Spinoza and Other Heretics

THE MARRANO OF REASON

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CHAPTER I

Prologue: Heretic and Banned

On July 27, 1656, a sentence of excommunication was pronounced on a twenty-four-year-old Jew of the Portuguese community of Amsterdam and recorded in the communal record book:

> The Gentlemen of the *Ma'amad* [i.e., the Ruling Council] make known to you, that having for some time known the evil opinions and works of Baruch de Espinoza, they have endeavored by various ways and promises to draw him back from his evil ways; and not being able to remedy him, but on the contrary, receiving every day more news about the horrible heresies he practices and taught [to others], and the awful deeds he performed, and having of this many reliable testimonies, all given in the presence of the said Espinoza, which convinced them; and all this having been examined in the presence of the Gentlemen *Hahamim* [Rabbis], they resolved with the latter's consent that the said Espinoza be put to the *herem* [ban] and banished from the nation of Israel, as indeed they proclaim the following *herem* on him:
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> "By the decree of the Angels and the word of the Saints we ban, cut off, curse and anathemize Baruch de Espinoza . . . with all the curses written in the Torah [*Ley*]: Cursed be he by day and cursed by night, cursed in his lying down and cursed in his waking up, cursed in his going forth and cursed in his coming in; and may the L[ord] not want his pardon, and may the L[ord]'s wrath and zeal burn upon him . . . and ye that did cleave unto the L[ord] your G[od] are all alive today."
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> We warn that none may contact him orally or in writing, nor do him any favor, nor stay under the same roof with him, nor read any paper he made or wrote.*

* Folio 408 of *Livro dos Acordos da Naçam*, A[nn]o 5398–5440, as transcribed (from

The object of this excommunication, Baruch d'Espinoza, belonged to the upper crust of the Jewish community. His father, Michael, was a highly respected merchant active in civic affairs who had served several times as a *parnas* (elder), an extremely powerful office in Amsterdam. The young Baruch (Bento) received a traditional Jewish education, studying Hebrew and Scripture, Talmud and Jewish philosophy, and also read independently on secular subjects (including works in Hebrew on mathematics, physics, and astronomy), preparing himself for a life in commerce. At the age of six he lost his mother, Hana Devora, and from then on death visited the family frequently, taking his younger brother, Yitzhak, his sister, Miriam, his stepmother, Esther, and finally his father.

Spinoza was twenty-two when his father died. Together with his brother, Gabriel, he founded a commercial company—Bento et Gabriel d'Espinoza—for the import and export of fruit. The venture was only moderately successful, and on one occasion the brothers suffered losses due to a shipwreck. During this period, Spinoza continued to attend the Keter Torah yeshivah headed by Rabbi Shaul Levi Morteira, and apparently also kept up his connection with his former teacher, Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, whose home was a center for scholars and educated Jews passing through Amsterdam. On the surface, at least, no change was as yet perceptible in Spinoza's relations with the Jewish community; for more than a year after his father's death he continued to be on good terms with the synagogue authorities, was scrupulous in the payment of his dues and the honoring of his pledges, and was not involved in any open conflicts with authority.

Nevertheless, he was apparently full of doubts and heretical thoughts. He knew the Bible by heart and found many contradictions in it. The notion of miracles, for example, seemed to him to contradict both reason and the laws of nature, and in the prophets he found evidence of great imaginative power but not of ordered rational thought. The ordinances of the Torah (written law) and the *halakah* (oral law) seemed to him arbitrary and merely historical, having nothing to do with the laws of God. If God did indeed have laws, they could only be inherent in the universe itself, in the form of the universal and immutable laws of nature. Moreover, in view of the death that awaits all, (and which Spinoza himself had already encountered from the years of his early childhood on), there was no comfort in the vain idea of a life

photocopy) by I. S. Révah in *Spinoza et Juan de Prado* (Paris–The Hague: Mouton, 1959), "Textes et documents," pp. 57–58 (my tr.). The *Livro dos Acordos* (also known as *Ascamot* [Hebrew for *Acordos*]) is part of the archives of the Jewish-Portuguese community, kept at the Amsterdam Municipal Archives (and in photocopied form in Jerusalem).

to come. Death was the absolute end of every living creature, of both body and soul; if there was any value or purpose in life, it had to be found in this world—in a life of inquiry and understanding and in the intellectual freedom of the individual.[1] Spinoza still clung to the idea of the eternal, the infinite, the perfect—in other words, the idea of God—but this deity was not in his view a unique and separate person existing outside the world and the nature he had created. God, the object of man's love, was rather the universe itself, insofar as it could be grasped as a single whole. Nature and God were one, and the knowledge of nature was therefore the knowledge of God.

It is not known when these ideas matured in the mind of the heterodox youth, but the process apparently began at a rather early age. About four years after his excommunication, the first part of Spinoza's most important work, the *Ethics*, which contains the essence of his pantheism, already existed in manuscript form. With these ideas Spinoza distanced himself from both Judaism and Christianity, and even from the accepted philosophical tradition; he was a heretic not only from the point of view of the established religions, but also from the point of view of the freethinkers and from the several varieties of philosophic deism they were espousing at the time. Deism rejects religion in the name of an external and remote philosophic deity that does not intervene in the affairs of this world and does not possess the attributes of particular providence, punishment and reward, commandment, or ritual. But the deistic heretics at least acknowledged the existence of a transcendent deity elevated above the world, whereas Spinoza dismissed this idea and identified God with the whole of the universe. In short, Spinoza proclaimed himself a heretic not only among the faithful, but also among representatives of the accepted heresy of his period, thus separating himself from all of the major spiritual currents of his time.

In its mature form, Spinoza's system is one of the most important in the history of philosophy. Although he had few actual disciples, it has simply not been possible, ever since the modern republication of his works, to participate in the enterprise of philosophy without taking his world view into account. In the words of Henri Bergson, "Every philosopher has two philosophies: his own and Spinoza's."[2] It is no coincidence that minds as opposed as Hegel's and Nietzsche's, for example, both saw Spinoza as their great forerunner. His doctrine is more complex and multifaceted than it might at first appear.

But Spinoza's ethics and metaphysics—the essence of his teaching—were not his first achievements. They were preceded by a profound critique of religion and a vigorous attack on its sacred texts—first and

foremost the Bible. When he wrote this critique, the young Spinoza, who did not know Latin, had not yet read the new scientific and philosophical works that would change the face of the age. He had not come into contact with the students of Descartes and the scholars of the Royal Society of London, and was not acquainted with Hobbes, Machiavelli, or Galileo. He developed his reflections and criticisms of religion solely from within the world of contemporary Judaism—a world far more complex and varied than one might imagine today.

The Jews of Amsterdam in Spinoza's time have been described both in literary works and by historians (mainly those following Heinrich Graetz) as a narrow-minded and fanatical lot who deliberately shut themselves off from any spark of enlightenment from the outside world. This picture is inaccurate. The truth of the matter is that the Amsterdam community was one of the most enlightened and cosmopolitan Jewish communities of the period. The people who inhabited Amsterdam's Jewish Street—which was worlds apart from the closed ghettos of eastern Europe—were former Marranos or sons of Marranos, most of them prosperous businessmen living in relative freedom within a tolerant state. Engaged mainly in import and export and other forms of international commerce, they were accustomed to mingling with Gentiles, and were open-minded and receptive, having been educated in the schools of Spain and Portugal, or later on in the flourishing educational system developed by the Amsterdam community itself. At the same time, their experience as former Marranos was a never-ending source of perplexity to them, an experience that led to difficulties of adjustment and deep-seated problems of identity. It is against this background that one must view both Spinoza's heresy and the excommunication that was its result.

Some have seen in the Marranos the "beginning of modernization in Europe."[3] Even without going so far, however, it is clear that a person who had been educated as a Christian and who then chose to return to Judaism could not belong entirely or simply to either faith. He would of necessity be faced with enormous difficulties in reintegrating himself into the community to which he indeed belonged, but whose daily life and deepest values and symbols were not actually part of his experience. It is not hard to understand how a man who is neither a Christian nor a Jew, but who is divided between the two or who possesses memories of the one existing within the other, might be inclined to develop doubts about both, or even to question the foundations of religion altogether. As Yosef Yerushalmi has argued, the wonder is not that the return of the Marranos to Judaism gave rise to doubts and heresies, but rather that the majority should have succeeded as far as

they did in reintegrating themselves into the framework of normative Judaism.[4] In any case, Spinoza did not lack predecessors in his heresy among the Marranos—the dough of the "New Jews" seems to have contained a leavening agent that gave rise to a constant intellectual ferment from within.

Uriel Da Costa had twice been excommunicated for rejecting the oral law and the rabbinical canons of Judaism and for denying the immortality of the soul. Twice he had recanted, only to commit suicide in the end, after many harassments and humiliations. Indeed, Bento Baruch d'Espinoza, who was only eight years old when Da Costa killed himself, may very well have been among the little boys whose persecutions Da Costa had complained of during his ordeal. In any case, by the time Spinoza grew up and began to think for himself, both the fate and the views of Uriel Da Costa must have provided him with food for thought, just as he must certainly have been aware of the less spectacular cases of nonconformity that were then troubling the community. It is widely claimed that Spinoza's critique of religion was influenced above all by his reading of Jewish philosophy. But why should the boy have pored over ancient Jewish texts and extracted from them elements that might have sounded heretical out of context (although in context they remain in the framework of legitimate Judaism) unless there was some incentive in his external environment? There is no doubt that Spinoza's apostasy contained an element of spontaneous awakening—that spiritual breakthrough of a solitary genius which cannot be fully explained by a set of foregoing events. Yet this breakthrough did not occur in the void but within a specific social and cultural milieu, which must be taken into account if one is to understand the phenomenon of Spinoza at all.

Coming into the Open

The curious fact that, until a mere six months before his excommunication, Spinoza continued to conform externally to the norms of Jewish life in his community may be explained by his own rules of caution, which state that we must "speak according to the understanding of ordinary people" and "conform to the customs of the community that do not conflict with our aims."[5] Although he was one of the most independent thinkers of his generation and displayed an extreme and extraordinary boldness in his intellectual attitudes, Spinoza was not interested in making a public show of his opinions or boasting of his intellectual independence. On the contrary, a combination of spiritual elitism and personal caution (both of which he inherited from Mai-

monides, among others) led him to speak in a covert language and to confine his activities to a small circle of trusted friends and acquaintances. Even in his most provocative book, the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza continued to disguise his true opinions and to speak in the "language of the multitude." The ring he wore—this freest and boldest spirit of his generation—was engraved with the warning *caute* (carefully), and Spinoza remained true to this combination of daring and caution all his life. How then can one account for the fact that one day in the autumn of 1655 he suddenly began making his opinions public and became so disruptive a presence in the synagogue that, after several warnings, he was finally excommunicated and anathematized?

Two compatible conjectures are possible here. Spinoza's first biographer, Jean M. Lucas, claims that the break with the Jewish community was a product of Spinoza's own wishes;[6] at a certain stage, Spinoza discovered that his pretended conformity was beginning to conflict with his spiritual goals, and so he discontinued it. Other sources point to the influence of Juan de Prado, an Andalusian physician who had been active for many years in the Marrano underground in Spain. By leading an underground life, Prado had succeeded in escaping the clutches of the Inquisition only to fall prey, in the very midst of his activities as a secret Jew, to profound theological doubts. By the time he finally escaped to Amsterdam (less than a year before Spinoza's excommunication), these doubts had been articulated—he began to express his deistic opinions publicly, to mock the rabbis, and to transgress openly against the commandments of Judaism. Prado was an educated man who had studied science and philosophy, but he was also vain and arrogant, and he could not resist the temptation to boast of his scholarship and enlightened views. He was about twelve years older than Spinoza, and it is reasonable to suppose that when they first met in Amsterdam, the young Baruch found in him a man with whom he could discuss his own doubts. Along with Prado, an even more famous heretic appeared in Amsterdam at this time—the Calvinist theologian Isaac La Peyrère, an early biblical critic, and a friend of Spinoza's teacher Menasseh ben Israel.

It is possible that meeting these two men accelerated processes in Spinoza that were already well under way. If nothing else, these meetings doubtless helped put an end to Spinoza's isolation—the isolation of a young man who had no one with whom he could share his doubts—and must have encouraged him to be more explicit both with himself and with others. More specifically, it is possible that these contacts helped Spinoza make up his mind to declare his independence and

detach himself from the daily rituals of Judaism, even at the possible cost of cutting himself off from the community.

Once Spinoza had reached this decision, nothing could stop him. He ceased attending services at the synagogue, broke the commandments of the Torah, and began to reveal his doubts to those of his acquaintances he felt he could trust. He still did not perpetrate these offenses in public, but he did at least put an end to his former pretense. The leaders of the community did what they could to dissuade him, and there is even a conjecture that among the "various means and promises" they employed (as itemized in the writ of excommunication) was an attempt to bribe him to take part in synagogue services. Similar pressure was put on Prado, since the scandal involved them both, but the reactions of the two friends were very different. Prado preferred to continue the double life he had become accustomed to in the Marrano underground in Spain and fought doggedly to remain within the Jewish community. Spinoza, however, stood up openly for his ideas, composed a detailed defense of his actions that has unfortunately not survived (although the main points seem to be included in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*), and resigned himself to excommunication and isolation.

The Ban (Herem)

Drastic though it may sound to modern ears, excommunication was a fairly common sanction in the Jewish community of Amsterdam. Most cases were not prominent but part of an almost routine procedure. Even Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel himself was once banned—though only for a day—for alleged implication in some affair involving taxes and the misuse of propaganda materials. Grounds for excommunication, as laid down in the community regulations, were not confined to heresy and blasphemy, but also included such seemingly minor transgressions as speaking too loudly or carrying weapons in the synagogue, disseminating libelous literature, organizing private prayers, representing the Jewish community without the permission of the *parnasim*, and associating with people who had refused to pay taxes[7]—all of which indicates that excommunication was primarily an internal sanction used by the community as a way of enforcing and maintaining discipline and authority over its members.

Those empowered to pronounce the ban were not the rabbis but the civil authorities, represented by the council known as the *ma'amad*, which was made up of six parnasim (elders) and a *gabbai* (treasurer). The *ma'amad*, which enjoyed both executive and judicial powers, was

accountable to no one and was not even elected by the community, its members (like the Amsterdam burgomasters) having been appointed by their predecessors. Among the functions of the *parnasim* were those often associated with rabbis or religious officials, such as supervision of ritual-slaughter practices. They also had authority to impose excommunication, though it was carried out in consultation with the rabbis and with their consent.

