the ancient commonwealth stood; there was nothing in the Bible to indicate that it was absolute in its scope, divine at its source, and eternal in its validity. What the Bible described as divinely ordained miracles merely reflected its authors' limited understanding of nature and scientific causation. Indeed, as far as knowledge of God and nature

was concerned, the Bible was plainly an imperfect book. Prefiguring modern biblical criticism, Spinoza portrays the Bible as a historical document written by human authors, none of them philosophers. Even the Pentateuch, traditionally believed to have been dictated by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, was not the work of Mosaic authorship alone. To understand what the Bible meant, one had to study it with the same philological and contextual tools one would use to decipher any ancient text.

With this historical-critical method for reading the Bible, Spinoza challenged two axioms of his day. The first was the notion that the Bible should serve as the basis for contemporary politics; the second was the idea that the Bible should set parameters for acceptable philosophical and scientific investigation and discovery. Both were rooted in a fundamental confusion about what was truly of enduring value in the biblical text. The theocratic nature of the ancient biblical commonwealth may have been apropos in its time, but it was now long since obsolete, including for Jews living in exile.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the effort to avoid all conflict between rational inquiry and the Bible—either by placing the former in a thoroughly ancillary position, or by forcing the two to cohere, however much violence of interpretation that might require—was a category error of the worst sort, for the Bible was simply not a philosophical or scientific work. It was a normative text with scripts for action, aimed at society at large and designed to teach piety and morality. What merited being considered “true religion” or the “Word of God” in the Bible, and consequently of lasting validity, were several ethical and ecumenical precepts, e.g., to love your neighbor as yourself. A bedrock text such as the Bible could thus demonstrate its continued religious significance by helping to secure *obedience* to these principles among the public. Left unsaid, though it is implicit in the *Ethics*, is that for the philosopher, capable of recognizing the merit of these moral truths on the basis of reason alone, the Bible is essentially superfluous.

The *Theological-Political Treatise* was notorious from the moment it was published. Numerous polemics and diatribes followed closely on its heels and continued to appear in print for decades thereafter, while governments throughout Europe took measures to suppress what one critic famously branded the *liber pestilentissimus* (or most pestilent book).<sup>17</sup> Jewish voices were largely absent in the early reaction to the *TTP*, perhaps because the *herem* that forbade the reading of anything written by Spinoza dissuaded even those aggrieved by the book from publicly entering the fray. But the snubbing of the *TTP* by Jews lasted long after the ban had declined in de facto authority, as seen in the fact that it was

first translated into Hebrew in 1961, nearly eighty years after the first Hebrew translation of the *Ethics* was published.<sup>18</sup> Spinoza's harsh and withering criticism of Judaism in the *TTP* explains this disparity in the Jewish reception of the two works. Spinoza attacked the idea of Jewish chosenness and attributed Jewish survival in exile not to any special covenant with God, but solely to the hatred Jews incurred through their stubborn adherence to separatist practices such as circumcision. He cast Mosaic law as merely a political religion aimed at shoring up submission to the ancient Hebrew polity and suited to the slave mentality of a people fresh out of Egyptian bondage. He essentially stripped Diasporic Judaism of any purpose for existence, while betraying not a hint of identification with the Jews, whom he refers to consistently in the third person as "they," or worse, as "Pharisees," in a manner seemingly designed to capitalize on the negative Christian connotations of the label. All this was bad enough, but especially galling was the much gentler, even groveling treatment that Spinoza appeared to afford Christianity. By fixing the arrows of his critical method of interpretation on the Hebrew Bible while largely sparing the New Testament, and by portraying Jesus as far more philosophically enlightened than Moses, Spinoza appeared to violate his own stricture against saving a religious text or tradition via rationalist interpretation, the very approach for which he faulted Maimonides in the *TTP*.<sup>19</sup> What was the reason for this double standard? Was Spinoza driven by spite toward his native religion and community for having ostracized him? Did he indeed view Christianity as a more philosophically refined religion than Judaism? Or was his apparent genuflecting merely tactical, a result of his attempt to accommodate his argument for the separation of philosophy from theology to the anti-Jewish prejudice of his target audience?<sup>20</sup> Between the lines, was his critique of religion directed at Christianity as much as and perhaps even more so than Judaism? Whatever the case may be, Spinoza's reduction of Judaism to an outmoded legal system, at once narrow, particularist, exclusive, and intolerant, foreshadows (if not founds) a major current of Enlightenment anti-Judaism.