Many hypotheses have been put forward to explain Spinoza's excommunication. One school argues that the reasons were political and stemmed from the community's relations with the outside world rather than from its own internal needs. Those holding this view base their case on the circumstances in which the Jews had been permitted to settle in the United Provinces and especially in Amsterdam. In 1615 the States-General of Holland and West-Frieseland had asked two officials to propose a Jewish policy: one was the young Hugo Grotius, then *pensionaris* (a legal counsel with chief executive powers) of Rotterdam, and Adriaan Pauw, who held that office in Amsterdam. Each of them presented his proposals separately. Grotius recommended that Jews be allowed to settle "and do business and manufacture, enjoying freedom, exemptions and privileges in the same way as the other burghers and citizens" (art. 6). But Grotius was aware that the Marrano immigrants had more than their share of "atheists and impious people" who, he declared, "should not be tolerated in any good republic." So he demanded all Jews over fourteen years of age to state their faith in God, Moses, the prophets, and the afterlife.[8] Grotius's *Remonstrantie*, as it is known, has never been written into law (neither was Pauw's, which some say was more restrictive, others say more liberal). The actual regulations passed in 1619 concerning the Amsterdam Jews did not adopt either resolution but rather authorized each city to make its own regulations. However—so the argument goes—the Jews had to take seriously the concerns of a person such as Grotius. They could not afford to be branded as sympathetic to atheism.

Plausible though it may sound, this hypothesis has its weaknesses. It is true that in 1619 the Jewish community was still in its infancy and fighting to secure its position in the Dutch republic. It is also true that at the time of the *Remonstrantie*, Calvinist orthodoxy was at the height of its powers, calling for the subjection of the state to the laws of religion and persecuting its opponents within the Christian faith. But Spinoza's excommunication took place about forty years later and in completely different circumstances. Calvinist orthodoxy was in retreat by this time, and the republican party, much more tolerant in its views, was in power. About six months after Spinoza's excommunication,

the Netherlands States-General approved a resolution stating that theology and philosophy must be kept apart, thereby providing a basic legal safeguard for the freedom of philosophical inquiry. Moreover, the statesman Johan de Witt, the strong man of the republic (who later befriended Spinoza) was himself a cautious defender of the freedom of philosophical inquiry at the universities. In addition, the Amsterdam Jews had demonstrated their political influence and confidence in 1654 by successfully lobbying for the right of their co-religionists to settle in New Amsterdam (as New York was then called), against the stubborn opposition of the Dutch governor, Peter Stuyvesant. By 1656 the Amsterdam Jews were fairly secure, and it is difficult to imagine that Spinoza's excommunication took place simply in the name of the ancient regulations, which had never been enforced anyway, and had by then lost much of their force as a statement of principle as well. Indeed, there is room to suppose that Spinoza's excommunication was if anything opposed to the new religious policy then taking shape within the circles in power in the Netherlands.

This being the case, some scholars have argued that the political reason for Spinoza's excommunication had nothing to do with the position of the Jews in the Netherlands, but hinged rather on the possibility of their return to England.[9] On the very day of the excommunication, Spinoza's former teacher Menasseh ben Israel was in London, where he was attempting to persuade Oliver Cromwell to allow Jews (who had been expelled in the thirteenth century) to resettle in England. Scholars have argued, accordingly, that Spinoza's excommunication was a means of facilitating this scheme. To mollify opponents of Jewish resettlement and dispel their fears that the Jews might bring heretical ideas and religious apostasy to Puritan England, it was necessary to suppress any manifestations of apostasy in Amsterdam. This is an intriguing theory, but there is no evidence to support it. In the first place, Rabbi Menasseh did not have much influence in Amsterdam; in the second place, the notion of the return of the Jews to England was probably Menasseh's own personal (and essentially messianic) idea rather than the official policy of the Amsterdam Jewish community.

There is another variation of the political explanation of Spinoza's excommunication—one that has a peculiarly contemporary ring. This is the argument that blame for the excommunication rests not on the Jewish community of Amsterdam, but rather on the burgomasters of the city, who had intimated to the parnasim that Spinoza should be excommunicated. This theory, however, completely distorts the significance of the excommunication in its own time and prevents one

from seeing its justification in terms of the life of the community, as well as inside the drama embodied in the whole affair.

Political Reasons Are Secondary

Even if the decision to excommunicate Spinoza was influenced by political considerations, this should not blind one to the fact that the inside life of the Amsterdam Jewish community and its unique situation provide sufficient reason for the excommunication. The need to rid itself of Spinoza (as also of Da Costa and Prado) stemmed primarily from the requirements of the community's survival and the difficult task of creating a shelter for the refugees fleeing the Inquisition. The rabbis and elders of the Amsterdam community were faced with a historic responsibility: reintroducing the so-called New Jews into the religious traditions of Judaism and thereby renewing a process of historic continuity that had been cruelly disrupted. This was far from a simple task; in some respects it was an impossible one. Organic continuity could not simply be mandated, nor could the Christian-Marrano past of the New Jews be excised and replaced by an uncomplicated Jewish identity. Spinoza's apostasy stemmed in part from this problem, but so did the necessity for his excommunication.

Because the Amsterdam community was engaged in a continuous daily struggle to reintegrate the Marranos into Judaism, the issue of unity was necessarily more crucial than any other. The problem faced by the Amsterdam rabbis, and by the community's teachers and publicists, was not only to translate Jewish culture into the idiom of the Iberian peninsula, but more important to restore the daily pattern of Jewish life in accordance with the ancient customs of Israel. In light of this necessity, such acts as Spinoza's, which challenged tradition in the name of freedom of thought and sabotaged the endeavor to repair the torn fabric of Jewish life, could not be tolerated. In fact, the emphasis throughout the proceedings against Spinoza was more on his acts than on his opinions (so long as he kept those to himself); for the survival of Judaism—as Spinoza himself was later to maintain—had never depended on theory, but rather on a complex network of specific and particular actions.

The Amsterdam community, it must be remembered, was still living in the shadow of the Inquisition, whose persecutions continued unabated on the Iberian peninsula. Refugees from Spain and Portugal continued to arrive in Holland in a steady stream. In May 1655, fourteen months before Spinoza was excommunicated, one Abraham Nuñez Bernal, who had relatives and acquaintances in Amsterdam, was

burned at the stake in Cordova; the community was shaken by the news. Two months earlier, another young martyr, Yitzhak da Alameida Bernal, had been burned at the stake in Galicia; Spinoza himself speaks in his letter of a third victim of the Inquisition, Judah the Believer, whose fate must surely have shocked him deeply. The Amsterdam community was living in a state of emergency: it was fighting to crystallize its own Jewish life from within and at the same time to provide both physical security and a new social and spiritual identity to the refugees from the Inquisition. Against this background, Spinoza's challenge could be interpreted as profoundly dangerous to the community—an action that had to be countered by every possible means.

On the other hand, Spinoza's stand was also justified. Against the weight of tradition, Spinoza demanded that the tradition itself be subjected to the test of his individual judgment and reason, and he refused to accept any truth—or any practical or moral commandment—unless it was compatible with his own subjective consciousness when following the guidelines of universal reason. From the point of view of the guardians of the tradition that he was questioning, this was an act of destruction and subversion; from the point of view of his dignity and freedom as a person, it was an act of progress and emancipation. In this sense, Spinoza's break with both Judaism and Christianity was a harbinger of the modern era.

Justice against Justice

Spinoza's excommunication should thus be seen as a nontragic clash between two valid points of view. Hegel defined tragedy as the clash of justice with justice; in Spinoza's case the drama ended without a fall, without death or extraordinary suffering, and therefore without tragedy. Indeed, legend has greatly exaggerated his case. He was never impoverished, he was never the victim of persecution, and he was not a social outcast. Although he had cut himself off from all religious affiliations, and although he was alone in the deepest sense of the word (having no true intellectual or spiritual peers even among his colleagues), Spinoza did not lead the life of an embittered or alienated man, but remained open to social relationships and had both friends and admirers. Nor did he lack the means of a livelihood. Though his needs were modest, he did not deny himself the small pleasures of life, and he scorned the ascetic ideal both personally and on principle.

The notion that he was obliged to grind lenses for a living is also highly exaggerated. In fact, Spinoza lived on a rather adequate allowance provided by friends to enable him to pursue his studies. He

ground lenses mainly to further his own research into optics, which was then a new science. In one respect, though, the legend is not entirely inaccurate: it is possible that the glass dust from the lenses may have hastened the progression of the hereditary lung disease (apparently tuberculosis) from which Spinoza suffered, a disease for which the causes were not then known, and from which Spinoza died at the age of forty-four on February 21, 1677.

CHAPTER 2

Spinoza, the Marrano of Reason

The Marranos

For half a millennium, Spain had been the major Jewish center of the world and the gem of the Diaspora. Having flourished under Moslem rule, Spanish Jewry retained its vitality in the early days of the reconquest, but was already past its prime as the Christians seized control over most of the peninsula. Then, in the span of one century (1391–1492), it cracked, struggled, and was extinguished.

1391 was a bitter year in the annals of Spanish Jewry. In a crisis of government, the mob, incited by the petty clergy and by a disenchanted archdeacon, was unleashed in Seville. Soon the riots spread to the rest of Andalusia and then all over Aragon and Castile. "Death or the Cross" was the cry everywhere as the mob streamed forth killing and burning. In town after town, thousands of Jews were dragged to the font or flocked there by their own choice, accepting baptism in order to save their lives. Martyrdom, though known, was rare.

In less than a year, Spanish Jewry lost a significant segment of its population—many by the sword, most to the Cross. Then, shattered and traumatized, its morale giving way, it witnessed the waves of voluntary conversions that followed the forced ones. When political order was restored, religious pressure, especially in Aragon, became official. Vicente Ferrer, a religious reformer and zealous missionary, terrorized the Jews in 1411 and 1412 as he marched through their neighborhoods at the head of a troop of barefoot flagellant monks and stormed into their synagogues in an effort to convert them by what he thought was persuasion. Antipope Benedictus XIII, meanwhile, organized a grandiose and well-orchestrated theological show—the so-called Tortosa dispute—where for about two years (1412–1414) Jewish rabbis and

CHAPTER 7

Epilogue
Spinoza and His People: The First Secular Jew?

Seldom, if ever, was a philosopher so lonely as was Baruch Spinoza. Romantic legend notwithstanding, his solitude was not of a social nature. On the contrary, Spinoza had a gift for friendship and was surrounded by loyal friends, as well as by inquisitive intellectuals. Some of his friends even saw to his livelihood, thus refuting yet another legend: that the lonely and ostracized Spinoza, on the brink of starvation, was forced to grind lenses for a living, an occupation which hastened his death. As a matter of fact, Spinoza did earn a supplementary income through the practice of this highly demanding art but he engaged in it primarily because of his interest in optics, a science that was then undergoing vigorous development. Since Galileo, the science of optics had attracted many scholars both theoretically and practically. Christian Huygens, the great Dutch scientist (who subsequently became secretary of the French Scientific Society established by Louis XIV) also ground lenses, together with his brother Constantijn. Indeed, their own scientific investigations prompted their great interest in Spinoza's method, which they knew to be different from their own. "How goes it with our Jew from Voorburg?" Huygens asks his brother in a letter from France, referring to the latest advances of their competitor in lens-grinding. By posing this question, Huygens not only throws light on Spinoza's preoccupation with avant-garde technological research but, indirectly, on Spinoza's existential situation as a Jew. Banned from the Jewish community, indifferent to Jewish law, and abjuring the God of Israel—along with the gods of every other historical religion—Spinoza nonetheless is regarded as "our Jew from Voorburg," even after he had joined the international community of scholars.

Spinoza thus exemplifies and adumbrates the situation of the modern Jew—secular, assimilationist, or national—without himself falling

neatly into any of these categories. Countless Jews in the coming centuries were to find themselves in a similar predicament. The secular Jews tried to define their Jewishness in terms of the Jewish people (or nation); and the assimilationists tried to leave the people and merge into gentile society. Most often, however, they were thrust by the attitude of the gentiles (or by what Sartre calls their "look") back into the existential Jewish situation they tried to escape. Spinoza himself perceived the Jew's inability to escape his condition, but was unable to offer an alternative.

That the world regarded him as a Jew was one of the hallmarks of Spinoza's loneliness, which was not social, but existential. He refused to identify with any of the cultural or religious associations of his day. He was a loner, the individual par excellence, who demands to be defined solely in terms of his private being and beliefs, not in terms of any social or historical framework supposed to provide him with the essential ingredients of his identity. The only affiliation Spinoza accepted, at least theoretically, was political. He regarded himself as a citizen of the Netherlands Republic, to which he even referred as his "homeland." Nevertheless, in several respects (ethnic, linguistic, and partly also political), he lived as an alien in that country. The son of recent immigrants, his family had its origins in Spain and Portugal, the arch-enemy of the Netherlands. In terms of religion, his family was originally Catholic (ostensibly at least), and subsequently Jewish. Both faiths were at variance with the dominant Calvinist culture of the young Netherlands Republic.

Nor did Spinoza enjoy the full civil status that was accorded to Christians from birth. Born into the relatively foreign milieu of the Jewish-Portuguese quarter of Amsterdam he was probably not entirely fluent in the language of the country. In fact, it is unclear which, if any, of the languages he knew was predominantly his own. As a child, he evidently spoke Portuguese at home; at the same time he learned Spanish, which as an adult he liked to use for his casual reading (travels, drama, history, etc.). He later learned Latin, which he adopted for his philosophical studies. He knew Hebrew from an early age, but as the scholarly language of the classroom and the *Yeshiva*, not as a living tongue; and he seems to have picked up Dutch "by osmosis," enough for all practical purposes but without making it his truly active language. Only one of his essays—*The Short Treatise*, discovered some two hundred years after his death—is in Dutch; but some scholars believe that it is actually someone else's translation of Spinoza's Latin.

What, then, was Spinoza's language? In a word: he had none. Like many Jews, he was a polyglot, lacking a single language in which he

was exclusively and genuinely at home and which dominated his life and semantic universe. Nor was there a single society to which he belonged. Having left the Jewish congregation, he was never fully integrated within the Dutch republic. His belonging to it was more an abstract political stance than a real living experiernce. Spinoza regarded the state as the individual's direct frame of reference without the mediation of religion, church, corporation, or any other body which claims to be "a kingdom within a kingdom." Yet such an intellectual position is remarkedly different from an existential sense of belonging.

This difference evolved into a real breach with the overthrow of the government in 1672 and the murder of Johan de Witt, leader of the republic and its ruling oligarchy, whom Spinoza had supported and perhaps befriended (though not as closely as legend would have it). "*Ultima barbarorum*!" ("the height of barbarism") Spinoza cried out when de Witt and his brother were butchered and dissected by a mob in the center of the Hague, just a few blocks from where Spinoza lived, while the guardians of law and order looked on. Spinoza's reaction was not just a momentary one. The knife that dissected the murdered republican ruler also lacerated Spinoza's body politic. The return of the monarchy was accompanied by an increase in mob rule, as the House of Orange owed its strength to the popular masses who supported it against the liberal bourgeoisie. Monarchy and mob—these were two closely related political forces of which Spinoza had been apprehensive all his life. With the liquidation of the republican regime, Spinoza's attachment to his homeland was presumably attenuated not only (or not necessarily) because of his origins or his nonconformist thinking, but also because of his inability to rediscover himself and acquiesce in the country's prevailing political practices and values.