While Jewish responses to Spinoza's work have been as wide-ranging as this oeuvre itself, the question that has sparked the most discussion is whether Spinoza's philosophy—despite its apparent hostility to Judaism as well as its deviation from the traditional exegetical mode of Jewish thought—can be deemed, in some way, to be "Jewish." In what follows, I arrange the positions on this debate along a spectrum ranging from near-total inclusion on one end to near-total exclusion on the other. Obviously, how one specifically understands Spi-

noza is not all that is at issue here; as important is the respondent's construction of "Jewish thought" or "Jewish philosophy" more generally.

(1) *The argument that Spinozism is substantively, if also subversively, Jewish*

One rationale we encounter time and again among those who urge a stance of unequivocal inclusion is a vision of Spinozism as an authentic, if largely underground and suppressed, Jewish intellectual tradition. The pantheistic element of Spinoza's thought plays an especially important role here. Since the nineteenth century, the conventional view of even the most liberal Jewish thinkers, let alone the Orthodox ones, has been that Spinoza's monism—his belief that there is only ultimate substance or reality, which can be called God or Nature (*Deus sive Natura*) interchangeably—is utterly incompatible with a biblical monotheism that stresses God's sovereign will and transcendence of nature. Yet some have reasoned otherwise, arguing that Spinoza's monism, if interpreted as a claim that only God exists, is a kind of philosophical consummation of biblical monotheism's emphasis on God's radical oneness.<sup>21</sup> This became an especially common argument among nineteenth-century maskilim determined to reclaim Spinoza for Judaism. In the writings of figures such as Meir Letteris (selection 14) and Salomon Rubin (selection 15), we find what verges on an obsession with unearthing hints of this monistic metaphysics not only in the Bible, but also in rabbinic literature, medieval Jewish philosophy, and even Kabbalah. While such appropriations often had anticlerical intent, they nevertheless tended to an idealistic interpretation of Spinozism as a divinization of nature more than a naturalization of the divine. Jewish nationalists who favored a recuperation of Spinoza for Judaism typically objected to this "God-intoxicated" reading of Spinoza as an excessive spiritualization of his thought. For figures such as Moses Hess (selection 16) and David Ben-Gurion (selection 19), what was uniquely and originally Jewish about Spinoza was precisely his rejection of all dualisms, whether idealism and materialism, spirit and nature, mind and body, or religion and politics. Such dualisms, these thinkers argued, were distinctively Christian, not Jewish, though they had become unfortunately integral to the "Diaspora Judaism" of the rabbis. Certain Zionists thus viewed Spinoza's pantheism and his politicization of Judaism not as treasonous (as did critics such as Cohen), but as harking back to a Jewish worldview that was prediasporic and prerabbinic—indeed, as a philosophy very much in tune with their own ideological project of *shelilat ha-golah*, or "negation of the exile."<sup>22</sup> Yet this vision of a distinctively Jewish subversive Spinoza has not been exclusive to Jewish nationalists. More recently, some postmodern and postcolonial theorists have emphasized

the Jewishness of Spinoza's thought on grounds that have little to do with any primordialist logic. The contemporary thinker Willi Goetschel, for instance, views Spinoza as exemplary of a "Jewish philosophy" whose Jewishness is (or should be) manifest in its critical function vis-à-vis the Western canon. In this reading, just as Spinoza's monism rules out any privileging of the universal over the particular, so too Jewish thought, as a philosophical and ethical universalism self-consciously rooted in particularity, has the power and responsibility to "unmask" the hidden particularities that are constitutive of all universalisms, including those of mainstream Western philosophy.<sup>23</sup>

(2) *The argument for considering Spinoza a "Jewish philosopher" more on the basis of a secularized view of Jewishness than on the content of his thought per se*