In an era when it was virtually impossible for anyone to exist and find his identity other than from within a recognized religious framework, Spinoza, the typical individual, left the Jewish congregation but did not enter the church. He refused to be baptized, nor did he join any of the radical sects that flourished in the Netherlands: neither the Mennonites nor the Remonstrants, though he agreed with some of their political positions; neither the Quakers, in whose service he earned his living for a time following his excommunication; nor the Collegiants, among whom he resided for a period in Rijnsburg, finding among them friends and disciples. The term "disciples" also requires severe qualification, as it illuminates further the nature of Spinoza's isolation. The new doctrine that Spinoza taught was not properly understood even by most of those who considered them-

selves his disciples. They entertained him, accorded him friendship, and some of them even supported him financially and helped him publish his works. Yet, in the final analysis he was lonely, since they failed to grasp his meaning. They could not fathom the radical, yet rich and nuanced nature of his position.

Even among rationalist philosophers, Spinoza was unique to the point of solitariness. He transcended the conceptual universe of Descartes and of Leibniz, and also of skeptical deism, no less than the world of traditional faith. These other thinkers postulated a "God of the philosophers" as part of their rational systems, but preserved his extraworldly role as Creator and First Cause. Spinoza alone refused to assign God such a role. Rather, he identified God with the totality of the universe itself. His conception, indeed, remained *sui generis* in the annals of philosophy.[1] As a result, Spinoza was rejected and despised not only by the traditional philosophical establishment but also by the Cartesian innovators and revolutionaries.

The identification of God with the world implies a more profound rejection of Judaism and Christianity than ordinary atheism. Spinoza does not contend that there is no God, only the inferior natural world. Such a contention is itself steeped in a Christian world view. Spinoza contends, on the contrary, that by virtue of identifying the world with God, immanent reality itself acquires divine status. Only Christianity considers the world of the here-and-now so base and so insignificant in and of itself, that denial of the transcendent divinity who gives it meaning robs the world of any significance whatsoever. The problem and anxiety of modern skeptics and atheists is usually Christian at root and subject to the categories of Christianity. Spinoza is far more radical in rejecting Christian (and Judaic) categories than the ordinary atheists—and as such is exceptional even among them.

Spinoza himself points at the rarity of true philosophical wisdom, at its singular and difficult nature. Very few can attain the intellectual love of God and be initiated into its insights. The multitude will respond to philosophical truth with fury and intolerance, not only because it lies beyond their grasp, but because it threatens their prejudices and undermines the sacrosanct images inculcated in them by "superstition," that is, by the different varieties of historical religion. Hence Spinoza's motto, to be prudent; hence the ambivalent, at times dissembling, style he employs in his more open writings, particularly his correspondence and *Theologico-Political Treatise*; and hence, more generally, the special strategy he adopts in dealing with the problem of the multitude, which he considers of prime importance and to which he devotes his reflections on politics and popular religion. Spinoza was among the

first, if not the very first, to treat the problem of the multitude as a philosophical issue per se.

Spinoza's teachings, then, are highly esoteric, of the kind propounded by a philosopher who knows that only a few can share his knowledge. Such esotericism has usually been the province of secret sects and of mystics. In Spinoza, the "mystic of reason," it becomes an esotericism of the third kind of knowledge. Certainly, universal reason (*ratio*), dealing with scientific laws and logical inferences, is accessible to many (and, in time, perhaps, to the majority). But *ratio* is only the lower degree of reason, as yet incapable of transforming one's personality or of generating a revolution in the inner quality of life. *Ratio* provides no basis for the intellectual love of God, and no key to redemption and the eternity of the soul. As for the synoptic and intuitive degree of reason (which Spinoza terms simply "knowledge of the third kind," and which contains the key to all these changes of personality), it is seen by Spinoza as attainable only by rare individuals. "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare": these simple and lofty words conclude Spinoza's chief work, the *Ethics*. In this sentence reverberate not only his lifelong efforts to attain his own ideal, not only his solitude and esotericism, but also, perhaps, echoes of the experience of his Marrano forefathers. Like Spinoza, they steadfastly adhered to a secret truth that was theirs alone: they and not the Christian multitude around them possessed the true key to salvation. They alone knew that salvation would come through the Law of Moses, and not through Christ. Spinoza, the "Marrano of reason" (as we saw in chapter 2) preserved patterns of life and experience whose roots lay with his Marrano-Judaizing forefathers.

Indeed, we have seen that Spinoza was the "Marrano of reason" during the two principal periods of his life: as a member of the Jewish congregation where he displayed signs of heresy long before the formal breach between him and the community; and later, as a member of Dutch society, keeping most of his thoughts to himself, preferring to divulge them parsimoniously to his friends and "disciples," writing in an equivocal style, publishing anonymous texts addressed to large audiences, and keeping locked away to his last days his own true philosophical treatise, the *Ethics*. Thus Spinoza lived in a dual tension between the external and the internal, between his thoughts and the inner workings of his mind, on the one hand, and his conformity to society on the other.

During his youth and early manhood, it was Spinoza's consideration for his father that led him to keep his skeptical thoughts from bursting out in open rebellion. He officially broke with Judaism only after his

father's death. Yet even after Spinoza left the Jewish quarter and lived among the Dutch, he remained a "Marrano of reason"—not because his life was in jeopardy, but because of the disjunction between his inner self-knowledge and what he thought could be given social and verbal expression. Holland was a Christian land, fired by a vigorous Calvinist fervor, whereas Spinoza had disavowed all religions and their attendant organizational and conceptual extensions.

Spinoza's espousal of secularity makes him, indeed, a true harbinger of modernity. Yet the new principle he enunciated could not change his own life as an individual, because that principle was as yet untenable in the social reality. A single individual exemplifying it was fated, in a crucial sense, to suffer an alienated existence. Religious affiliation was the individual's passport to social acceptance. It was possible to abandon Catholicism, but only by taking up Protestantism (Lutheranism, Calvinism, etc.), or, in exceptional instances, Islam or Judaism. But to renounce all historical religions was tantamount to opting for social and existential isolation. Membership in the secular body politic alone was not yet a viable form of social identity, as Spinoza was bound to discover. Nevertheless, he articulated and exemplified in his person what was to emerge in time as the overriding principle of modern life.

The same may be said with regard to Spinoza's relation to his own people and what we may term the secularization of Jewish life. Alone and alienated, he prefigured what later generations would call "Jewish secularism." So Spinoza contributed to the emergence of a phenomenon which was neither viable nor possible during his own lifetime.

Spinoza and the Jews

We must distinguish between what Spinoza himself thought or wrote about Judaism, and the significance of his peculiar existence as a Jew, something of which he himself could not be fully aware. First, I will elaborate upon Spinoza's image of Judaism and its attendant implications, including certain Jewish motifs in the deep structure of his thinking. Then I will discuss the relevance of his life for our times.

At the core of our discussion lies the notion of secularity. Spinoza attempts to secularize Jewish history in order to secularize history in general, and then goes on to reinvest certain implicit Jewish values with universal significance for the modern secular world. In both instances, Spinoza continues to make Jewish history the model and lever of world history—albeit without divine providence and without election.

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Spinoza's approach to Judaism rests on a strictly philosophical basis, vividly colored by his own emotional history. His philososphical position is consistent with his doctrine as a whole in that he attempts to examine the peculiar destiny of the Jewish people in the light of natural causes, uninformed by divine-transcendental meaning. In other words, he continues to use the immanent approach also with regard to the history of the Jews. The Jewish people is traditionally considered to be the bearer of historical meaning in general. As it happens, it is also Spinoza's own people and community, in which he was unable to express himself as a free thinker, but was rather castigated and inexorably driven from the fold.

The Rhetorical Context

The traces of this bitter experience are quite perceptible in Spinoza's language. When it comes to his fellow Jews, Spinoza loses his philosophical cool. His writings betray his rancor toward the adversaries of his youth, the rabbis, who sanctioned or actually initiated his ban. Yet here and there one also hears a *cri du coeur*, the cry of a Jew struggling with his brethren over the paradoxical nature of Jewish existence, in which faith and reason are implacably pitched against each other. Here there are no easy answers. Moreover, as we shall see, Spinoza's writings betray a personal, even intimate, feeling of kinship with Jewish destiny—despite his disavowal of Jewish *religion*—and, subsequently, a strong sense of alienation.[2]

In order to understand the context, we must also bear in mind that Spinoza was writing largely for a Christian audience in an attempt to discredit their superstitions. To this end he employs a rhetorical language adapted to his readers and to his purposes (see chapter 5, above). Spinoza rejects Christianity as a *vana religio* no less than he rejects Judaism. But to achieve his ends he must ostensibly accept the principles of Christianity and argue from its point of view. This is a kind of Marranesque technique which, however difficult it might have been for him to apply, was rhetorically necessary.

For this reason, inter alia, Spinoza accords Jesus pride of place among the prophets—but only as a human being, not as a divine being. Jesus' divinity for Spinoza is an irrational notion.[3] Spinoza employs here an old Jewish argument against Christianity, but cautiously couched in ambiguity: when he writes that he "does not understand" the notion of Jesus' divinity, he clearly intends that it be understood as: "the notion is absurd and meaningless *in itself*." But, of course, it could

be read as: "The notion is so profound that it lies beyond my intellectual powers," thus providing an alternate option for certain readers.[4]

Spinoza's rhetorical needs vis-à-vis his Christian audience effectively accommodate his antirabbinical rancor as well. This is done when he refers to the rabbis as Pharisees, a strongly perjorative term to Christian ears.

We should, however, recall that Da Costa had already employed the same term in his polemic against the rabbinical establishment, and that sarcasm and virulent invective were fairly typical of the intramural criticism leveled at the orthodox by later opponents. Generations after Da Costa and Spinoza, the rhetoric of enlightened Jews (*maskilim*), nationalists, heretics, and Zionists makes Spinoza's abuse pale in comparison.

There is of course a difference; the latter critics, or most of them, sought some sort of Jewish alternative. Spinoza, two centuries earlier and lacking any alternative, abandoned Jewish society altogether. Nevertheless, a reminder of this sort helps place Spinoza's aspersions in their proper rhetorical perspective.

Judaism—A Political Religion and Historical Anachronism

Spinoza's image of Judaism is anchored in a thesis which proved useful to later Jewish reformers and anti-Semites alike. For Spinoza, Judaism is fundamentally a political religion that was designed specifically for the ancient Hebrews as the basis for a theological regime. When the temple was destroyed and the Jews were deprived of their political existence, their religion also lost its meaning, and Judaism became historically obsolete and self-contradictory.

This view would appear to smack of Christian logic. After all, the Christians were the first to claim that since Jesus had redeemed the world, Judaism had been superseded: God's "chosen people" were now those who adhered to the Christian church. But this is mere rhetoric. Spinoza does not consider Judaism anachronistic because God's elect are now the Christians: Spinoza rejects the very notion of election. What makes Judaism obsolete is not a theological argument but a purely profane analysis, which treats history as a natural causal system, uninformed by divine providence.

Judaism lost its historical rationale, according to Spinoza, because the political nature of the Jewish religion no longer corresponded to the nonpolitical existence of the Jews in the Diaspora. In the absence of a Jewish body politic, Jewish religion is superfluous. To sustain this view Spinoza must turn to a sociohistorical analysis, showing that the

essence of the ancient Jewish religion was theocratic, that is, a political regime where the laws of God are also the supreme civil authority. Crucial sections of chapters 3 and 17 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* are given over to this analysis, which is Spinoza's alternative to traditional theological interpretations of Judaism.

While his methodological principle is sound, Spinoza's detailed explanation is imprecise. As we know, the ancient Jewish state was racked throughout its existence by a relentless struggle to convert it into a theocracy. That struggle, however, was never quite resolved. Even if, as Spinoza contends, the Jewish religion projected the ideal of a theocratic state, it was never strong enough to impose it on concrete reality. Prior to the destruction of the second temple, the influence of the Pharisees (which came closest to the theorcratic model) considerably increased, but its great achievement came, paradoxically, after the destruction of the second temple. Then Rabban Yochanan Ben-Zakkai requested and received from the Roman emperor authority over "Yavneh and its provinces," in order to establish there a center of Jewish culture and law. Rabban Yochanan, with whom Spinoza is quite familiar, is thus considered to have laid the cornerstone for autonomous Jewish life in the Diaspora as well. Such autonomy is based on the sanction of the gentile government and the voluntary development of a system of rabbinical commandments as a substitute for the Jewish body politic. This development is also seen, to a certain extent, as a triumph of the Pharisaic approach.[5]

From Spinoza's point of view, it is an absurd and incongruous state of affairs when the laws of a religion, whose entire purpose is the political constitution of some concrete and actual theocratic state, succeed in gaining ascendancy over reality only *after* the state itself is annihilated. Henceforth, the Pharisees are able to dictate the shape of future Jewish history. Yet, under these circumstances, the theocratic laws have taken over in a distorted and absurd manner. In the absence of a concrete state, a phantom substitute has been created by the imagination, nourished by piety and a hatred of other nations, and this phantom "homeland" is carried by the Jews everywhere in their exile. The Jews continue to regard themselves not only as a separate nation but even a separate polity, however bizarre and incongruous in reality.

Of course, Spinoza's main interest is in the present—with his analysis of Jewish existence in the exile, from which he also projects back into the Jewish past. The Jews in Palestine never lived under an absolute theocracy. The almost full coalescence of law and religion emerges only in the phantom state Spinoza criticizes—and with which, we may add, he had an existential clash. Only in the exile is it possible to say

as Spinoza says in painful reproach that "everyone who fell away from religion ceased to be a citizen, and was, on that ground alone, accounted an enemy" (*Theologico-Political Treatise*, chap. 17, pp. 219-20). In this type of reality, a critic of religion like Spinoza was forced to relinquish his membership in the Jewish community. In the ancient Jewish states, however, both in the first and the second temple periods, there were many Jews who disavowed religious authority or transgressed against its laws without being considered enemies; or who took issue (like the Sadducees) with the Oral Law and with the very principle of theocracy, and yet were legitimate, even influential, citizens of the polity. A person like Da Costa or Spinoza would conceivably have been better off, certainly less alienated, in ancient Israel. And it is quite probable that in depicting the idealized and somewhat imaginary theocracy of the ancient Israelites, Spinoza is projecting a negative print of what he considers the distorted life of the Jewish exile.