It would be fair to say that full-throated claims for the Jewishness of Spinoza's thought form a minority opinion in the history of Jewish responses to Spinoza. Ambivalence has been far more characteristic, though this has taken a variety of forms. The one that comes closest to the case for unequivocal inclusion is typically grounded in a broad vision of "Jewish thought" as the collective cultural or intellectual output of a nation, people, or civilization. The advocates of this approach may differ over where the lines are to be drawn and over which, if any, boxes must be checked to regard a particular outlook as Jewish. Yet they are united in spurning any attempt to reduce "Jewish philosophy" to a "philosophy of Judaism," limited to furnishing theoretical exposition of, or justification for, Jewish religious beliefs, doctrines, or practices. Champions of a secular and expansive definition of Jewish thought and culture—from early twentieth-century Hebraists and Yiddishists to the Posen Foundation today—have been especially prominent in the effort to reclaim Spinoza for modern Jews. At times, they draw attention to what they see as decidedly un-Jewish, indeed heretical elements of Spinoza's thought. Yet their ultimate concern is to imagine a Jewish philosophical canon sufficiently flexible and capacious to accommodate Spinoza.

(3) *The argument for viewing Spinoza's philosophy as formatively, though not necessarily distinctively Jewish*

Most of the literature on Spinoza's Jewishness to date has focused on identifying Jewish sources and contexts for his philosophy, including both his biblical criticism and his metaphysics. This research has taken three main directions. Some have sought to situate Spinoza's work within the medieval Jewish rationalist philosophy; others have looked for influences in Kabbalistic literature specifically; still others have stressed the impact of the Marrano background of Amsterdam's Sephardic society in shaping the heterodox views of Spinoza.

Common to all these approaches is their rebuttal of the common assumption in much of the philosophical literature on Spinoza that the decisive influences on his thought were wholly or even largely *external* to the Jewish community. Yet while scholars from Manuel Joël in the nineteenth century (selection 23) to Harry Wolfson (selection 27) in the twentieth to Warren Ze'ev Harvey and Steven Nadler today have contributed greatly to portraying the Jewish intellectual tradition as a significant *formative* influence on Spinoza's writings, they have generally been more cautious toward, or even outright rejected, the view of Spinoza's thought as distinctively Jewish.<sup>24</sup>

(4) *The argument that Spinoza's philosophy is at odds with Judaism rightly understood, but is not irredeemable*

Some opponents of Spinoza—even while rejecting his thought as both Jewishly and philosophically objectionable—have nonetheless held out the possibility of a posthumous “fix” that would reduce the distance separating the Amsterdam philosopher from Judaism. Typically, this repair has taken the form of understanding Spinoza's immanentist theology in a panentheist (where God is fully present in yet still exceeds the world) or acosmic (where “all is God”) rather than strictly pantheist light. For all their differences, Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century and Rav Avraham Isaac Ha-Kohen Kook in the twentieth (selection 29) could be said to agree with the view that Spinoza's thought is heretical, yet contains sparks worthy of being rescued and redeemed.

(5) *The argument for an unbridgeable gulf between Spinoza's thought and Judaism*

Finally, we come to those who have claimed a gaping abyss between Spinoza's ideas and Judaism and steadfastly resisted even a modest gesture of selective appropriation or posthumous rapprochement. This camp—though it contains a considerable number of Jewish traditionalists—is hardly monolithic. Rationalists and antirationalists, “religious” thinkers who nevertheless differ substantially on matters as basic as the divinity of scripture and the continued authority of Jewish law (Halakhah), and even many self-described “secular” Jews have been members as well. In other words, we find widespread disagreement as to the very nature of Judaism among the opposition to Spinoza in Jewish thought. For all this internal variety, what this group might be said to share is a basically prescriptive view of “Jewish philosophy” as a form of inquiry with moorings in the sources and fundamentals of Judaism. They are almost entirely at odds with an essentially cultural or national definition of “Jewish philosophy” that would be emancipated from the task of furnishing a “philosophy of Judaism.” In itself, this is not a disqualifying factor for reclaiming Spinoza, for there have been and

continue to be those who see Spinoza's thought as derivative of, and commensurate with, Judaism's core ideas. Yet most proponents of an essentialist view of Jewish philosophy have tended to view Spinoza's thought at the very least as a stark deviation from Judaism, and often as a malicious disfigurement of its bedrock values and beliefs. Such is the case for critics such as Samuel David Luzzatto (selection 28) and Hermann Cohen, for whom Spinoza's thought—whether on account of his metaphysics, his ethics, his biblical criticism, or his treatment of Judaism compared to his treatment of Christianity—is simply beyond the pale.