The Survival of the Jews

Even if Judaism has lost its raison d'être with the destruction of the temple, the Jewish people continue to survive. For centuries they zealously preserve their phantom "homeland," rooted, as it is, in religious superstition. Moreover, like Spinoza's own parents and fellow Marranos, they prevail even in the face of forced conversion and cruel persecution, returning openly to Judaism after generations of secret practice. From a logical point of view, there is something incomprehensible in all this, a kind of theoretical scandal; and empirically, at least prima facie, this poses a riddle.

Thus Spinoza, in his own way, faces the same problem that has perplexed Jews and Christians alike: the amazing survival of the Jewish people. The Jews maintain that they are God's chosen people who, even though sinners, yearn for redemption. Christians, on the other hand, maintain that the Jews *were* God's chosen people who, because they rejected Jesus as the Messiah, are themselves rejected by God.

Spinoza of course, must dismiss both explanations as transcendent. What is demanded is a purely natural explanation, based upon social and psychological causes. Significantly, the twofold explanation Spinoza offers is drawn in part from his Marrrano background. What preserved the Jews, he says, was gentile hatred of the Jews from without and the power of their religious faith ("superstition") from within.

Gentile hatred of the Jews, in Spinoza's view, enhances their survival. So intensely do the Jews differentiate themselves from other

peoples, that they cannot help but arouse animosity and revulsion. As a result, even if many individuals are ostracized and lost to their people, the external pressure reinforces the Jews' survival as a group. This is a modern, essentially secular, explanation which has by now become banal (the last important writer to use it was Sartre).[6] Spinoza, however, was among the first, if not actually the first, to express it so succinctly.[7] Spinoza's outlook derives from the accumulated experience of the Jewish people in general, and from his own Marrano forefathers in particular.

> At the present time, therefore, there is absolutely nothing which the Jews can arrogate to themselves beyond other people.
>
> As to their continuance so long after dispersion and the loss of empire, there is nothing marvellous in it, for they so separated themselves from every other nation as to draw down upon themselves universal hate, not only by their outward rites, rites conflicting with those of other nations, but also by the sign of circumcision which they most scrupulously observe. (*Theologico-Political Treatise*, 3:55)

After citing an example from the history of the Marranos (to which we shall refer separately), Spinoza continues:

> The sign of circumcision is, as I think, so important that I could persuade myself that it alone would preserve the nation for ever. Nay, I would go so far as to believe that if the foundations of their religion have not emasculated their minds they may even, if occasion offers, so changeable are human affairs, raise up their empire afresh, and that God may a second time elect them. (Ibid., p. 56)

Since Spinoza aspires to an objective, scientific posture, even when dealing with such highly emotional matters, he postulates an analogy between the Jews and the Chinese with respect to this same anthropological process.

> Of such a possibility we have a very famous example in the Chinese. They, too, have some distinctive mark on their heads which they most scrupulously observe, and by which they keep themselves apart from everyone else, and have thus kept themselves during so many thousand years that they far surpass all other nations in antiquity. They have not always retained empire, but they have recovered it when lost, and doubtless will do so again after the spirit of the Tartars becomes relaxed through the luxury of riches and pride. (Ibid.)

This discussion of the Jewish people should be read in conjunction with chapter 17. There Spinoza asserts that gentile hatred of the Jews is psychologically motivated by the Jews' own xenophobia toward the gentiles, which in turn derives from the Jews' sense of the superiority of their unique religious faith. However, Spinoza again underscores the solidarity generated by external pressure, and cites another example from the annals of his Marrano brethren:

> That they have been preserved in great measure by Gentile hatred, experience demonstrates. When the king of Spain formerly compelled the Jews to embrace the State religion or to go into exile, a large number of Jews accepted Catholicisms. Now, as these renegades were admitted to all the native privileges of Spaniards, and deemed worthy of filling all honourable offices, it came to pass that they straightway became so intermingled with the Spaniards as to leave of themselves no relic or remembrance. But exactly the opposite happened to those whom the king of Portugal compelled to become Christians, for they always, though converted, lived apart, inasmuch as they were considered unworthy of any civic honours. (Ibid.)

A number of scholars have justly contested Spinoza's historical account.[8] When he speaks of the exclusion of the conversos from "all honourable offices," he is referring to the so-called "statutes of blood purity" (*limpieza de sangre*). Yet, oddly enough, he refers only to the Portuguese statutes, ignoring those of Spain. It is true that by the end of the sixteenth century most of the original Spanish Marranos were close to assimilation, whereas the Portuguese Marranos persevered for many generations. Furthermore, the Marrano reawakening that occurred in Spain at the end of the sixteenth century was a result of the immigration of Portuguese Marranos to Spain. With regard to the restrictions imposed on the Marranos, as Yerushalmi notes, the situation was more or less identical in both countries; in Portugal it merely came later.[9] Yet by the time the blood purity regulations were effectively enforced, the assimilation of the Marranos of Spain had already reached its zenith. In fact, by the time the regulations were institutionalized by royal decree, over 170 years of Marrano life in Spain had already passed (1391–1566), and seven decades elapsed since the expulsion, the date from which Spinoza begins his reckoning. While these data do not expunge Spinoza's error, they do perhaps mitigate his critics' charges of tendentious, even unbridled, disregard of the facts.[10]

The above-quoted passage provides us with a rather interesting glimpse into the recesses of Spinoza's consciousness as well a view of

his self-image. To illustrate his thesis, Spinoza selects not ordinary Jews but Marranos, and not only Judaizing Marranos but all conversos, even those who willfully assimilated. To all of them he assigns the universal name "Jew." (The importance of such a *nomen universalis* will presently become apparent.) Here Spinoza reveals that, to his mind, even those who have disavowed the Jewish religion have not, ipso facto, been severed from the "nation" or from Jewish destiny—if only because of the hostile attitude of the gentiles toward them. Spinoza, no doubt, is converting his own personal experience into a prodigious generalization. He, Baruch Spinoza, continues to be seen by others as a Jew in the empirical-historical sense of the word and, as a consequence, implicitly sees himself in the same way.

Yet Spinoza's implicit image is that of a lost and alienated Jew, locked in a paradox, unable either to live positively as a Jew or to shed his basic Jewish identification.

Jewish and Marrano Experience as Reflected in the Ethics

Spinoza's preoccupation with this issue resonates quite powerfully—and surprisingly—in his purely systematic work, the *Ethics*. I refer to part 3 of the book, which is devoted primarily to the psychology of the emotions. Throughout the discussion, Spinoza concerns himself with individuals rather than social or group psychology. He deals with joy and grief, love and hate, hope and fear, and the like, all on the personal, individual level. And then, abruptly, without warning, we find ourselves in the realm of social psychology. This occurs when Spinoza is discussing hatred—that same variety of hatred which is so decisive in preserving the Jewish people. In terms of style, this proposition is, like the rest of the book, dry and scientific, yet attesting to such intense emotions within its geometrical form of discourse that at times it seems to explode from the weight of its excessive scientific neutrality.

> Prop. 46. If someone has been affected with joy or sadness by someone of *a class or nation different from his own*, and his joy or sadness is accompanied by the idea of that person as its cause, under the universal name of the class or nation, he will feel love or hate not only to that person, but everyone of the same class or nation. Demonstration: The demonstration of this matter is evident from prop. 16. (Emphasis added)

A puzzling proposition: How and why does Spinoza suddenly plunge from individual psychology into this sociological theory? On

the face of it, this is a purely scientific proposition, the forty-sixth in a deductive chain, that dissects the most powerful emotions "as though they were points, surfaces and bodies." Similarly, the content of the proposition would apply in principle to any "foreign class or nation" that became the object of either love or, more probably and closer to the author's intention, hatred, by dint of such association as described in the text. Yet what erupts from beneath that dry sociological generalization and its irregular position within the text, is the singular fate of the Jewish people, and within it, the Marranos. Who more than members of that "nation" (*natio; nação*), as they were commonly called, had collectively suffered from hatred and prejudice nourished by invidious individual-collective stereotypes? Moreover, this is Spinoza's own "nation," subsumed under the same "universal name" (*nomen universalis*),[11] on behalf of which he continues to suffer even after he has withdrawn from the community. Evidently, this tacit reference to the "nation" of the Marranos and the Jewish people as a whole accounts for the appearance of this extraordinary proposition within the deductive chain of the *Ethics*.

No less remarkable than the proposition itself is its demonstration. By way of proof, Spinoza merely cites a corroborating proposition, some thirty propositional steps away. This underscores the status of prop. 46 as a formalized "passing remark" which could just as well have been inserted anywhere else. Spinoza chooses to include it here precisely because his present context is hatred: that same hatred that has preserved the Jews and the Marranos, and of which, perforce, Spinoza himself is an object.

Thus a perceptive reader might complete this dry laconic proof—so joltingly trenchant in its simplicity—and write it thus:

> Demonstration: The demonstration of this matter is evident from prop. 16—*and from the entire history of the Jews and the Marranos*.

Spinoza did not actually write this but it must have hovered over his pen.

The Power of Superstitious Faith

Gentile hatred is not the only explanation Spinoza provides for the astounding survival of the Jews. He posits an "internal" explanation as well, inherent in Jewish life itself: the unique power of the Jewish faith. Spinoza as a philosopher rejects this faith as "superstition," yet he is bound to recognize its power as a natural phenomenon, toward which he betrays ambivalent feelings of empathy and admiration. As we shall

presently see, the Marrano experience once again speaks through Spinoza, coloring his thesis.

This complementary explanation is mentioned in chapter 17 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* but is more evident in Spinoza's correspondence. Spinoza writes to a pious, ungifted young man named Albert Burgh who went to Rome and became a Catholic. He had written to Spinoza, seeking to convince him of the truth of the Catholic faith. Spinoza, unforbearingly, replies in a tone he does not often employ:

> O youth deprived of understanding, who had bewitched you into believing that the Supreme and Eternal is eaten by you, and held in your intestines? (tr. Elwes, p. 416)

Such mockery of the Eucharist was common among Jews in the Middle Ages and Judaizing Marranos in Iberia (as well as among radical Protestants). The rest of the letter also oozes with anti-Catholic sarcasm. It is against this background that we must read what Spinoza says about the Jews.

Burgh had justified his new Catholicism by the uninterrupted ecclesiastical successison through which generation upon generation have accepted its message of Catholicism. Spinoza, the former *yeshiva* student, familiar with Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and others, replies: "This is the very catch-word of the Pharisees" (i.e., the rabbis), who "as pertinaciously as the Roman witnesses repeat what they have heard as though it were their personal experience." The indignant Spinoza does not realize that within a few lines he himself will fall into the same trap. In the meantime he adds, thinking no doubt of himself, and not only of Jesus:

> That all heretics have left them, and that they [the Pharisees] have remained constant through thousands of years under the constraint of no government, but by the sole efficacy of their superstition, no one can deny. (Ibid., p. 417; Elwes tr. modified)

Once more we are confronted with the miracle, the scandal, the anachronism: how do the Jewish people exist apolitically, without a state and a government? This time Spinoza's answer does not invoke the hatred of the gentiles but "superstition," a term he uses to denote all historical religions alike, both Jewish and non-Jewish. What sets the Jews apart—and invests their faith with such "efficacy"—is their peculiar (and counterrational) success in converting patriotism (i.e., fidelity to the homeland) into fidelity to their religious superstition. This engenders manifestations of heroism and self-sacrifice which Spinoza, the rationalist philosopher, but also the son of the Marranos,

views with irritated awe and a mixture of repulsion and fascination. In speaking of Jewish martyrdom, his Marrano background surfaces again. Without mitigating his revulsion of religious fanaticism, it heightens the sense of affinity and empathy which Spinoza would share with anyone who can recognize sublimity even while rejecting its wellsprings.

> But their chief boast is, that they count a far greater number of martyrs than any other nation, a number which is daily increased by those who suffer with singular constancy for the faith they profess; nor is their boasting false. I myself knew among others [of] a certain Judah called the faithful, who in the midst of the flames, when he was already thought to be dead, lifted his voice to sing the hymn beginning, "To Thee, O God, I offer up my soul," and so singing perished. (Ibid., pp. 417–18)

What Spinoza fails to discern is that he, like the Pharisees he deplores, is quite close to "repeating what he has heard as though it were his personal experience." Spinoza could not possibly have witnessed these acts. The Inquisition did its work in the Iberian Peninsula (and America); Spinoza never left the Low Countries. His childhood, however, was rife with reports and stories of the Inquisition and its *autos-da-fé*, and they may have branded themselves so deeply on the boy's mind that he later remembered them as vividly as if he had actually experienced them.[12]

Who was "Judah the faithful"? He was "Judah the *Believer*" of whom the reconverted Marrano, Isaac Cardoso, speaks in his book *Las excelencias y calumnias de los Hebreos* (1679). This Judah (whose original name was Don Lope de Vera y Alarcon) was not a Marrano but a Christian who had converted, circumcised himself, and studied Hebrew. Imprisoned by the Inquisition, he refused to recant, and went to the stake chanting psalms. That Spinoza calls him "the faithful" and not "the believer" demonstrates, in my view, that Spinoza's thinking here operates through the mediation of the Hebrew language and its associations. For the words *creyente* and *fidus* have no common root, neither in Spanish nor in Latin. In Hebrew, however, the two words (*ma'amin, ne'eman*) have the same root (*amn*) and are closely related; and if Spinoza erred here inadvertently, it shows how deeply engrained the Hebrew language was in his mind.

This may, however, be a Freudian slip, a symptom of Spinoza's profound ambiguity in the face of martyrdom. As a rationalist philosopher, he was not only repulsed by religious fanaticism but was unable, as he avowed, to fathom suicide and self-denial. This is a general phil-

osophical problem in Spinoza (as in Hobbes) with no special bearing on his Jewishness. In addition, as a critic of Judaism, Spinoza should have rejected martyrdom as fanaticism and madness. Yet not only is he powerfully attracted by the sublimity of the phenomenon; the subject also plays a painful and ambivalent role in his own life. After all, from a Jewish standpoint, was not he, Spinoza, the very antithesis of martyrdom? Shortly before Spinoza's ban, the Amsterdam congregation was shocked by yet another case of Marrano martyrdom, when Abraham Nuñez Bernal was burnt at the stake in Spain (see chapter 1). The contrast was manifest to everyone—not in the least to Spinoza himself. He, the heretic, must leave the congregation as a traitor; the other gives his life for his faith and is hailed as a hero. Etching itself deeply in Spinoza's mind, this contrast suddenly reappears in a key passage in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*:

> Thus in the Hebrew state, the civil and religious authority . . . were one and the same. The dogmas of religion were not precepts, but laws and ordinances; piety was regarded as the same as loyalty, impiety the same as disaffection. *Everyone who fell away from religion ceased to be a citizen and was, on that ground alone, accounted an enemy; those who died for the sake of religion were held to have died for their country*. (*Theologico-Political Treatise*, 17: 219–20; emphasis added)

A most telling passage, encapsulating at once Spinoza's general thesis regarding Judaism and his most personal experience. The characters mentioned at the end of the quote are not just abstract types but have proper names: one is Spinoza, the other Nuñez Bernal. In a painful effort of self-understanding, as he reflects upon his personal situation, Spinoza is able to see through it into a general structure of Judaism as a whole. Herein lies the existential source of his thesis regarding the political nature of the Jewish religion. This nature forced him to abandon his "citizenship" in the Jewish fold when he became a nonbeliever; and the same political nature raises martyrdom to prestigious heights in Judaism as a defense of the phantom "homeland" that the Jews carry in their superstitious imagination wherever they go, and for which they are prepared to perform acts of fanatical daring and sublimity.

The connection between the hatred of the gentiles and superstitious faith, the two elements that have preserved the Jews, is explicated in chapter 17 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which should be read as complementary to chapter 3. Yet several new points emerge in chapter 17. It turns out, for example, that the unique fusion of patriotism and religious piety existed already in the ancient kingdom and was merely

emulated in the exile. Further, we find that the gentiles' hatred of the Jews is the result of the Jews' hatred of the gentiles, fed by their superstitious faith and their sense of uniqueness and superiority. "Of all hatreds, none is more deep and tenacious than that which springs from extreme devoutness or piety" (17: 229), and, in reaction to such feelings, the nations rewarded the Jews with "a hatred just as intense." All of this, Spinoza adds, "strengthened the heart of the Jews to bear all things for their country with extraordinary constancy and valor" (ibid.). Chapter 17 complements Spinoza's remarks about Jewish survival which appear at the end of chapter 3. When the two sections are read as one substantive unit, we find that Spinoza adduces both reasons for the survival of the Jews, and not just the gentiles' hatred (as Yerushalmi seems to believe).[13] Religious superstition leads the Jews to disdain and hate the gentiles. This in turn feeds the gentiles' hatred of them, which further forges their internal solidarity and power of resistance. Thus the reciprocal interaction of both factors, the internal and the external, explains the phenomenon.

The Marranos and Existential Anti-Semitism

As Spinoza knew from his own experience and from Marrano history, the external factor may remain effective long after the internal factor has lost its validity. For this reason, apparently, Spinoza believed that even if the Jews became wholly secularized individually, they would still exist as Jews (and be called by that name) collectively; from that point of view, gentile hatred would preserve them *in perpetuo*.

It was, therefore, particularly ingenious of Spinoza to choose the Marranos, rather than ordinary Jews, to illustrate his theses. The Marranos suffered from a unique brand of anti-Semitism several hundred years before the onset of modern anti-Semitism. For the first time in Jewish history, anti-Semitism stemmed not from opposition to the Jewish religion but from a hostility to Jewish existence itself: it was existential anti-Semitism. The converso who disavowed the Jewish religion and sincerely sought to assimilate into Christian society, found that he was still discriminated against because of his ancestry and his blood. This existential anti-Semitism reemerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and was given its most inexorable expression in the crematoria of Auschwitz; but the earlier version is to be found in Iberia in the waning days of the Renaissance. The concept of "racial purity" adduced by modern anti-Semites, and that of "blood purity" propounded by their Iberian predecessors, are two sides of the same coin: hatred of the Jew no longer depended on his religion but was

anchored in his very being. There is something tainted, contemptible, and abhorrent in the mere existence of the Jew per se. The Jew can convert to Christianity or (like Spinoza) disavow all religion; yet, willy-nilly, he will continue to be subsumed under that "universal name" referred to in proposition 46, and remain, thereby, an object of loathing.

Auschwitz is the logical conclusion of this type of anti-Semitism; for if the stigma inheres in the Jew's very existence, it can only be expunged by physical extermination. But the Iberian Inquisition never dreamed of going as far as that. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, exile was the common practice for getting rid of the Jews. Only the "enlightened" modern era actually made physical extermination possible. Yet through Marrano history Spinoza could have peered into a deep structure of Jewish existence: he made the discovery—to which he was still unable to give conceptual articulation—that Jewish existence was broader in scope than Jewish religion, and the two could not simply be identified.

Spinoza's "Zionism"

Was Spinoza a "closet Zionist"? Perhaps he saw in the renewal of Jewish sovereignty an answer to the anomaly of Jewish existence in the exile. After all, Zionists of three generations regarded him as their forerunner—all on the basis of his somewhat obscure, though moving, remarks at the end of the third chapter of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. After explaining that the hostility of the gentiles is what preserves the Jews, Spinoza goes on to say:

> The sign of circumcision is, I think, so important that I could persuade myself that it alone would preserve the nation forever. Nay, I would go so far as to believe that if the foundations of their religion have not emasculated their minds, they may even, if occasion offers, so changeable are human affairs, raise up their empire afresh and that God may a second time elect them. (3: 56)

This passage appears in the chapter entitled "Of the Vocation of the Hebrews," which is designed to demolish the entire concept of election. Spinoza's use of the term *God's election* is actually metaphorical and means "successful political existence."[14] He argues that even from the viewpoint of the Bible (a viewpoint he adopts for rhetorical purposes), the election of the Hebrews refers solely to "dominion and physical advantages" (p. 56). This also implies that the election is temporal, not eternal; and while Spinoza as a philosopher recognizes nei-

ther, he uses the Bible's own language and authority as a weapon against itself. If the "election" of the Hebrews is a mere temporal, earthly (in fact, empirical) event, nothing will remain of the idea of eternal, transcendent election. Thus Spinoza discredits the idea of "sacred history" altogether, secularizing Jewish history and, consequently, all human history. All things happen in accordance with the laws of nature—and this is the meaning (and part of the intent) of Spinoza's remarks about the return to Zion.

Although Spinoza's point is strictly philosophical, it has a particular bearing upon current issues of his time. Spinoza is writing only a few years after the upheaval fomented by Sabbetai Zevi, the false messiah who unleashed a wave of mystical enthusiasm throughout the Jewish Diaspora, from Marakesh to Vilno, and from Thessaloniki to Hamburg. The effect was particularly fierce in Amsterdam, probably due to the Marrano background of its Jews.[15] Spinoza, though no longer of the community, must have been relatively well informed. This was, at least, the view of Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society in London (where millennarian sentiment was also prevalent). In a letter to Spinoza he writes:

> Everyone here is talking of a report that the Jews, after remaining scattered for more than two thousand years, are about to return to their country. Few here believe in it, but many desire it. Please tell your friend what you hear and think of the matter. . . . I should like to know what the Jews of Amsterdam have heard about the matter, and how they are affected by such important tidings which, if true, would assuredly seem to harbinger the end of the world.[16] (Letter 33)

We do not have Spinoza's reply. Perhaps he never made one; perhaps his letter was lost or destroyed. However, chapter 3 of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* offers an indirect answer, not only to Oldenburg and his friends but to the Sabbatians themselves (and also to Spinoza's old friend and adversary, Isaac La Peyrère, author of *The Recall of the Jews*). It presents an antithesis to the Sabbatian torment and madness (as Spinoza was bound to view it), and at the same time a different version—rational and secular—of the messianic longing that beat confusedly in Sabbatian hearts. Since all human affairs are transient, Spinoza says, the renewal of the Jewish kingdom is not inevitable;[17] but if the return to Zion should take place, it will be because of the immanent laws of nature and not by providence, divine reelection, or messianism. For Spinoza, the Jewish vision of redemption (traditionally understood as

"liberation from the dominion of the nations") is thus not devoid of sense, but its content is entirely historical and secular.[18]

This then is the import of Spinoza's "Zionist" dictum, to which later Zionists clung. They failed to see that Spinoza does not recommend the establishment of a Jewish state; he merely posits it as one of the possibilities offered by secular history. Moreover, the logic of his position theoretically precludes such a recommendation. True, a Jewish state would remedy one major distortion of Jewish life, namely, the gap between the political essence of Judaism and the apolitical character of Jewish existence in the Diaspora. Yet this would entail the renewal of the ancient theocratic regime, a solution Spinoza cannot possibly accept, for as a political philosopher, he favors religious tolerance and the separation of church and state.

Would not then a secular Jewish state provide a solution? Presumably it would restore to the Jews a tangible homeland, revoke the alienation inherent in their present situation, and enable a person like Spinoza to live in a Jewish milieu as a full "citizen." From this point of view, the contemporary State of Israel (as long as it remains secular) would seem to suggest a solution for several of the basic problems tackled by Spinoza.

But this is an anachronistic solution, anchored in an altogether different situation. In Spinoza's time, it had no social basis and was not even a glimmer on the horizon of consciousness. To Spinoza, of course, every state should be secular: that is his ground-breaking message to the era which he was ushering in. But a secular Jewish state was still inconceivable to him.

From his own experience and from Marrano history, Spinoza pinpoints the gap between Jewish religion and Jewish existence, but gives it no theoretical underpinnings. He neither defines the gap positively nor develops from it the concept of Jewish "destiny" or "nation" as separate from religion. Spinoza, we could say, lacks the theoretical tools with which to articulate what he has experienced existentially. From this point of view, he was not only ahead of his time but actually ahead of himself: his life preceded the state of his own consciousness.

Still, Spinoza clings to several of the deepest motifs in Jewish consciousness—the eternity of Israel, the vision of redemption (understood as political liberation), and the covenant with God as symbolized by circumcision. But true to himself he submits them all to an utterly prosaic, natural, and secular interpretation. The eternity of Israel, for example, is contingent upon causes similar to those relating to the Chinese. A Jewish ear may be offended by the comparison, but this is how Spinoza, the Jewish heretic, paraphrases the words of the prophet

Amos on behalf of his new God, Nature: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?" (Amos 9:7). In other words, like the other nations, you too are subordinated to the laws of nature, which are the sole expression of God's "will" and "decrees." You too are subject to the same causal system of secular history, which is all there is. It does not follow that there is nothing unique about Jewish history; on the contrary, there definitely is, and who can know this better than the son of reconverted Marranos, who thus fulfilled the quasi messianic hope, *esperanza*, which attended their "exile" in Iberia? Nonetheless, even the uniqueness of Judaism is the result of natural causes; and if the hope of return is ever realized, it will take place only through the agency of secular history.

This may entail a significant message for modern Zionism—which, indeed, chose not to wait for transcendent or messianic redemption but to work for Jewish redemption within the course of secular history. Spinoza may not have defined Zionism as a goal but he pointed out the methodological approach. Zionism can be meaningful only if accepted as a development within secular history—and not as a mystical doctrine about an elect people led by God to its sacred land to the beat of the Messiah's drum. Everything Spinoza said about *vana religio* is true of the false messianism and religious fanaticism which today endanger the State of Israel. Spinoza, the errant Jew, the heretic, the premature secularist, who responded to the insanities of Sabbatian messianism, by asserting that only secular history exists and must be respected if Jews are to fulfill their age-old aspirations, may in this respect still offer his people timely advice.

Elements of Spinoza's Jewish Self-Image

To what extent did Spinoza remain Jewish in a subjective sense? I shall now recapitulate the evidence (part of which has already been mentioned) for the Jewish self-image that continues to dwell in various layers of Spinoza's consciousness.

CONVERSOS AS PARADIGMATIC OF JEWS By his choice of the Marranos as paradigmatic of Jewish history, Spinoza discloses that at some level of consciousness he views himself, too, as a Jew—perhaps by deterministic necessity. The Marranos he cites were not only Judaizers but the whole converso "nation," including those who tried unsuccessfully to assimilate into Christianity—and all of them he calls "Jews" in a straightforward and bona fide manner. Hence, this name will apply to him as well. True, Spinoza was a Marrano of reason and not of Chris-

tianity, but the same pattern recurs in his case—and whatever his views, his belonging to the same group or "nation" was, as he knew, irradicable.

THE DESTINY OF "THE NATION" Similarly, proposition 46, part 3 of the *Ethics*, implies: (1) the structural homology of Jews and Marranos; (2) Spinoza's affiliation by means of the "universal name" to both of them, and consequently, to the common destiny of the members of that "class or nation."

ACCEPTING THE JEWISH CONDITION Generalizing further, we may say that Spinoza remains "our Jew from Voorburg," not only in the eyes of the gentiles, but in his own eyes as well. His refusal to become a Christian, even for appearance sake, reflects this special awareness as well and not just his abstract intellectual integrity. It indicates that Spinoza has comprehended and internalized the necessity of his destiny and made it part of his effective consciousness—as implied, indeed, by the Spinozistic theory of ethics. The Jewish "class or nation" includes Spinoza, too, under its "universal name" and, therefore, by natural necessity he is subject to the same common destiny. Accepting as he does the laws of nature as the salient and exclusive expression of "God's decrees" (or, in nonmetaphorical language, as an immanent rational necessity stemming from God as the totality of being), Spinoza accepts the condition of his Jewishness and does not attempt to escape it. Yet, as an individual, he cannot find a positive expression for his heterodox Jewishness, and remains alienated, the victim of a double rejection. In the words of the highly perceptive Heine: "The gentiles were generous enough to grant him the title of Jew of which the Jews had deprived him."[19]

Incidentally, double rejection was also the lot of the Iberian Marranos. The gentiles rejected the Christian converts among them as Jews, and the rabbis (or at least most of them) rejected the Judaizers among them as idolators. There too Spinoza conforms to a long-established Marrano pattern, albeit in another context.

PRESERVING JEWISH MOTIFS IN A SECULAR FORM Spinoza's Jewishness also crops up through his use of a series of classical Jewish motifs which he secularizes, severing them from their original context. As we have noted before, Spinoza preserves such notions as the eternity of Israel, the redemption, and the covenant with God. True, he invests each of these concepts with a new heterodox meaning, prosaic and subject to natural laws; yet the fact remains that he does preserve them

in his new, secularized universe. It is still a Jew who is writing these things, even if he is already a heretic or quasi secular. With regard to the reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel, we have seen that while Spinoza does not explicitly recommend the idea, he certainly is ambivalent about it. Oldenburg was not entirely off the mark when he assumed that Spinoza the Jew would welcome such an eventuality. Even with regard to martyrdom—an agonizing issue for him—Spinoza has mixed feelings: as a rationalist he cannot justify the act of suicide and he deplores the "obstinacy of superstition," but as one brought up on these values, he also cannot cast off the sense of sublimity, and perhaps even pride, that martyrdom evokes in him.

Even certain variants of the idea of the "chosen people" are preserved by Spinoza. Implicitly, Judaism plays a special role in the shaping of a new secular world, for it is both an object of paradigmatic criticism and the source from which a new universal message is extracted.