### *Legacy*

The last focal point for the “Spinoza Question” in Jewish thought has been his legacy. Here it is not so much the intent as the effects of Spinoza's personal example and philosophy that are at issue. The responses range from those, at one end, who view Spinoza's influence as corrosive and deleterious for Jews and Judaism to those, at the other end, who ascribe an almost sacred status to Spinoza's life and thought for the modern Jew. Not surprisingly, most take a position somewhere in between these two extremes. Once again, I will arrange the positions on Spinoza's legacy along a progression from the largely admiring to the wholly negative.

#### *(1) Spinoza as a pioneer of Jewish modernity in a positive sense*

In this camp lie those who credit Spinoza with giving birth to, or at least paving the way for, Jewish modernity. By personally rejecting rabbinic and communal authority while at the same time refusing to convert—and by developing a philosophical system that eviscerated the historical and metaphysical foundations of traditional Jewish law and society—Spinoza, in this view, offered later Jews a model and a map for the road “out of the ghetto,” or in the words of one of his main nineteenth-century champions, “a new guide to the perplexed.” The principal debate among the proponents of Spinoza's prototypical significance has centered on which of the myriad responses to the modern “Jewish Question” might be laid at this doorstep. Some have seen in Spinoza the forerunner of a Diaspora-oriented assimilationist or integrationist Jewish identity, wherein Judaism, if it is to endure, can do so as only a voluntaristic and privatized religion. Others have claimed him as a Zionist precursor, for reasons ranging from his cryptic allusion to the possibility of the re-creation of a Jewish state in the third chapter of the *Theological-Political Treatise* to his fundamentally secular and political understanding of Judaism. Still others have regarded Spinoza as a heroic exemplar of what the Jewish Marxist Isaac Deutscher famously called the “non-

Jewish Jew” (selection 21), the critical Jewish intellectual of modern times whose Jewishness is paradoxically expressed in a principled repudiation of all forms of particularism. For all the variety of this camp, those who belong to it commonly view Spinoza’s “modernity” as a working-out of ideas and possibilities secreted in the Jewish intellectual tradition to which he was heir.

(2) *Spinoza as a progenitor of Jewish modernity in a negative or dialectical sense*

Unlike the previous group, the propagators of this view largely reject any attempt to categorize Spinoza as a “Jewish thinker” or even a “modern Jewish thinker,” arguing that such a label would be a betrayal of how Spinoza saw himself or would wish to be remembered. Yet while excluding Spinoza from the Jewish philosophical canon, they nonetheless vouch for his profound relevance for the advancement of modern Jewish philosophy. Spinoza, in this view, laid down a gauntlet for all Jewish thinkers to come after him. By portraying Judaism in the *Theological-Political Treatise* as an anachronism devoid of a present-day *raison d’être*—and by personally dispensing with any and all Jewish commitments, convinced that one could live a worthy life on the basis of universal reason alone—Spinoza provided a negative model with which any philosophical affirmation of modern Judaism would have to seriously contend. The chief exponent of this view of Spinoza as the unwitting table setter for modern Judaism has undoubtedly been Eliezer Schweid (1929– ), Israel Prize laureate and emeritus professor of Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University. Schweid interprets virtually the entire history of modern Jewish thought as one long answer to the Spinozan challenge. “Spinoza,” Schweid has written, “entered into the history of Jewish philosophy in his departure from it. His slamming of the door upon leaving signified a new beginning.”<sup>25</sup> While not concerned to the same degree as Schweid with the entire history of Jewish thought, Leo Strauss is another thinker who regarded a confrontation with Spinoza as a *sine qua non* for the post-Enlightenment Jewish philosopher. This is one of the main themes of his autobiographical preface to the 1962 English translation of his *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, excerpts of which are contained in this volume.

(3) *Spinoza’s Jewishness as a formative factor in his contribution to the progress of philosophy in a general sense*

Here the emphasis falls not on Spinoza’s relevance for Jewish philosophy specifically, but on his part in the development of thought more broadly. One of the forms the Jewish “rehabilitation” of Spinoza has taken is a lauding of Spinoza’s groundbreaking significance for the rise of modern Western philosophy, coupled with everything from a highlighting to a hinting at the role of his

Jewishness therein. Often, such arguments are meant to counter interpretations of Spinoza, typically by non-Jewish thinkers, that either deny that Spinoza made any kind of meaningful contribution to modern philosophy or acknowledge it, while treating his Jewish background either as an entirely negligible factor or as a negative one. If the latter, either Spinoza might be credited with having successfully cast off this Jewish millstone, confirming by his very example that intellectual freedom was contingent on an emancipation from Jewishness; or—as in the case of Hegel—his Jewishness might be regarded as something Spinoza ultimately could not escape, preventing him from developing a philosophical system that transcended the limits of a Jewish world-view.<sup>26</sup> Starting with Mendelssohn, we find attempts to counter these narratives, though the effort to present the nexus between Spinoza’s Jewishness and his contributions to philosophy in a more positive (if still often ambivalent) light would really pick up only in the nineteenth century, in the wake of Spinoza’s more general reclamation in European (and especially German) thought. There is a fine line, however, between arguments in this vein that appear to have an apologetic aim (“the Jewish contribution to civilization”), and those that seem more keen on disrupting Christian lineages for philosophical modernity than on mainstreaming Spinoza and Jewishness.

#### (4) *Spinoza’s legacy as toxic for Jews and Judaism*

Spinoza’s most vehement detractors in Jewish thought tend to regard his historical impact in a wholly pejorative light. This impact is usually the last reason cited for vigorously countering Spinoza, after an assessment of his biography and philosophy on their own terms. At the same time, it is typically what prompts intervention in Spinoza’s reception in the first place. Most of the major and minor works of Jewish anti-Spinozism originate as an aggrieved response to an already existing Jewish Spinozism. Samuel David Luzzatto, the Italian rabbi and scholar who was Spinoza’s harshest nineteenth-century critic, became fixated on Spinoza only when it became clear that maskilim such as Meir Letteris and Salomon Rubin were determined to rehabilitate him and “Judaize” his thought. Cohen’s polemic against Spinoza began in earnest in 1910, following the decision of a B’nai Brith lodge in Berlin to name itself after the Amsterdam philosopher. And several thinkers, including Emmanuel Levinas (selection 32), were driven to oppose Spinoza by David Ben-Gurion’s proposal to officially repossess him in the 1950s. All of the above viewed the rehabilitation of Spinoza in Jewish thought not simply as a distortion of Spinozism and Judaism alike, but as an intellectual and moral failure to face up to invidious aspects of Spinoza’s

influence. Above all, Spinoza's Jewish critics have (rightly or wrongly) judged him guilty of a caustic and disfiguring secularization, reducing God to nature, prophecy to imagination, ethics to egoism and fatalism, the Bible to a purely historical and political text, and Judaism to an arid and utterly anachronistic legalism. The fruits of this thoroughgoing reductionism have included a decline of Jewish belief and commitment, an alienation from the Torah as a living document, and a closing of the gates of interpretation. Their faith ruined, many Jews blinded by their admiration for the Amsterdam philosopher have futilely sought substitutes in secular ideologies, some holding out the promise of a Jewishness without Judaism, others seeking an emancipation from Jewishness altogether. Perhaps the most serious indictment against Spinoza has been the charge that he bears responsibility in some measure for the secularization of anti-Judaism in modern thought from the Enlightenment onward. For Cohen in particular, Spinoza was more rightly considered the founder of modern antisemitism than of modern Judaism. The damage done by his "humanly incomprehensible betrayal" of Judaism was both extensive and enduring.