SECULARIZING JEWISH HISTORY AS A NEW MESSAGE TO THE WORLD The critique of Judaism is, first of all, meant to be the lever for the general secularization and modernization of civilization through the negation of its religious-transcendental foundations. Spinoza aims to accomplish this by specifically undercutting the principles of election and theocracy inherent in Judaism and thus, dialectically, he retains for Judaism a central role in shaping the new world.

Again, it is no accident that a Jew revises the history of his own people as a means of presenting a revolutionary message to the rest of the world. Allowing for differences in content, this resembles the work of the first Jewish Christians, particularly Paul and his disciples, only this time the pattern occurs in a secular version that repudiates Christianity and Judaism alike.

The early Jewish Christians saw the fulfillment of the Judaic message in its metamorphosis into a "universal" church under the aegis of the Savior, the Son of God. In practice, however, they did not accomplish genuine universality, but produced yet another historical creed. Christianity became a particular religion in competition with other religions, and primarily with Judaism itself—which the Christians persecuted by means of the law and by force of arms. For Spinoza, however, the universalization of Judaism must result in the rule of reason, that will displace *all* historical religions, those of persecutors and persecuted alike, and will abolish religious persecution altogether by granting equality and tolerance to all (including Jews who wish to remain as such).

Spinoza's position implies, moreover, that the secularization of Judaism, as a message for all of humanity, will succeed in undermining Christianity more than in destroying Judaism—for which Spinoza prophesies, as we have noted, eternality. Thus, in generalizing his critique of Jewish history into a message for humanity Spinoza does not commit the kind of "apostasy" or "defection to the enemy" that Jews had seen in converts to Christianity. From that standpoint, too, it is significant that Spinoza refused to convert even while following the Pauline pattern—which he reenacted, in contrast to Paul, on the level of universal reason, transcending all religious particularity and negating religious persecution of any kind.

MODERNIZING POLITICS THROUGH A CRITIQUE OF JEWISH THEOCRACY

More particularly, the critique of Judaism is to be a lever for the modernization of politics (and of political theory). Here Spinoza criticizes both forms of Jewish theocracy: that which he believes existed in ancient times, and that which developed in the exile into a "state within a state."

When Spinoza describes the political rule of God through his priestly representatives, he thinks more of the rabbis in the Diaspora than of Moses and the Levites. But his chief targets lie in the Christian world. He aims at the political claims of the pope and the Catholic establishment; at the demands of the Dutch Calvinist *predikanten*; at the Iberian Inquisition; and at the ostensibly modern principle which emerged from the wars of religion (*cuius regio eius religio* [religion in the state goes by its ruler]). Rather than truly modern, this principle was to Spinoza a culmination of the system we now call medieval, for it endorses the concept while allowing for a plurality of state religions. Spinoza, in contrast, demands to sever the states, as such, from all confessional links and other varieties of creed and ideology. This lays down the modern principle of the separation of state and religion (and, concomitantly, contra Hobbes, the principle of the liberal state). And all this Spinoza serves up to his audience of "theologians" and lay intellectuals via a critique of Jewish theocracy.

Jewish life in the Diaspora is another example of the medieval conception of polity that Spinoza seeks to expunge. Following Hobbes, Spinoza's ideal state is a single, all-embracing sovereign body, independent of any prescriptive authority, in which the citizen or subject is recognized by virtue of his individual identity rather than any collective quality vested in him. The medieval polity was based upon the mediation of autonomous groups—corporation, class, feudal lord, church, guild, and the like—to which the individual belonged and

owed allegiance, and through which he related to the broader political entity (the kingdom or state). The Diaspora Jews embody this medieval principle in owing their allegiance to the phantom "state" they carry with them over and above the laws of the earthly state. And though Spinoza does not say so explicitly, the gentiles, in granting the Jews communal autonomy, were legally sanctioning the Jewish "state within a state" and its authority over its own "citizens." In the modern state, founded on the universality of reason, such authority would have no place.

While Spinoza's critique of Judaism was intended as a lever for modernizing of politics and heralded the secular, egalitarian state that came into being later, it was also fraught with implications for Jewish life itself. Implicit in it was the demand for religious tolerance and equal civil rights for the Jews, but also for the abolition of their communal autonomy and for the direct affiliation of the individual Jew to the state as a citizen. Spinoza thus adumbrates the two distinguishing features of the political condition of the Jew in the modern era, which was to emerge in the West after the French Revolution. This ties up with a third development that Spinoza foresaw: the new, existential kind of anti-Semitism, no longer contingent upon religious belief but upon the person of the Jew as such. These three developments have produced the typical situation of the modern Jew, who cannot (or does not wish to) escape his Jewish identity. As his traditional "ghetto" community has disintegrated, is he now to express his Jewish affiliation within the confines of his individuality, or within a voluntary group, or in a sovereign state of his own, or in some other way?

The logic of Spinoza's analysis seems to favor a quasi-Zionist solution. As modern politics can no longer admit the "kingdom within a kingdom" that marked Jewish life in the Diaspora, the Jews must either relinquish all self-rule and disperse as individuals among the gentiles, or establish their own political state. From a Spinozistic point of view, then, the only valid way for Jewish self-rule to continue in the modern era would be within a sovereign Jewish state. This implication (which Spinoza did not draw explicitly) may well have attracted Zionists like David Ben-Gurion, Nachum Sokolov, and Joseph Klausner to Spinoza even more than his famous remark in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*.

THE JEWISH RELIGION OF PRACTICE AS A MODEL OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Spinoza suggests a "universal religion" for the masses, based not on beliefs or opinions, but only on obedience to rules of action consistent with the demands of a universal practical intelligence. This is how Spi-

noza as philosopher addresses the problem of creating an enlightened society even while most persons do not attain true rationality. And as the model for the popular "universal religion," Spinoza uses the basic feature of Judaism, which, he believes, is founded on practical commands and not upon cognitive beliefs. In claiming that *all* true religion prescribes only actions and no opinions (following an entire Jewish school of thought), Spinoza's theological-political program takes its clue from its picture of Judaism, whose fundamental character it generalizes into a message for all of humanity. In other words, although Spinoza rejects Judaism as a particular historical religion, he employs one of its fundamental tenets as the underlying principle of the universal religion he hopes will supersede all historical religions.[20]

In depicting Judaism as merely practical, Spinoza follows a trend in medieval Judaism itself. And in calling it political, he does not mean to disparage or belittle Judaism (as Kant or Hegel did later). On the contrary, according to Spinoza (following Machiavelli and Hobbes) the proper role of religion *is* political. It is subservient to the state and should foster its basic goals (security and liberty, in Spinoza's view) by educating the people to a life of justice and solidarity; and these values can receive their content only from the civil government in its ordinary, secular legislation.

In this respect, the universal religion would be a political religion, its functions united in the indivisibility of the sovereign authority. This is a fundamentally "Jewish" model with its theocratic principle reversed. Yet even ancient Hebrew theocracy is preferable to regimes where the political authority is distinct from the religious, yet obeys its dictates. In ancient Israel, at least, religion was inherently political and functioned as the expression of the state. Spinoza wishes to restore this "Jewish" principle while reversing its inner balance: within their unity, the religious function should yield to the political and not vice versa.[21]

In its deep structure, then, the program of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* entails a kind of universalization of Judaism. Judaism as a "political" religion and as a religion of "commandments only," becomes the paradigm for what must take place in the world as a condition for rational progress. The message of Judaism is extended into a universal system in which historical Judaism, though abolished as a particular religion, fundamentally informs the system that replaces it.[22] Universalist Jews in the coming centuries, whether they were Spinozists or not (an outstanding example is Moses Hess), may well have viewed this as Spinoza's principal message for them.

Judaism thus continues to be the bearer of human progress, and the

critique of Judaism, in both its negative and its positive aspects, is the lever of that evolution. Even if Spinoza did not pronounce this idea consciously, it certainly informs his consciousness and constitutes a distinct undercurrent of his thought.

The First Secular Jew?

Was Spinoza then the first secular Jew? What can be said confidently is that Spinoza took the first step in the eventual secularization of Jewish life by examining it empirically as a natural phenomenon subject solely to the forces of secular history. In doing so he opened a breach between the Jewish religion and traditional community, on the one hand, and the broader totality of Jewish life on the other. Yet the question remains of how to interpret this new Judaism. A multiplicity of alternatives, some (but not all) of them contradictory, present themselves, all contained as logical possibilities in Spinoza's position though he himself was historically unable to choose from among them.

1. *Assimilation*, which would place the individual directly within the universal dimension of society; and his link to the state, as the political sovereign, would then be his only binding affiliative relationship.
2. *Religious reform*, which would sever Jewish attachment to an autonomous political authority and make of its believers German, French, U.S., etc., citizens "of the Mosaic faith."
3. *Secular nationalism*, stressing the concept of the Jewish people (independently of religion and of political citizenship), as the basic existential and collective dimension of Jewish identity.
4. *Zionism*, entailing the renewal of Jewish political existence within an independent state.

These alternatives are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, and each entails several nuances. Nor are they equally inferable from Spinoza's position. Assimilation, on Spinoza's theory, may solve the problem for individuals but not for the entire people, since gentile hostility alone will preserve the Jewish people forever. Religious reform within Judaism, though not incompatible with his views, was not on Spinoza's agenda; the only reform he envisaged went in the direction of a popular universal religion. As for the renewal of the Jewish state, Spinoza could not recommend its theocratic form, and its secular variety was still devoid of meaning for him. Although he knew that Jews, Marranos, and a nonbeliever like himself, were referred to as belonging to the same nation (and suffered similar conditions), the

concept of Jewish national existence, as separate from religion, did not yet exist for him as a defined theoretical concept. Existentially, in his singular life and experience, Spinoza was indeed the harbinger of this idea but he did not articulate it consciously, not even as a personal demand. Had Spinoza claimed for himself the right to disavow religion yet remain within the congregation, we might have been able to view him as, consciously, the "first secular Jew." But as we saw in chapter 3, that title belongs, if at all, to his less gifted friend, Dr. Daniel De Prado, who insisted on his right to remain within the Jewish congregation while disputing the rabbinical commandments.[23]

Prado himself was not aware of the far-reaching significance of his demand. His approach was more personal and self-interested. Still, Prado, even more than Spinoza, embodies in his confused personality the emerging phenomenon of secular Judaism. He firmly resisted the principle before which Spinoza yielded, that only religion accords "citizenship" in the Jewish community. He insisted—in vain—on his right to belong to the congregation and to the Jewish people even after he had ceased to believe in the Torah and to observe its commandments.

Spinoza made no such claims. Imbued with broader intellectual interests, his message of secularity was meant for the world as a whole. He evidently assumed (correctly, at the time) that within Judaism this struggle was hopeless, and he was certainly affected by Da Costa's experience. What trapped him tragically at the personal level was this lack of perspective for change within Judaism. On the one hand, he knew he could not escape his Jewish condition, nor did he seek to do so; yet neither did he attempt to rehabilitate himself as a Jew (not even in the explicit direction of secular Judaism). Thus he was caught up in a double negation, rejected by the gentiles as a Jew and by the Jews as a heretic. Spinoza lived in this situation without being able to suggest any way to remedy it. Nonetheless, his life itself presaged possibilities that assumed historic importance in subsequent generations.

Secularization and the New Jewish "Citizenship"

Because the concept of secular Judaism is a modern one, and has an inevitable social dimension, it cannot be realized by the traditional congregation. The Jewish body to which the secular Jew wishes to go on belonging as a "citizen" is no longer the autonomous medieval congregation but the Jewish people. In Spinoza's time, however, only the medieval community structure could offer an expression of Jewish affiliation. From this perspective, too, what befell Prado and Spinoza

must be considered anachronistic in terms of "Jewish secularism," even though it certainly anticipates it.

I use the word *anachronistic* descriptively, with no pejorative connotation. In the same anachronistic sense, Spinoza could be called, "the first assimilated Jew," albeit with less justification. It was one of the abstract possibilities in his case—and the distinction between mere possibilities and their actualization is crucial. None of these concepts—secular Judaism, Jewish nationalism, Zionism, even assimilation—has an a priori or supratemporal definition; their meaning emerges only in a historical context. In the absence of a historical reality to rely upon, they appear abstract and in certain cases absurd. The very concept of secularity was not yet established in Spinoza's time, let alone the more complex idea of Jewish secularism. People were identified above all by their religion—and this applies especially to the Jews. To belong to a particular society, one had to belong to the religion it confessed. True, Spinoza used his critique of Judaism to fight against this linkage of "citizenship" and religion. Yet whereas he offered a clear secular message to society at large, he had no solution for Judaism as such. Spinoza fought for the secularization of *individuals* and of *states*, but he lacked the modern concept of a nonpolitical secular Jewish nation. Marrano history and his own fate as a "Marrano of reason" provided him with an optic fiber, penetrating into the depth of the Jewish situation and distinguishing between the religion of the Jews and their actual, more fundamental existence. But Spinoza did not develop this insight beyond the theory that gentile hostility preserves the Jews and will do so forever. While offering Western society a clear, positive doctrine of secularity, for his own people Spinoza had only a cry of protest. He could neither accept nor find a way to sever the link in Judaism between "citizenship" and religious observance. Thus, in his time, even if he had wished to remain a part of his people he possessed neither the theoretical nor sociological means to do so.

At this juncture an immense existential difference is apparent between Spinoza and the contemporary Jewish situation. Today a Jew can become non-observant and deny the divine origin of his religion without losing his Jewish "citizenship" either in the eyes of non-Jews or in the eyes of his own people. Not only atheist Jews exist today but, in rare cases, even atheist rabbis as well. In the State of Israel the majority of Jewish citizens define themselves as non-observant or down right secular. Jewish identity is unquestioned, even if its content is debated. While the problems that Jewish secularism entails have not been resolved, it is today a living, historically resonant concept, for Jews both in the Diaspora and especially in the State of Israel. Spinoza

helped set this revolution in motion—not because he explicitly enunciated it but because it was the foremost challenge that his case posited for the generations to come.

In the past two hundred years, following the emancipation which undermined the traditional Jewish congregations from within and the Holocaust which destroyed them from without, new forms of Jewish existence have emerged. Some of them are still in the formative stage, some already moribund, but all seeking historical legitimacy. They encompass a multiplicity of approaches, some deriving from the pluralism that informed Jewish civilization even in the past, others superseding it. But Spinoza himself, who presaged these developments, could not have benefited from its results, but was forced to live as a lost and alienated Jew, caught between two negations and two false identities, neither of which was necessarily consistent with his own self-consciousness. Even had he wished to remain a loyal "citizen" of his people (and we have no proof of this, beyond a few textual ambiguities) he would not have been able to do so, not only because the Jews rejected him, but also because Christian society was yet undisposed to recognize persons independently of their religious affiliation. At the same time, Spinoza was instrumental in the emergence of European secularism and through it, indirectly also contributed to the secularization of Judaism, which his own life foretold. Therefore, when this process finally penetrated Jewish society as well, it evoked the name of one Baruch Benedictus de Spinoza—Jewish heretic, lost and alienated, but Jew nevertheless, whose personal fate embodied and presaged the fate of his people in later generations and the multiplicity of ways in which they tried to cope with modernity.