### *Conclusion*

The sources assembled here are varied in ways that testify to the breadth of Spinoza's impact in Jewish thought and culture. In addition to philosophical texts, they include works of fiction, drama, and poetry; publicistic and polemical writings; and diaries and autobiographical fragments. On the ideological spectrum of modern Judaism, they range from liberal integrationist to radical cosmopolitan to secular and religious nationalist. They are chronologically and geographically, as well as linguistically, diverse: a large number of the selections are translated from German, Hebrew, and Yiddish, and one of the oldest texts in the reader, the introduction to Isaac Orobio de Castro's *Certamen Philosophicum* (*A Philosophical Disputation*) (selection 2), the earliest-known published Jewish response to Spinoza's philosophy, was written in Latin. The latter is only one of several excerpts in this collection that appear here in English translation for the first time. For all their diversity, all but one of the texts are the product of Jewish authors, and the vast majority take up the theme of Spinoza's vexed relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people, whether affirmatively, negatively, or simply dispassionately. My aim in this introduction has been to illustrate the complexity of the question of Spinoza's Jewishness, by revealing how it branches into a host of smaller questions pertaining to Spinoza's life, philosophy, and legacy. Of course, there is another crucial source of its complexity, and that is simply

the difficulty of defining Jewishness at all, a problem that has mushroomed as a result of the proliferation of Jewish identities in the modern world. This book thus offers a valuable window into two central ambiguities—the ambiguity of Spinoza and Spinozism, and the ambiguity of Jewishness—in modern Jewish thought.

An anthology that furnishes examples of the *reception* of a philosopher, rather than of his or her own key texts, may be unusual. I hope to have convinced the reader of this introduction that in the case of Spinoza, considering his unique importance to the fashioning of modern Judaism, it is eminently justified.

### Notes

1. This interpretation of the history of Jewish philosophy, which regards Spinoza's influence as decisive (while at the same time denying that Spinoza himself was a Jewish philosopher), is most closely associated with the Israeli philosopher Eliezer Schweid (1929–). Schweid has stated outright that “the attitude to Spinoza is the key to identifying where every thinker, philosopher, and critic sits on the map of the currents and factions of Judaism in our times.” See Schweid, *Ha-yehudi ha-boded ve-ha-yahadut* (Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at Am Oved, 1974), 118. For more on Schweid, see the section on Spinoza as a progenitor of Jewish modernity.

2. For a discussion of how Spinoza's inclusion or exclusion can serve as a test case for different definitions of Jewish philosophy, see Raphael Jospe, *What Is Jewish Philosophy?* (Ra'anana: Open University of Israel, 1988).

3. On the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius's (1583–1645) rejection of both the ghetto and the badge for Jews, see Steven Nadler, *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 21.

4. The best study of seventeenth-century Amsterdam's Sephardic community remains Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998).

5. For a fuller-scale biographical introduction to Spinoza, the reader is encouraged to consult Steven Nadler's magisterial *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

6. See I. S. Révah, *Spinoza et Juan de Prado* (Paris: Mouton, 1959), who claimed to find proof that these were the “horrible heresies” and “monstrous doctrines” that drove the community to expel Spinoza in documents surviving in the files of the Inquisition. For a very brief review of the debate over this thesis (and for a defense of it), see Edwin Curley, “Spinoza's Lost Defense,” in *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, ed. Yitzhak Melamed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

7. See, for example, Odette Vlessing, “The Excommunication of Spinoza: A Conflict between Jewish and Dutch Law,” *Studia Spinozana* 13 (2003): 15–47.

8. Lewis Feuer, *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction, 1987 [1958]), 22.

9. For one example of a dissenting opinion, see Willi Goetschel, *The Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 48.

10. See “Letter 76 (OP),” Spinoza’s reply to his former student Albert Burgh (Letter 67), in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 473–78.

11. I discuss the controversy over Ben-Gurion’s plea to “rectify the injustice” as well as the Zionist writer and scholar Joseph Klausner’s earlier symbolic lifting of the ban in chapter 5 of my *The First Modern Jew: Spinoza and the History of an Image* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

12. “Ethics,” part 1, definition 3 (E1, d3), in *The Complete Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, ed. Edward Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 408. Future references to ideas or passages from the *Ethics* will be included in shorthand in the body of the text.

13. In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vol. 2, chap. 19, in the midst of his argument against Aristotle for the creation of the world, Maimonides writes that “for us, the matter is clear . . . namely, that all things exist in virtue of a purpose and not of necessity, and that He who purposed them may change them and conceive another purpose, though not absolutely any purpose whatever. For the nature of impossibility is stable and cannot be abolished.” Here we see Maimonides attempting to navigate between a strict determinism and a philosophy that would reject natural causation entirely and ascribe everything to God’s untrammelled will. See Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 303.

14. “Letter 58 (OP),” in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 2, 428.

15. The doctrine of the “imitation of God,” or *imitatio Dei*, is mentioned on a few occasions in the Pentateuch, though the thrust of this directive is always more practical than metaphysical. Notable instances of this imperative include Leviticus 19:2 (“You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy”) and Deuteronomy 10:12 (“And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the LORD your God, to walk only in his paths, to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and soul”). The early rabbis underscored the ethical implications of *imitatio Dei*. “How can man walk after God?” the third-century Palestinian *amora* Hama bar Hanina asked. “Is He not a consuming fire? What is meant is that man ought to walk after [imitate] the attributes of God. Just as the Lord clothes the naked, so you shall clothe the naked. Just as He visits the sick, so you shall visit the sick. Just as the Lord comforted the bereaved, so you shall also comfort the bereaved; just as He buried the dead, so you shall bury the dead” (TB Sota, 14a). There is a vast literature on the subject of the imitation of God in Jewish ethics; for a brief overview, see Menahem Kellner, “Jewish Ethics,” in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1993), 82–90.

16. Spinoza’s treatment of the ancient Hebrew republic in the *TTP* is in fact somewhat more ambivalent. In chapter 5, he argues that the all-embracing, theocratic character of the Mosaic law was intended for a people “quite incapable of establishing legislation wisely and keeping the sovereignty in their own hands” (145). Hence the need for a system wherein “the people could do nothing without being bound at the same time to remember the law, and to carry out commands which depended only on the will of the ruler” (146). From this point of view, the Hebrew commonwealth appears miles removed from the anticlerical state committed to protecting the “freedom to philosophize” that the *TTP* endorses. However, later

in the book, in chapter 17, in the context of articulating his social contract theory, Spinoza interprets the Hebrew state more sympathetically. Initially, following their escape from Egypt, the Hebrews decided “to transfer their right only to God, not to any mortal” (301). And because “everyone surrendered his right equally, *as in a Democracy* . . . everyone remained completely equal by this covenant [and] the right to consult God, and to receive and interpret his laws, was equal for everyone” (303). The seeds of the eventual downfall of the Hebrew state lay in Moses’ decision to make the Levites into a special priestly caste uniquely empowered to interpret the law—for Spinoza, a cautionary tale about the vesting of any clerical body, from the Amsterdam Mahamad to the Dutch Calvinist *predikanten*, with coercive authority or undue influence in matters of state. From this later vantage, nevertheless, the Hebrew theocracy is more than simply a foil as in our counterexample. Still, Spinoza’s conclusion is clear: “Though the Hebrew state . . . could have lasted forever, nevertheless no one can imitate it now. Nor is this even advisable” (322). See *The Collected Works*, vol. 2.

17. The phrase appeared in an April 1671 letter from J. G. Graevius to the philosopher Leibniz. See Jakob Freudenthal, ed., *Die Lebensgeschichte Spinoza’s in Quellenschriften, Urkunden, und nichtamtlichen Nachrichten* (Leipzig: Veit, 1899), 193; Ernst Altkirch, ed., *Maledictus und Benedictus: Spinoza im Urteil des Volkes und der Geistigen bis auf Constantin Brunner* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1924), 29.

18. *Ma’amar te’ologi-politi*, trans. Chaim Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961).

19. For the charge that Spinoza basically adopts, toward Christianity, the harmonizing hermeneutic for which he castigates Maimonides, see Shlomo Pines, “Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, Maimonides, and Kant,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 20 (1968): 3–54.

20. Leo Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997 [1962]).

21. Carlos Fraenkel, “Maimonides’ God and Spinoza’s Deus sive Natura,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, no. 2 (April 2006): 169–215.

22. See Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer, trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Schocken, 1972), 29, 43.

23. Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza’s Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

24. Warren Z. Harvey, “A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19, no. 2 (April 1981): 151–72; Steven Nadler, “The Jewish Spinoza,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70, no. 3 (July 2009): 491–510.

25. Eliezer Schweid, *Ha-yehudi ha-boded ve’ha-Yahadut* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1974), 117.

26. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1896), 252–90.