Lifting the Ban

From time to time, petitions are made to have Spinoza's ban revoked. In 1925, the late Israeli historian, Joseph Klausner, stood on Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, and proclaimed: "Baruch Spinoza, you are our brother." In the early 1950s, Israel's prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, conducted a campaign to have the ban lifted. And in 1953, the then Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yizhak (Isaac) Halevi Herzog, replied to an application from the late G. Herz Shikmoni, director of the "Spinozaeum" in Haifa, asking him if the excommunication was still in force from the point of view of the *halakhah*. In reply to the question of whether the excommunication was intended to apply only to Spinoza's lifetime or also to future generations, Rabbi Herzog did not rule,

leaving the matter open to further consideration. But with regard to the ban on Spinoza's works, the rabbinical ruling was clear:

> I have examined the text of the proclamation [the writ of excommunication quoted at the beginning of chapter 1] and I have found: (a) at the end in regard to his books and composition it is written only "we warn" and not "we warn to excommunicate"; (b) even if we say that we can deduce the end from the beginning, it is shown by the language of the above sentence that the intention is not specified for future generations, but only for the period of Spinoza's lifetime. It is possible that it was thought unnecessary to prolong the period of the ban, and it is possible that due to modesty the authorities did not wish to rule for future generations. Be this as it may, it seems that the ban on the reading of Spinoza's books and compositions no longer stands.[24]

A legalistic quibble, in other words, enabled the chief rabbi to rule that there was no longer a ban on the reading of Spinoza. And one gains the impression from the beginning of the letter that Rabbi Herzog was also seeking a loophole that would have enabled him to rule that the excommunication, too, was no longer in force.

Yet all these attempts to have the ban revoked are really beside the point. Spinoza does not need certification by any authorities, whoever they may be, and one cannot but be struck by the astonishing discrepancy between his actual impact on intellectual history and the attempts to grant him belated institutional legitimization. The significance of the ban was in isolating Spinoza from the actual Jewish community of his day, and whoever wishes to revoke it today is late by three hundred years. The demand to revoke the ban would not sound anachronistic only if it were to have some symbolic meaning—national, perhaps, or ideological—rather than being purely religious; such a case, however, would entail the contradiction of both adopting the religious concept of the ban (as implied in the demand to revoke Spinoza's) and at the same time rejecting it (by changing its meaning).

Lastly, and this is perhaps the crux of the matter, who in the Jewish world today might be authorized to accept Spinoza back into the Jewish fold? The Lubavitcher Rebbe? The prime minister of Israel? The board of the Jewish Theological Seminary? The B'nai B'rith? There is no longer a single normative Judaism today—a development of which Spinoza himself was a harbinger.

In abandoning the observant Judaism of his day, but refusing to convert to Christianity, Spinoza unwittingly embodied the alternatives which lay in wait for Jews of later generations following the encounter

of Judaism with the modern world. As a result of this encounter, there is no longer one norm of Jewish existence today. There are Orthodox and secular Jews, Conservative and Reform Jews, Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews, and nuances and subcategories within all of these; in fact, Judaism today is determined by the way actual Jews live it, and not by any one compulsory model. This being the case, there is no longer an institution or an individual with the authority to include or exclude, to excommunicate or bring back to the fold (even symbolically). Since Spinoza himself foretold this development (less in his philososphy than in his biography), he has once more become central to contemporary thinking about Judaism and the complexities of its existence and survival.

Postscript

As this book was going to the publisher, I was interested to note on a visit to the newly reopened Jewish Museum in Amsterdam, that without fanfare, Spinoza has been readmitted by his erstwhile community. In a section devoted to "Jewish Identity," the museum has a text explaining that for many centuries, being Jewish had entailed belonging to the orthodox Jewish community; but ever since the Act of Civil Equality (1796), granting political emancipation to the Dutch Jews, "every Jewish person could decide what expression to give to his or her Jewishness" and how to relate to the Jewish community. On this new description Spinoza will certainly count as Jewish—as indeed he does in this museum. The text is illustrated by an impressive gallery of Jewish characters, all unnamed but some easily identifiable. There is an orthodox Jew, a secular intellectual, a reform cantor, a coquette nineteenth-century matron, a modern woman wrapped in a prayer shawl, two orthodox boys with ritual curls (*peot*), a medieval Jew in oriental cap, a Jew in Nazi Europe wearing a yellow David's Star, an Israeli baby in woolen *yarmulka* (Zionist-orthodox), a contemporary young man in loosened tie—and the familiar features of Baruch Spinoza and, at the very end, the severe and distinguished face of the great Amsterdam Rabbi Isaac Aboab, one of the signatories of Spinoza's ban. So finally the banned dissenter and the banning rabbi end up together in this minor pantheon of Jewish diversity. What better way for the Amsterdam Jewish community to readmit Spinoza, not by a declamatory gesture like lifting the ban, but by recognizing, with good historical sense, the new Jewish situation which Spinoza's own case had anticipated and tragically embodied.

Afterword to Volume I

I know question marks have a tendency to elude the eye, yet I hope the one I placed in the title of the epilogue has been noticed, along with the negative answer I gave it. Spinoza could not actually have been a secular Jew because the concept did not yet exist, and there were no others to share in it. Rather, he was a lost and suspended Jew, his existential case preceding his explicit ideas and prefiguring forms of Jewish existence in which he could not himself participate.

Similarly, I hope attentive readers have noticed the methodological limits I placed on my claims concerning Spinoza's Marrano background. The coinage "The Marrano of Reason" has two parts, each equally important: Spinoza was not a Marrano *simpliciter*, but a transformed Marrano, crossing over from the world of revealed religion into a world of secular reason and immanence. In the preceding chapters I described a series of characteristic Marrano life patterns and experiences that recur over several generations and manifest themselves in Spinoza's case as well, yet in him they are transformed from the domain of historical religion—Judaism, Christianity, and their various mixtures—into the universe of secular rationalism; moreover, this passage itself is made intelligible partly in light of the Marrano background. In spelling out these striking analogies, I claim they deserve attention and explanation, and that they establish the relevance and impact of Spinoza's Marrano background on his case. But I do not purport to describe the precise mechanism and causal links by which this relevance came to bear. In that respect, my claim remains structural rather than causal.

In response to several critical comments, I should note also that the book does not give Spinoza's "Marrano of Reason" side a monopoly over the others. It presents Marranism as a *dimension* of Spinoza's case and growth—a crucial and neglected dimension, to be sure, which deepens our understanding of the other dimensions as well, but not one which is exclusive.

Furthermore, nothing is farther from my mind than *reducing* Spinoza to his Marrano background or to any other set of "influences." My "Marrano of Reason" thesis respects the covert alchemy by which, as I see it, a creator's life conditions are partially—always only partially—transformed into the work's inner texture (see e.g., pp. 96–97, 128n). Like other great creators Spinoza transcended his background and, by an impervious mental process, transformed it into something profoundly new and original.

In addition, the book does not deny the standard view that Spinoza's thought has been strongly informed by Descartes and Hobbes (and earlier by Maimonides and Crescas). However, Spinoza's *contaus intelligendi*, the drive which made him philosophize and seek these writers out, was not awakened by them, but by his specific condition. The Marrano intellectual disquiet and crisis of cultural identity will explain why a Jewish adolescent in the Yeshiva, where no philosophy was taught, should browse through the old philosophy books written in teeth-gritting medieval Hebrew, and why he should later be eager to learn of the latest innovative ideas in the gentile world outside. In other words, the Marrano dimension is existentially more fundamental, and deepens our understanding of why Maimonides was sought out and how the ideas of Descartes, Hobbes, et al. were received and modified by Spinoza.

Perhaps I should add a word on how I see Spinoza's relation to Descartes. Of course, the Cartesian vocabulary that Spinoza adopted involved a whole conceptual universe, through which the young Jewish prodigy was to structure his own intellectual concerns. For Spinoza, however, Cartesianism did not signify the truth, only its language and the context in which it was to be sought. Descartes represented the "New Philosophy" in general, which was inseparable from the new science of nature. In assimilating Descartes' conceptual framework and rules of thinking, Spinoza was not subscribing to a specific doctrine, but initiating himself to philosophy as a rigorous scientific project, and no longer as historical prejudice drawn from an authoritative heritage.

Descartes was his ticket to modernity. To be modern, to participate in the postscholastic revolution in science and philosophy, one had, at least on the European continent, to take first the road of Cartesianism, rejecting the authorities of the past, shedding Platonic ideas and Aristotelian teleology, accepting mathematics as the model of sure knowledge and mechanism as the only valid approach to natural phenomena. In so doing, one was bound also to accept Descartes' problem setting and the philosophical agenda his answers and failures have set. To Spinoza, as to many of his contemporaries, Descartes stood more for a

discipline than for a specific doctrine. Adopting the former, Spinoza used it to reject much of the latter.

As for the alleged influence of Spinoza's radical Protestant friends (the Collegians, etc.) and the group around his erstwhile teacher, the libertine Van den Enden, I point out that Spinoza encountered them *after* his banishment from the Jewish community, so they could not have provoked his dissent. Nor were they of a particularly sharp philosophical bent. They soon recognized Spinoza as a master, not a disciple, and met to study his "philosophy"—an early version of part I of the later *Ethics*, which circulated among them as early as 1661. These good people did not fathom the full extent of Spinoza's radicalism, but they were open and unorthodox, and provided the dissenting loner with the most hospitable environment he could find at the time.

Further, I do not hold that Marranism was a necessary condition for the rise of modernity or for dual language to be used. Of course, as Amos Funkenstein and others pointed out, dual language was known in the "Nicodemites" and in non-Marrano philosophers from Hobbes to Boyle, and religious doubt and this-worldliness had several other Renaissance sources in addition to Marranism. Yet in Spinoza's case it would be futile to look for remote explanations when his ex-Marrano background provides the closest relevant explanatory context, and a sufficient *causa proxima*.

Also, what affected Spinoza in my interpretation were not so much Marrano official works or explicit ideas (these could hardly have existed), but the Marrano *existential situation* and the consequences of the Marrano mentality. Hence, no need to refer to specific Marrano writers whom Spinoza did or did not read. He shared, or inherited, a common *Lebenswelt* or its powerful offshoots.

This extends to another objection I have heard, namely, that Spinoza was born Jewish: how could he share the mind of the Marranos? My answer is that (a) Spinoza was a first-generation Jew growing up in a community where most of the members, including his own family and parents, were former Marranos educated in Iberia, speaking Spanish and Portuguese, schooled in clandestine life, imbued with Catholicism, and bearing the imprints and traumas of the Inquisition; and (b) powerful mentalities have the capacity of filtering into further generations, especially when they reflect intense emotional experiences. Watch today the second- and even third-generation children of the Holocaust, born in Israel—how frequently they are marked by that experience and its offshoots, and how, inadvertently, they pass many of those signals on to their own children.

In conclusion, I hope the book has shown that the Marrano back-

ground, though not exclusive, is a crucial dimension of Spinoza's case and work that has long been overlooked or underrated; as such it deserves emphasis and the detailed attention I gave it, even without making it all embracing.

Perhaps incidentally, this two-volume diptych might also help modify the common view that Jews were latecomers to European modernization and merely passive recipients of its effects. Here, on the contrary, we see a Jewish tributary outside the rabbinic mainstream, marginal yet culturally influential, making a distinct contribution to the early phases of modernity and how one of its dissident members, powerfully systematizing the idea of immanence, eventually made it penetrate and to a certain extent underlie the mainstream of Western ideas.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Spinoza does speak at the end of *Ethics* of a kind of immortality of the soul, but not in any individual sense; the individual perishes and what remains is a kind of eternal truth. See also chapter 6 below.

2. Quoted in the French edition of Spinoza's works (Paris: Flammarion, 1969).

3. Richard Popkin, "Epicureanism and Scepticism in the Early Seventeenth Century," in *Philomathes*, ed. R. B. Palmey and R. Hamerton-Kelly (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971).

4. Yosef Yerushalmi, "Marranos Returning to Judaism in the 17th Century: Their Jewish Knowledge and Psychological Readiness," in *Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies* [Heb.] (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1969), 2:202.

5. *Treatise on the Intellect* §17.

6. Jean M. Lucas, *The Oldest Biography of Spinoza*, ed. A. Wolf (London: Allen and Unwin, 1927).

7. See A. Wiznitzer, "The Merger Agreement and Regulations of Congregation Talmud Torah of Amsterdam, 1638–39," *Historia Judaica* 20 (1958): 48. Between 1623 and 1677 there were thirty-five excommunications recorded in the records of the congregation (mainly the book of *Ascamot*) of which five, including Spinoza's, have not been revoked, but the number of actual bans probably exceeded those on record; see Y. Kaplan, "The Social Functions of the *Herem* in the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam in the Seventeenth Century," in *Dutch Jewish History: Proceedings of the Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. Jozeph Michman (Jerusalem: Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry, 1984), pp. 111–55, esp. appendix.

8. The text was published and introduced by Jacob Meijer, *Hugo de Groot: Remonstrantie nopende de ordre dije in de landen van Hollandt ende Westvrieslandt dijent gestelt op de Joden* [. . .] (Amsterdam, 1949). He also published a shorter English essay, "Hugo Grotius' *Remonstrantie*," *Jewish Social Studies* 17 (1955): 91–103. See also A. K. Kuhn, "Hugo Grotius and the Emancipation of the Jews in Holland," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 31 (1928):

173–80; and Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2d ed., 18 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 16: 310–13. Baron's account has been severely criticized by Jozeph Michman, "Historiography of the Jews in the Netherlands," in *Dutch Jewish History*, pp. 16–22. Michman takes issue with Baron's claims that Grotius was more liberal toward the Jews than Pauw was and that eventually the regulations passed were in fact more restrictive on paper than in practice. He also cites various minor mistakes in Baron. What makes a decision difficult is that Pauw's original text has been lost and there is no reliable comparative analysis of Grotius, Pauw, and the actual regulations passed by various cities afterward.

9. J. L. Teicher, "Why Was Spinoza Banned?" *Menorah Journal* 45 (1957): 41–60.

Chapter 2

1. This had been noted by contemporary witnesses like Hugo Grotius, who, in his *Jaerboeken en Historiën* (1598), remarked that many Marranos arrived to flee the Inquisition "and others with a view to greater gain" (quoted by Jacob Meijer, "Hugo Grotius' *Remonstrantie*," *Jewish Social Studies* 17 [1955]: 91).

2. See Samuel Schwarz, *Os Christãos novos em Portugal no século XX* (Lisboa: Empresa Portuguesa de Livros, 1925), p. 99. For *dia pura* see Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Philadelphia: 1941) ("The Religion of the Marranos").

3. See Fritz Baer, *Die Juden in christlichen Spanien* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936), Vol. 1, Pt. 2: Inquisitionsakten, no. 423.

4. See Y. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 2: 276–77.

5. References to Rojas, as well as to other names and places mentioned in this chapter, are given in the notes of the following chapters where these topics are expanded.

6. There are three kinds of knowledge in Spinoza:

   1. *Imaginatio* (Imagination). This is confused knowledge (i.e., error or accidental truth) gained from crude sense perception, association, hearsay (including authority), and the like.
   2. *Ratio* (Reason). This is knowledge of the universal laws of nature and reason, both in themselves and as applied in particular causal explanations.
   3. *Scientia intuitiva* (Intuitive Knowledge). This is a synoptic grasp of some particular thing as it inheres in God-nature: essence through an-immanent chain of causes. (This is a rational intuition explained in chapter 6.)

7. Yosef Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).

8. Violated only by Hegel and the Hegelian offshoots in nineteenth-century ideologies. See Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics: The Adventures of Immanence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), chap. 2.

9. See M. Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne* (Paris: E. Dros, 1937); enl. Spanish ed.: *Erasmo y España*, 2 vols. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950, 1966).

Chapter 3

1. The literature on the Amsterdam Jewish community is rich and growing. See Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 2d ed., 18 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), vol. 15, chap. 9, "Dutch Jerusalem," pp. 3–37, the notes of which (pp. 379–411) contain a rich bibliography. For further references, see H. Méchoulan and G. Nahon, "Amsterdam, des Marranes à la communauté juive portugaise," introduction to *Espérance d'Israel*, by Menasseh ben Israel (Paris: Vrin, 1979), pp. 15–34, which also contains many bibliographical notes; Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1941), esp. chap. 9; G. Nahon, "Amsterdam, métropole occidentale des *Sefarades* au XVIIe siècle," *Cahiers Spinoza* 3 (1980): 15–50, also with references. For a recent bibliographical survey, see also idem, "Les Marranes espagnols et portugais et les communautés juives issues du Marranisme dans l'historiographie récente (1960–1975)," *Revue des Etudes Juives* 136 (1977): 297–367. Some of the older sources and many specialized studies are included in Baron and the other bibliographies. Note also: Henri Mechoulan, *Le sang de l'autre et l'honneur de Dieu* (Paris: 1979); idem, "Catholicism et Judaisme dans *La certeza del Camino* d'Abraham Pereyra, Amsterdam 1666," in *Revue des Etudes Juives* 143 (1984), pp. 461–73; idem, *Amsterdam au temps de Spinoza* (Paris: PUF, 1990). Jonathan I. Israel, "Spain and the Dutch Sephardim, 1609–1660," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 12 (1978), pp. 1–61; idem, "An Amsterdam Jewish Merchant of the Golden Age: Jeronimo Nuñes da Costa (1620–1697)," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 18 (1984), pp. 21–40; Bartolome Benassar, *L'Inquisition espangnole* (Paris: Hachette, 1979).

Most of the hitherto-published documents on Spinoza's Jewish-Marrano links (including those found by Revah) along with less reliable accounts and chronicles are contained in Gabriel Albiac's recent work, *La Sinagoga Vacía* (Madrid: Hiperion, 1987), which reached me after my manuscript had gone to the publisher.

2. Carl Gebhardt, *Die Schriften des Uriel da Costa* (Amsterdam: Curis Societatis Spinozanae, 1922), p. xix.

3. The *Exemplar humanae vitae* was first published in 1687, almost half a century after Da Costa's suicide, by the Remonstrant (liberal Calvinist of the Arminian School) theologian Philip van Limborch (1633–1712) as an appendix to his "friendly debate" with the former Marrano scholar and Jewish apologist, Isaac Orobio de Castro (see below), entitled *De Veritate Religionis Christianae amica collatio cum erudito Judeo* (Gouda, 1687), reissued in facsimile by Gregg International, Farnborough, Hampshire, in 1969. Limborch claims to have found his copy of the text among the papers of his great-uncle, Simon Episcopius (1583–1643), a leading Remonstrant theologian of tolerant leanings, to whom it had presumably been given "by an outstanding man of this town [Amsterdam]." Limborch himself polemicized against Da Costa's deism but deemed it important to publish and confront his challenge.

Da Costa reportedly had written other tracts that were banned and probably even destroyed during his lifetime, but that can, perhaps, be partly reconstructed from polemical responses written against them. Gebhardt (in *Schriften*

mediary stages they occupy a problematic post, for they have (infinite) duration but are not themselves determined by external causes. Given the example of infinite modes, we may conclude that eternal essences are also, in their way, sempiternal, for at any moment in time they can be said to exist—however timelessly. Whatever the solution to this paradox (if it is a paradox), the sempiternal status applies to these essences regardless of whether their objects have entered the actual world of duration and external causality. But once they do, once an existing concrete thing expresses the essence in a definite time and place, it cannot sustain this existence indefinitely but, engendered by external causes which translate the essence horizontally, and resisting, as *conatus*, as long as it can the assault of other external causes, it must eventually, by its ontological mode of being, succumb at a certain point and cease to exist in duration. At that point all that remains—or rather, is—of it is the eternal essence.

17. Of course, a particular essence, because it defines the individual's unique place in being, can and must include its life history or career; but it expresses this from the standpoint of eternity, as a timeless implication of God (and one ontological "spot" in the eternal map of being).

CHAPTER 7

1. Only Hegel returned to it, though he was less radical and confrontational.

2. For a list of Jewish deep structures that persisted in Spinoza's self-image, see below.

3. See chapter 1 of *Theologio-Political Treatise*. In preferring Jesus, Spinoza does not express his own view as a philosopher but what he claims to be the Bible's position. At the same time, attributing to the Bible a preference for Jesus when addressing a Christian audience clearly has a rhetorical purpose.

4. Evidence for this can be found in Spinoza's correspondence with Henry Oldenburg concerning Jesus. Oldenburg (Letter 71 of Nov. 15 1675) quotes some Christian believers who charge that Spinoza conceals his views about Jesus and the incarnation. Oldenburg's letter provoked an energetic response from Spinoza, with an open statement (Letter 73). Of those who say that God had assumed human nature Spinoza says he had already stated that he does not understand what they say, adding that their words are as nonsensical as saying that a circle assumed the nature of a square. He goes on to say that Christians, too, must admit Jesus not in the flesh but metaphorically. The term *God's eternal Son* means God's eternal wisdom, which is present in all things (thus Spinoza equates it with the infinite intellect—as he had already done explicitly in *The Short Treatise*, chapter 9). Jesus in the flesh, the historical figure, was a man only, albeit an exceptional philosopher who discovered rational truth and the man in whom divine wisdom is largely manifest. This is Spinoza's interpretation of the preference given to Jesus by the Scriptures.

5. A similar approach evolved in the Babylonian exile. The experience of a separate Jewish existence in Babylon preceded Rabbi Yokhanan and the destruction of the second temple. The Talmud, too, which contains the results

of these efforts, is known throughout Judaism mostly in its Babylonian version.

6. J. P. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, tr. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1974).

7. Y. H. Yerushalmi, "Spinoza's Words on the Survival of the Jewish People," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* (Heb.) (Jerusalem, 1984) 6: 176–78.

8. Y. F. Baer, *Galut* (New York: Schocken, 1947), p. 104; see also Yerushalmi, "Spinoza's Words," pp. 181f.

9. Yerushalmi, "Spinoza's Words," p. 182. The purity-of-blood statutes had appeared as early as 1449 (in Toledo, during a riot), but for a long time they had only local effect and were strongly disputed on theological grounds. These statutes became the law of the land only under Philip II over a century later; henceforth they became so important that the Inquisition used them to pry into a person's remote ancestry whenever he became a candidate for important office, to make sure no "impure blood" had penetrated the veins of his grandmother's great-uncle. This custom prevailed not just in Spain but also—perhaps primarily—in Portugal, a fact Spinoza disregards and which made him subject to criticism.

10. In any case even after correcting the picture that Spinoza draws, the following thesis (which also relies on what is known today) deserves to be maintained: the Inquisition and the anticonverso policies not only annihilated many pockets of Judaizing conversos, but at the same time also reinforced their separate existence. This was due to the identification of the conversos not simply as "New Christians" but also directly as "Jews" (especially in Portugal); and by strengthening their inner solidarity as a result of persecutions.

11. This may include Spinoza's implicit explanation of how nations exist in general. According to Spinoza's ontology only individuals are real. "Universals" are unreal abstractions, or mere "names." Yet this nominalism does not prevent the laws of nature (of psychosocial nature, in this case) from producing a network of causes that will make the image, the fate, and the life circumstances of a certain group of individuals change and evolve in a parallel and mutual way, so as to provide a nominalist-naturalistic explanation of the existence of nations. The "nation" as such will not be an actual individual, but using the category of "nation" will be significant and even necessary in explaining an individual's fate and situation.

12. From a linguistic and literary point of view, Spinoza writes as if he were giving actual testimony. Nor does he say "I *heard* of one" but "I knew . . . one" (or "of one"). Associating hearsay with actual knowledge is particularly curious in the case of Spinoza, who had relegated hearsay (*ex auditio*) to a lower kind of knowledge that does not constitute knowledge proper. Also, Spinoza's confusion of "faithful" with "believer" through their Hebrew translations testifies that on this issue his mind was full of conflicting associations and powerful but imprecise connections.

13. Yerushalmi, "Spinoza's Words," pp. 187, 189. Incidentally, Spinoza bor-

rows these factors from Tacitus, who in speaking of the Jews referred both to the "hatred of the nations" and to their "stubborn superstition" which explains their heroic resistance in the siege of Jerusalem. (Spinoza quotes him in the present text.) On Tacitus's influence on Spinoza see Chaim Wirszubski, "Spinoza's Debt to Tacitus," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* (Jerusalem, 1955), 2: 176–86.

14. Therefore, saying that the Jews will "raise up their empire afresh" and that "God may a second time elect them" has precisely the same meaning and their conjunction constitutes a pleonasm.

15. G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 518f.

16. This indicates the millennarian atmosphere in England itself, as it prevailed in Oldenburg's circle. Serrarius, who served as go-between carrying messages from Oldenburg to Spinoza, was himself a millennarian believer in the Messiah. If despite these connections Oldenburg turned to Spinoza for information, he must have assumed—not without ground—that Spinoza was well aware of the issue and maintained contacts among Amsterdam Jews.

17. Strictly speaking, Spinoza's ontology does not allow for the concept of possibility, since in itself everything is either necessary or impossible. But ignorance of causes makes us use the notion of possibility as a relative epistemological indication (referring to our state of knowledge rather than to the things' ontic modality). This is a practical necessity for humans, especially in predicting the behavior of others or the turn of historical tides.

18. This is how Spinoza's own words about *historia sacra* are to be understood. Spinoza is speaking rhetorically from the standpoint of his audience, and not in his own name. On Spinoza's abolishing sacred history in general see Shlomo Pines, "Joseph Ibn Kaspi's and Spinoza's Opinion on the Probability of a Restoration of the Jewish State," *Iyyun* 14 (1963/64): 289–317; English abstract pp. 367–69.

19. Heinrich Heine, "Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland," *Sämtliche Werke*, 14 vols. (München: Kindler, 1964), 9: 210.

20. One may even conjecture that Spinoza's philosophical system was seen by him as evolving from the true Jewish tradition. In a letter to Oldenburg he attributes to Paul (and to other ancient thinkers) a pantheistic view according to which God is the immanent cause of nature; all creatures "live and move and exist in God." This view has been abandoned or falsified by later Christian theologians (whom Spinoza calls "New Christians"—perhaps an intended irony). But Spinoza maintains that his immanent philosophy agrees with Paul, perhaps with all the ancient (pagan) philosophers, and, "I dare even say I thereby agree with all (!) the ancient Hebrews" though their traditions have been falsified (by later-day Jews and Christians alike, so he seems to imply). Spinoza's identification with the ancient Hebrews is much more pronounced than with the pagan philosophers—and he has no rhetorical need to evoke the Jews. On the contrary, Spinoza seems to apologize to his Christian audience that he relies here on Jewish ideas. Maybe he mentions them to show that Jew, pagan, and Christian concur in this idea—which is a sign of its universal truth.

Spinoza is writing this letter with some emotional tension—and therefore with less prudence than usual. To Oldenburg's challenge (see note 4) he responds by voicing a much sharper criticism of Christianity than he would normally permit himself. And in this context he sees fit to identify himself strongly with the "ancient Hebrews" and to suggest that his philosophy upholds their message—that is, he, Spinoza, carries on the *true* Jewish message!

21. Alexandre Matheron calls this "the sacralization of the political domain through the politization of the sacred"; see A. Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1971), pp. 14ff.

22. A variant of this position claims that for Judaism to carry a universal "mission" for humanity at large it must, while modernizing, persist eternally in its particular features. This view started in nineteenth-century Germany, and its spread has accompanied the Jewish *Aufklärung*—the *haskala*.

23. The measure in which Prado's challenge to the community defied all accepted categories can be gauged by comparing it to the contemporary position of Father Daniel Rufeisen, a Jew who converted to Catholicism during the Nazi genocide while feeling deep solidarity with his persecuted people. Emigrating to Israel after the war he declared himself a Catholic Jew—Catholic by religion and Jew by nation—and claimed Israeli citizenship based upon the Law of Return (which stipulates that every Jew can become a citizen of Israel). In refusing his demand (he became a citizen by another procedure) the Israeli Supreme Court wisely implied that the strange character of such demands is not absolute but relative to the historical time and conditions (i.e., eventually it may change). Another contemporary case is that of Cardinal Lustiger, also a Jewish convert during the Nazi genocide, who, when he was appointed Archbishop of Paris, declared he had never ceased to be a Jew and was, as a Christian, proud to belong to this ancient people. One must not draw too close an analogy between being a "secular Jew" and a "Christian Jew." Yet the strange character of each idea in its time does suggest a parallelism. No one can predict whether the notion of a "Protestant Jew" or a "Catholic Jew" will some day be as accepted and prevalent as "secular Jew" is today (at least in Israel). Decision in such matters is neither theoretical nor doctrinal but historical; theoretical categories will accompany the real historical situation and the consciousness that rises out of it.

24. Thanks are due to Mr. J. S. Hirsch, the former curator of the Rare Books Collection (which houses the "Spinozaeum") at Haifa University Library, who gave me a photocopy of this letter as well as of other holdings in this collection.